



KIM – TRUMP SUMMIT. WHAT DID THE MEETING EXACTLY TELL US?

On 12th June, as the world media labelled it, a ‘historic’ meeting of the North Korean leader and the president of the United States has been held in Singapore. The summit produced a joint statement signed by Kim Jong Un and Donald Trump which consists of four commitments:

- 1) Washington and Pyongyang will establish new relations;
- 2) Both states will make efforts to establish stable, peace regime on the Korean peninsula;
- 3) Both sides will work toward denuclearization of the peninsula and reaffirm the April 27, 2018, Panmunjom Declaration;
- 4) United States and DPRK will commit to the recovery and repatriation of the remains of American prisoners of war and soldiers missing in action during the Korean War (1950-1953).

Clearly, the fact that both leaders have finally met together bears the hallmarks of a historic event. Nevertheless, the following statement due to its content seems to be provisional and shall rather be treated as an initial document for further negotiations.

The point on ‘denuclearization’ of the Korean peninsula lacks of mechanisms and does not indicate any applicable legal regime (in 2003 DPRK unilaterally withdrew from the NPT¹) which will define the rules of the process. The document also does not indicate any mechanism of verification and timelines for North’s disarmament. Furthermore, the statement that both sides will commit to work towards the denuclearization of the peninsula is an old, familiar phrase, which appeared in many documents negotiated by Pyongyang (ex. the joint declaration of North Korea and South Korea in 1992), and always remained an empty statement.

American president also gave his promise that his country will suspend the U.S.–South Korea joint military exercises. He also added that this decision is based on financial reasons which caught the government in Seoul by surprise. The American Secretary of State – Mike Pompeo referred to this statement saying that the exercises will be suspended as long as Pyongyang will negotiate the issue of denuclearization of the peninsula in good faith.

The declaration can be analysed on many different levels. On one hand, American activities can be treated as a friendly signal towards Beijing and Moscow. Both states perceive American military presence in East Asia as a potential threat for them and as one of the element of American strategic advantage. For China, American presence acts as one of the most effective breaks in its expansionist policy on East Asian and South East Asian Seas. North Korea on the other hand plays a very

¹ More about legal aspects on this issue can be found in: G. Bunn, *The Right to Withdrawal from the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT): The views of two NPT negotiators*, Yaderny Kontrol 2005 [online] https://fsi.stanford.edu/sites/default/files/Bunn_Timerbaev.pdf



important role in Chinese foreign policy, giving Beijing the opportunity to create a situation of instability in the region and being the only actor that can avert it. Another important issue relates to the actions taken by the American administration which seem to be consequently taking a form of a trade war with China. For Moscow, the American activities on Russia's east coast are perceived as strategic threat in accordance with the doctrinal perception of being surrounded by the U.S. and NATO military bases. It is also important to underline that the representatives of China and Russia had meet with the North Korean leader before the summit and it is highly possible that the issue of Kim Jong Un's meeting with Donald Trump was raised by them.

The declaration can also be treated as an example of reduction of America's presence in the region. A shift from the pivot to Asia lunched by the administration of Barack Obama is clearly visible in Donald Trump's foreign policy. One of the examples is the America's withdraw from the Trans-Pacific Partnership Agreement, which included four ASEAN states (Brunei, Malaysia, Singapore, Vietnam) and Japan, and which was initially designed to create a counterbalance for Chinese initiatives.

The summit in Singapore in a certain way shall also be perceived as a success of DPRK's diplomacy. Firstly, Pyongyang achieved that what it tried to achieve during the 1993-1994 nuclear negotiations, i.e. to shape the agenda in a way that it will not only concern the nuclear programme, yet also the future relations with the United States.² This strategy was deeply analysed by T. Snyder in his work on U.S.-Korean negotiations on NPT.³

Secondly, the meeting shall also be considered as an indirect legitimisation of the North Korean regime. In comparison to his grandfather and father, Kim Jong Un managed to command an audience with the American president as an equal representative of a sovereign state without any third party and without giving anything away. The way how he was presented in the world media as well as the way how Donald Trump talked about him, would rather suggest that the North Korean leader is just one of 'state leaders', not a 'bloody dictator'. The fact that at least for a moment North Korea was not depicted as a rogue state might be very important for further stages of negotiations. The meeting was also used by the North Korean propaganda for domestic usage.

To sum up, the summit should be treated as a symbolic event. It seems very unlikely that the decisions made in Singapore will reorient North Korea's long term foreign policy goals. Possession of nuclear weapons is one of the most important conditions for the Workers' Party of Korea to survive and remain in power. Economic sanctions in most cases also appeared to be ineffective.

² More detail concerning the 1993-1994 U.S. – North Korea negotiations can be found in : P. Kraś, *United States – North Korea nuclear negotiations (1993-1994)*, Warsaw Peace Papers 2017.

³ S. Snyder, *Negotiating on the Edge: North Korean Negotiating Behavior*, World Affairs 2000 [online] <https://www.jstor.org/stable/20672592>

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It seems fair to say that the North Korea's nuclear programme will slow down; however, Pyongyang will not give up its nuclear arsenal in the nearest future.

Based on:

- V. Cha, S. Mi Terry, *Assessment of the Singapore Summit*, CSIS;
- <http://www.abc.net.au>, *Singapore summit: Donald Trump and Kim Jong-un document released after historic meeting*, ABC News.