



## The 20th Anniversary of June 15th South-North Joint Declaration – Implications and Possible Measures to Improve Inter-Korean Relationship Easing Military Tensions and Establishing Peace

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The June 15th South-North Joint Declaration does not state specific provisions on easing military tensions or establishing peace. However, the first inter-Korean summit “in accordance with the noble will of the entire people who yearn for the peaceful reunification of the nation” did become a significant stepping stone for bringing peace on the Korean Peninsula in the 21st century.

### **2000 Inter-Korean Summit and Issues Regarding Peace on the Korean Peninsula**

Easing tensions and establishing peace were indeed important agendas for President Kim Dae-jung and Chairman Kim Jong-il. According to the former South Korean Unification Minister Lim Dong-won’s memoir *Peacemaker*, President Kim said that “war only leads to co-destruction” and suggested to “hold a joint military committee, as agreed upon the Inter-Korean Basic Agreement, to discuss non-aggression, arms control issues, and prevention of accidental armed clashes.” Then, Chairman Kim expressed his gratitude and suggested to “put declarative contents” in the agreement and “take the form of delegating the rest to ministerial talks.” As a result, there is no actual content that discusses peace on the Korean Peninsula in the Declaration.

Nonetheless, the two leaders agreed on mutual non-aggression through the summit. They also agreed on the importance of building trust to escape anxiety and fear of a South Korean invasion (unification by absorption of the North) or a North Korean invasion of the South (unification under communism). Then, they agreed to hold inter-Korean defense ministers’ meetings to discuss preventive measures against accidental armed conflicts and further ways to build military trust. Returning from Pyongyang after this discussion, President Kim declared that there is no more war on the Korean Peninsula; in September of that year, the first inter-Korean defense

ministers' meeting was held on Jeju Island.

The problem was the wide rift between the military authorities—unlike the two leaders' talk. North Korea took a rather passive stance on speedy reconciliation and exchange. Although opening Gyeongui Railway and connecting Munsan and Kaesong were the immediate tasks of the first inter-Korean defense ministers' meeting, the two sides simply decided to hold another working-level military talk to discuss military assurance of the road establishment. They only adopted a declarative rule that they would make joint efforts to ease military tensions and build peace on the Korean Peninsula.

### **Inter-Korean Military Relations since the Roh Administration**

It is difficult to mend the inter-Korean relations, consisting of division, war, long-lasting enmity and confrontations, by just one or two rounds of talks. It took time for the first inter-Korean summit talks to lead to practical results. The process of reaching an agreement at the working-level military talks after the inter-Korean defense ministers' meeting and the actual establishment of work were delayed due to the concerns regarding the jurisdiction and management rights in the Demilitarized Zone (DMZ) and the labeling of "main adversary" in the Defense White Paper. There was even the Second Battle of Yeonpyeong in June 2002, which resulted in the casualty of South Korean naval officers.

The Roh administration followed the achievements of the June 15th South-North Joint Declaration to actively improve the inter-Korean relations. However, this administration had to face immediate challenges such as reducing military tensions and responding to the second North Korean nuclear crisis that erupted in October 2002. Efforts to resolve North Korea's nuclear issues through the six-party talks were made in parallel with efforts to ease military tensions; the first inter-Korean general-level military talks were held in May 2004. The agreement was reached at this time to establish basic military confidence-building measures along the Northern Limit Line (NLL), where military conflicts were most likely to occur, eliminate propaganda means, and suspend propaganda activities along the Military Demarcation Line (MDL).

Since then, while peace was maintained in the West Sea, the controversy over the NLL grew sharply at the general-level military talks. The issue was discussed in earnest at the second inter-Korean summit in 2007. Through the October 4th South-North Joint Declaration, President Roh Moo-hyun and Chairman Kim Jong-il agreed on the reduction of military tensions, non-aggression, and a future three-party or a four-party talk to discuss the end-of-war declaration. The two leaders also agreed to establish the "Special Zone for Peace and Cooperation in the West Sea" that includes a common fishery zone and a peaceful coastal zone. At the second inter-Korean defense ministers'

meeting in November 2007, the two sides agreed to build military trust, ease tensions, and operate a joint inter-Korean military committee; however, the actual establishment of the common fishing zone was delayed due to differences over its scope.

