



PRACTICAL STEPS TO SAVE A DEAL WITH NORTH KOREA

BY JONGSOO LEE

Jongsoo Lee is senior managing director at Brock Securities LLC and center associate at Davis Center for Russian and Eurasian Studies, Harvard University. The opinions expressed in this essay are solely his own. He can be followed on Twitter at [@jameslee004](#).

Since the beginning of this year, there has been a reduction in tension over the North Korean nuclear standoff to the point where a first-ever summit between the United States and North Korea has been announced. Recent developments – such as US President Trump’s decision to withdraw from the Iran nuclear deal and North Korea’s statements expressing opposition to a certain model and terms for its denuclearization – have cast doubt that a denuclearization deal can be worked out between Washington and Pyongyang, however. What practical measures can be taken now to save the momentum for peace and enhance the chances of a successful deal?

First, to demonstrate that Washington is sincere about seeking peace and reconciliation with Pyongyang, the US can offer to issue a formal statement expressing regret for civilian casualties of the US bombing of North Korean cities during the Korean War. This will help overcome decades of North Korean antagonism and mistrust toward Washington and help reassure North Korea that a denuclearization deal will not undermine its security or lead to a regime change in Pyongyang. Such a statement can be a part of a comprehensive peace settlement leading to the replacement of the Korean War armistice agreement with a formal peace treaty.

Second, as North Korea has recently signaled that it wants to be perceived as a “normal country,” there are confidence-building steps that the US and the global community can now take together with North Korea, which will encourage positive change in North Korea without violating the global sanctions in place against Pyongyang’s nuclear program. One such step is a program for planting trees in North Korea to arrest deforestation and soil erosion, which is an acute environmental problem in North Korea. Pictures of North Koreans, Americans, and other nationals standing side-by-side on the hills of North Korea planting trees together will be highly appreciated in North Korea and help promote goodwill toward the US and other participating nations.

Another is announcement of initiatives for educational, cultural, and sports exchanges. As North Korea transitions further toward an economy driven by market forces, it needs training in Western business practices and market economics. The US and other countries can host and train North Korean students, business leaders, and government officials as North Korea seeks to develop its economy further. A symbolic yet effective gesture would be establishing a scholarship program for North Korean students and professionals to enable them to study at US universities. Further goodwill will be promoted by reciprocal visits of athletes, musicians, and others between North Korea and the US.

Third, North Korea can signal its seriousness about shedding its reputation as a pariah state and its desire to be accepted as a responsible member of the global community by improving its human rights record. Many critics of North Korea, including in

the US Congress, are skeptical of any deal with Pyongyang because of their distrust of a regime known for horrific human rights abuses. Any unilateral gesture by North Korea that addresses this critical issue will help make it more acceptable for the US and other nations to work with Pyongyang, including in the areas of denuclearization and economic cooperation.

Pyongyang recently gave a step in this direction by freeing three US citizens it had been detaining, but it can do more, such as agreeing to work with Seoul and Tokyo on the issue of the South Korean and Japanese abductees in North Korea. The most visible symbol of improving human rights concerns North Korea's internal prisons and concentration camps. Pyongyang can take the initiative by releasing captives from these camps or closing down some of them. Another step that would improve Pyongyang's international image is desisting from illicit activities for which it has been notorious, such as its diplomats trafficking in drugs and counterfeit currency.

The US and other nations must offer Pyongyang concrete and sufficient incentives to take these steps: the ultimate reward is acceptance as a responsible member of the global community. Economic incentives such as a private sector-led "Marshall Plan" for North Korea upon Pyongyang's denuclearization have been suggested, and a significant economic assistance package may be pledged on the condition that Pyongyang makes concrete and verifiable progress toward denuclearization. Upon passing certain milestones, such as thresholds in denuclearization, North Korea may be invited to join international organizations such as the IMF, World Bank, Asian Development Bank, Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank, and World Trade Organization.

During the recent inter-Korean summit at Panmunjom, the leaders of the two Koreas impressed the world with gestures for inter-Korean peace and reconciliation. It is incumbent on North Korea and the United States – as well as other concerned nations – to make gestures for their mutual peace and reconciliation if the recent

momentum toward peace is not to be reversed and war is to be avoided.

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