

## East Asia Security Not Visibly Conflictual After Trump-Kim Summit

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The Singapore Summit between US President Trump and North Korean Chairman Kim on the question of denuclearisation of North Korea on June 12 2018 seems to have been hyped out of proportion by the international media forgetting that 'denuclearisation' necessarily does not imply North Korea giving up its nuclear weapons arsenal and ICBMs to launch them.

In the wake of the Singapore Summit the East Asian security environment has been rendered more troublesome with strategic uncertainties and ambiguities relacing the earlier predictable template.

One wonders as to how much the United States and President Trump took Japan and South Korea in confidence in the run-up to the Summit with reference to calling-off major joint US-ROK Military Exercises, reduction of US Forces from the Korean Peninsula and committing to denuclearisation of the entire "Korean Peninsula' The latter aim is that of China projected through the North Korean President.

If the above has not happened then the implicit trust that the United States has enjoyed for decades from Japan and South Korea would evaporate. What then emerges is that Japan and South Korea would believe that while President Trump secured United States against the North Korean ICBM threat it has not secured in any way the security of Japan and South Korea.

North Korea has provided optics for the global community in terms of destruction of testing sites infrastructure but no optics are available of destruction of any of its nuclear means and ICBMs threatening the United States and its allies in the Western Pacific, more specifically Japan.

Strategic logic would dictate that North Korea would be committing 'geopolitical suicide' by elimination of its nuclear arsenal. Cynically, yet

logically speaking, it needs to be highlighted that the North Korean nuclear arsenal was Chairman Kim's passport to international legitimacy evident where the US President of the mighty Superpower was impelled to travel to Singapore for a Summit with the leader of an 'international pariah state' designated as such for decades by the United States.

Contextually therefore, post-Singapore Summit 2018 it can be accurately asserted that East Asia security has not visibly become less conflictual despite all the assertions at Singapore by the US President Trump and North Korean Chairman Kim. That visibility would only emerge when 'the whole, complete, comprehensive, irreversible, internationally verified Complete Denuclearisation' is displayed by North Korea. It implies that North Korea destroys its complete holdings of nuclear weapons and delivery means.

It must be remembered that the North Korean leader in the run-up to the Singapore Summit had completely rule out the 'Libyan Model' of denuclearisation. This itself is an indication that North Korea would only opt for incremental denuclearisation spread over years. That itself induces conflictual possibilities in East Asia security environment.

East Asia therefore in terms of its turbulent security environment and edgy relationship between the nations of East Asian region continues as hithertofore. North Korea will continue to be a nuclear threat and China the strategic patron of North Korea would calibrate North Korean steps to 'De-nuclearize' dependent on the temperature of US-China relations. In simple words China will use North Korea as trump-card to trump President Trump as US imposes a trade war on China.

China's threatening overhang over the East Asian security environment has not seen any dilution commensurate with its self-acclaimed 'peaceful rise'. In mid-2018 China has acquired full-spectrum dominance over the South China Sea in direct contravention of the UN Convention on the Laws of the Seas. China has also defied the strictures passed by The Hague Tribunal declaring its claimed sovereignty over the South China Sea as "illegal".

China has not ceased intimidating Taiwan with oversized military show of force whenever China perceives that Taiwan is asserting more independence in its policy postures. Taiwan therefore continues to be an explosive flashpoint in East Asia as hitherto fore. China's overwhelming military postures on its Eastern Flanks resting on the Western Pacific littoral are designed to reunify Taiwan by force. US strategy of denuclearisation of North Korea would have no impact on the China Threat to Taiwan. The converse however would be true.

In the case of Japan and Chinese illegal claims over the Senkaku Islands it seems China is presently lying low in terms of direct provocations. This presumably arises after Japan forced the United States to commit that the Senkaku Islands are covered under Article V of the Mutual Security Treaty with USA and that America is obliged to militarily intervene should China go in for military intervention to forcibly occupy the Senkaku Islands.

China is no longer trusted by the Philippines President as Chinese Navy and Chinese fishermen encroach in Filipino waters. The Philippines

President's pivot to China hoping that China would be less provocative in the South China Sea islands has proved to be futile.

Moving to the Southern segment of East Asia China's relations with both Vietnam and Indonesia are edgy and confrontational over the South China Sea islands. Indonesia can longer be termed as a fence-sitter on the South China Sea islands dispute after China started encroachments in the Natuna Islands region.

Turning attention to the more recently focussed Korean Peninsula, it needs to be reiterated that the US President Trump's declaration of calling of joint US-ROK major military exercises as a goodwill gesture to North Korea has been ill-advised. These major exercises involving the Third Marine Division Expeditionary Force and other components of US Armed Forces in location in South Korea and also flying-in from Mainland USA were a major deterrent to North Korean aggressive designs and deterrent signalling to China also. Having personally witnessed these exercises the 'shock and awe' effect of concentrated military mass and firepower was awesome.

Calling off these exercises should have been calibrated with verifiable denuclearisation of North Korea. The US in doing so has sent wrong signals to its steadfast East Asian allies who form the foundations of US Forward Military Presence in the Western Pacific.

There is also a clever catch inserted in the call for denuclearisation of the 'Korean Peninsula as a whole made by North Korea seconded by China. It would imply that US has accepted that US nuclear weapons located in South Korea or planned to be located in South Korea as part of US contingency planning would have to be removed.

In actual effect therefore the much vaunted US "Nuclear Umbrella" so far in place as much needed assurance to Japan and South Korea would now be not substantially available.

Also ill-advised is the US declaration to withdraw US Forces in South Korea fully or even partially is an open invitation for North Korean aggression. There has been far too much hurry on the part of the United States establishment to declare 'intents' without calibrating them to North Korean responses to completely denuclearize.

Are there any hidden clauses or commitments made by the North Korean President to the US President during the Singapore Summit which prompted US President Trump to throw in the above named seemingly ill-advised concessions to North Korea?

If the above be true then a very crucial question arises analytically and that is whether the North Korean President made hidden commitments to the United States independent of China? If so then the entire template of the East Asian security template radically changes. A number of imponderables arise about China's options to dominate the East Asian security environment

Concluding, it needs to be highlighted that the East Asian security environment has not emerged as less conflictual after the US-North Korea

Summit in Singapore on June 12 2018. On the contrary, the reverse may have happened with the predictable security environment now lapsing into uncertainties.

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