



Institute Statement on the Singapore Summit

June 12, 2018

The key pledge in the [written statement](#) reached in Singapore between President Donald Trump and Chairman Kim Jong-Un promises to work toward denuclearization, yet it does not include concrete commitments or arrangements to do so. In his [press conference](#) following the signing, President Trump consistently stated that North Korea has committed to denuclearize and will do so expeditiously. This discrepancy requires clarification. From President Trump's oral statements, it appears that the parties are continuing to work out such arrangements behind the scenes.

Thankfully missing from the written and oral statements was any mention of the principle "commitment for commitment, action-for-action" contained in earlier agreements, in particular the September 19, 2005 Six Party pledge. This formula had the unfortunate effect of stretching out the process, essentially leaving the most difficult decisions to later years, when the deal fell apart. President Trump appeared to understand that denuclearization does not require years and years to accomplish. Moreover, he pointed out that denuclearization can reach a point of no return within a relatively short period of time that would prevent North Korea from reconstituting its most threatening nuclear weapon capabilities, absent a lengthy reconstitution program.

President Trump in his press conference also stated that the inspectors would include those from the United States. Relying on inspectors from the United States and other key countries would allow for more efficient and quicker inspections of a denuclearization process. This approach would also allow a surge in inspectors from advanced nuclear states who have the necessary technical knowledge needed to verifiably denuclearize North Korea. The International Atomic Energy Agency will also need to be involved, as the ultimate goal of denuclearization is to bring North Korea back into compliance with the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty.

As a reminder of the tough challenges ahead for U.S. negotiators, we are releasing a [companion piece](#) that points out just how little we know about North Korea's uranium enrichment program that is making weapon-grade uranium for nuclear weapons at known and unknown sites. This program will probably be the most arduous and time consuming of the nuclear programs to verify, with plutonium production and nuclear weaponization programs progressing more quickly.

Finally, in all past, successful denuclearization cases where significant nuclear weapons capabilities were abandoned, such as in South Africa, Iraq, Libya, Taiwan, and Brazil, there was a significant moment where the leadership of the proliferant state made a choice to do so and followed through. It remains to be seen whether this is truly that moment for North Korea. We have been disappointed so many times in the past.

Nonetheless, the positive actions taken thus far by the United States and North Korea and apparent commitments made by both parties at the summit have created a sound basis to build a path for addressing a multitude of lingering U.S./DPRK and DPRK/regional issues. A relaxation of security concerns for a proliferant state is often key to abandoning nuclear weapons capabilities.

We should know very quickly whether Chairman Kim is serious and can deliver on his pledge to denuclearize. The parties need to work out the verification arrangements and a concrete timetable for denuclearization. Until the time when North Korea's most threatening nuclear weapons capabilities are verifiably dismantled, sanctions and international pressure must remain strongly in place. Reports by President Trump that sanctions enforcement is weakening on the Chinese border are particularly concerning. The President should insist that China maintain sanctions until North Korea has made substantial and concrete progress on verified denuclearization.