Inter-Korean military relations kept getting worse since the Lee Myung-bak administration. In 2010, military tensions increased, following the ROKS Cheonan sinking and the bombardment of Yeonpyeong. In addition, local military threats heightened with North Korea's nuclear tests and mid- and long-range missile tests, the North's shooting over propaganda balloon in October 2014, and the North's provocation with wooden-box land mines in August 2015.

### **2018 Panmunjom Declaration and the inter-Korean Military Agreement**

North Korea's strategic provocations continued even after the takeover of the Moon Jae-in administration in May 2017. President Moon, however, pledged to inherit and develop the June 15th South-North Joint Declaration. In July 2017, he publicly proposed in the name of the "Berlin Initiative" to hold inter-Korean military talks and suspend hostilities along the MDL. Through Chairman Kim Jong-un's 2018 New Year's Address, North Korea began to respond to the South Korean government's proposal; such led to North Korea's participation in the PyeongChang 2018 Winter Olympics and to the April 2018 inter-Korean summit at Panmunjom.

President Moon and Chairman Kim agreed on joint efforts to reduce military tensions and war risks and to actively cooperate in establishing a peace system on the Korean Peninsula through the Panmunjom Declaration. Practical measures included the suspension of all hostilities, DMZ Peace Zone Initiative, the establishment of a peace zone along the NLL in the West Sea, prevention of accidental clashes, and occasional future meetings between military authorities. In September, 2018 Inter-Korean Summit was held in Pyongyang; the September 19th Military Agreement was adopted as an annex to the Pyongyang Joint Declaration of September 2018. It included specific measures to ease military tensions and build trust, such as the suspension of hostilities in the land, sea, and air, the withdrawal of guard posts (GP) from the DMZ, the demilitarization of the Joint Security Area (JSA) in Panmunjom, joint recovery operations, transition of the area around the NLL in the West Sea into a maritime peace zone, and the shared use of Han River Estuary.

Since then, the two Koreas have implemented practical measures to ease military tensions and bring peace on the Korean Peninsula. Shooting, military exercises and military aircraft flights in the border area have been suspended; other demonstrative measures were implemented for the DMZ Peace Zone Initiative. Some violations occurred intermittently in North Korea. Further implementation has been delayed especially since the collapse of the 2019 US-DPRK Hanoi Summit. Nonetheless, as the

agreement to stop hostilities has been largely implemented, military tensions along the border are seen to ease, slowly building military trust.

### **Inter-Korean Relations Crisis and a Total Solution**

A recent occasion of a group of North Korean defectors sending leaflets to the North and North Korea's strong reactions against this led to a worrisome situation that involves discussion of abolishing the Inter-Korean Liaison Office, a full halt to the Mount Kumgang tourism and the Kaesong Industrial Complex, and even the termination of the September 19th Military Agreement. On June 5, 2020, a spokesman for the United Front Department of North Korea said that "the enemy is just the enemy" and warned of an emergency, stating that "South Korea needs to prepare for an extremely exhausting situation (in the border area)."

South Korea must urgently establish measures to avoid a return to hostile relations and to prevent dangerous military clashes from occurring. Sending leaflets to the North was the direct cause of the situation, and so, it should be prioritized to make a national consensus and adjust the legal response system to cease hostilities as soon as possible in accordance with the agreement that both sides made. Meanwhile, recognizing that the current situation could extend to a crisis, the South Korean government must prepare and promote careful yet active ways to foster inter-Korean dialogues and establish an effective system of military preparedness.

The June 15th South-North Joint Declaration and the joint implementation of inter-Korean agreements are the bases for peace on the Korean Peninsula. Now, when issues regarding diplomatic security have almost disappeared due to the COVID-19 (coronavirus disease 2019) crisis, it is the time to reiterate active efforts to prevent the situation from deteriorating, honor the agreement, and resume inter-Korean talks.



※ *Translator's note: This is a summarized unofficial translation of the original paper which was written in Korean. All references should be made to the original paper.*

※ *This article is written based on the author's personal opinions and does not reflect the views of the Sejong Institute.*