Arms Control Association Welcomes U.S.-North Korea Diplomatic Opening: Now the Hard Work Begins

- Pressroom

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(Washington, D.C.)—The Arms Control Association welcomes the very positive signals and messages being sent by both sides this evening and over the past few days—by President Trump and the North Korean Leader Kim Jong Un—that they are interested in pursuing a diplomatic agreement that puts North Korea on the road to denuclearization and that also presumably will also seek to address North Korea's security concerns.

"South Korean President Moon Jae-in and his national security team deserve tremendous credit for their very skillful diplomacy that has made this breakthrough possible," stated Executive Director Daryl Kimball.

With North Korea's willingness to consider denuclearization if its security is guaranteed, its willingness to suspend nuclear and ballistic missile testing while there are talks with the United States, and Kim Jong Un’s acknowledgement that the regular U.S.-ROK defense exercises are not an obstacle to negotiations, the table is set for a meaningful, sustained dialogue between Washington and Pyongyang.

"But now, the hard work begins," noted Kimball. "Though President Trump deserves credit for being so bold as to agree to a summit meeting with North Korea by May, this is a process that will, if it is to succeed, require patience and persistence."

"A summit meeting must be carefully prepared, with expert-level negotiations beginning immediately. Preparations must take the planned North-South summit in April into account. It is too much to expect that a single Trump-Kim summit—no matter how intensively prepared—will bring an immediate and lasting solution to the nuclear issue," he cautioned. "But if the U.S. works closely and intensively with our South Korean allies in its approach to North Korea, a summit offers the potential for starting a serious process that could move us decisively away from the current crisis."

"The near-term goal," explained Kimball, "should be to maintain a long-term freeze on North Korean nuclear and missile testing and to discuss measures that can further reduce tensions on the peninsula, and agree on a balanced framework for sustained, direct, high-level negotiations on issues of mutual concern, including steps toward the longer-term goals of denuclearization of the Korean peninsula and the peace regime."

An Arms Control Association fact sheet details previous presidents' efforts in using a combination of pressure and incentives to curb North Korea's nuclear capabilities. "One important difference between the efforts of Bill Clinton in 1993-1994, George W. Bush in 2005-2006, Barack Obama in 2012, and the situation in 2018 is that North Korea's nuclear and missile capabilities are much more substantial and dangerous today, their bargaining power is greater, and the cost of failure is higher," noted Kimball.
"Diplomacy will not guarantee success, but it offers the best chance for curbing the North Korean nuclear threat," he said.

- Daryl G. Kimball
- North Korea

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