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## Assessment of the South Korea-U.S. Summit and Prospects for North Korea's Response

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The impact of the outcome of the South Korea-U.S. summit on the Peninsula and its security environment should be assessed in three domains: 1) North Korea policy; 2) China and Northeast Asian security; and 3) the evolution and development of the South Korea-U.S. alliance.

North Korean policy was one of the issues, about which Seoul and Washington revealed their most rigorous efforts to cooperate during the summit. President Biden expressed his commitment to the Panmunjeom Declaration—a symbol of inter-Korea relations, and the Singapore Joint Statement—a symbol of U.S.-North Korea relations, in the U.S.-ROK Leaders' Joint Statement issued after the summit. This suggests that the U.S. is highly likely to support the Moon government's approach of proactively managing inter-Korea relations and U.S.-North Korea relations. This also shows the Biden administration's earlier announcement that the United States would proceed in close consultations with its allies in reviewing its North Korea policy was not simply cheap talk. Moreover, with regard to human rights issues, rather than urging North Korea to take unilateral action to improve its human rights conditions, it emphasized “working together” for the sake of improving human rights, thus demonstrating carefully balanced and coordinated wording.

With regard to the matters of China, Indo-Pacific strategy and the Quad, which have implications for both countries' East Asia strategies, the two leaders confirmed their shared understandings of the general guidelines while recognizing their mutual autonomy in how this is expressed. The U.S.-Japan Joint Leaders' Statement directly criticized China through aggressive and forthright expressions, for instance, "concerns over Chinese activities that are inconsistent with the international rules-based order" and "China's unlawful maritime claims and activities in the South China Sea." In contrast, the South Korea-U.S. Joint Leaders' Statement reflected carefully coordinated efforts to not be seen as criticizing China, simply stating that we "oppose all activities that undermine, destabilize, or threaten the rules-based international order" without specifically referring to China.

Both the United States and Japan stressed the two nations' sense of responsibility as leaders in the Indo-Pacific strategy in their statement. However, the South Korea-U.S. joint statement simply reaffirmed both nations' commitment to "maintaining an inclusive, free and open Indo-Pacific" and working together to align South Korea's New Southern Policy and the United States' strategy for the Indo-Pacific region. Notably, the joint statement acknowledged the difference in both countries' strategic perspectives in stating that "the significance of the South Korea-U.S. relationship ... anchors our respective approaches to the Indo-Pacific region."

President Moon and President Biden characterized the nature of the South Korea-U.S. partnership as "a responsible alliance that shares values." Both leaders also expanded the scope of the alliance beyond the Peninsula to the global arena,

explicitly stating that the summit opened a new chapter for the South Korea-U.S. alliance. It emphasized restoring the core value of the alliance on the basis of democracy, the rule of law, and human rights, which enabled the bilateral relationship to move beyond the dichotomous tensions in the South Korea-US alliance, that is to say, focusing exclusively on issues on deterring the North Korean threat, on the one hand, and aiming to build regional and global cooperative relations, on the other.

What is most important about the changes in the situation on the Peninsula since the South Korea-U.S. summit, is the matter of how North Korea will react to the joint initiative proposed by the two leaders. North Korea has remained silent for nearly a month after White House Spokeswoman Jen Saki revealed the conclusion of the Biden administration's DPRK policy review at the end of April. It suggested there are many issues for Pyongyang to consider. There seems to be few justifiable reasons for North Korea to immediately reject Washington's approach in a situation that it is sending favorable messages to Pyongyang such as "succession of the Singapore Declaration," "maximum flexibility," and "resolution, not hostility."

Meanwhile, the fact that the U.S. is consistently raising the matter of North Korea's actions, not its statements, implies that tangible action by North Korea must be accomplished for U.S.-North Korea negotiations to be resumed. Given the prospect that North Korea's statements and its accompanying actions will not likely change definitively in the short-term, the matter of whether the South Korea-U.S. joint military exercises that are scheduled for August go ahead or not, and

if so, the scale of such exercises could be a turning point for the resumption of dialogue. South Korea and the United States have already stressed the importance of joint military readiness in their joint statement after the summit, and the impact of COVID-19 is gradually decreasing. Thus, it is uncertain whether the U.S. will agree to cancel or scale down the joint exercises on the basis of supporting diplomatic efforts with North Korea. North Korea had previously ramped up its criticism of South Korea and the U.S. in a statement issued by the Deputy Department Director Kim Yo Jong, even though both countries cancelled the Field Training Exercise (FTX) and replaced it with Combined Command Post Training (CCPT).

Nonetheless, it is imperative for Seoul and Washington to keep sending out consistent signals, rather than awaiting a response from the North to the summit. It is also necessary to utilize a communication channel with China in order to relay to North Korea the directions and principles of South Korea and the United States' North Korea policy. This is because, as expressed in the South Korea-U.S. joint statement, whether Seoul and Washington continue to coordinate in lockstep, and the conclusions that the U.S. comes to in relation to its concrete intervention measures, will provide the necessary justification for North Korea to return to a dialogue.

Keywords: South Korea-U.S. Summit, Biden's North Korean policy, South Korea-U.S. alliance, U.S.-North Korea dialogue