

Four steps toward peace in Korea

By (Ret.) Lt. Gen. Dan Leaf • June 17, 2018

Focusing on substance rather than style must be the priority for the U.S. and North Korea if they are to make peace out of the pizzazz in Singapore. President Donald Trump and Chairman Kim Jong Un signed a brief statement that had a four-point to-do list:

>> Commit to establish new U.S.-DPRK relations in accordance with the desire of the peoples of the two countries for peace and prosperity.

>> Join their efforts to build a lasting and stable peace regime on the Korean Peninsula.

>> Reaffirm the April 27 Panmunjom Declaration, the DPRK commits to work toward complete denuclearization of the Korean Peninsula.

>> Commit to recover POW/MIA remains, including the immediate repatriation of those already identified.

Trump proponents and opponents have largely held their ground in assessing the summit and its outcome. Enough has been said about word choice and style; let's examine each task and consider what should be done in implementation.

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Commit to establish new U.S.-DPRK relations in accordance with the desire for peace and prosperity.

While the two leaders may have established a personal relationship, “new U.S.-DPRK relations” must be formalized. With formal diplomatic relations as the eventual goal, both sides should agree and act swiftly to establish a diplomatic presence in each other’s capital. This has been attempted before in the 1990s, but devilish details and disagreement derailed that effort. This time, an aggressive “no later than” date should be established and met.

Beyond diplomatic presence, ties must be built on economic and security matters. The Daniel K. Inouye Asia-Pacific Center for Security Studies in Honolulu conducts highly regarded executive education courses for military and civilian leaders from every country in the Indo-Asia-Pacific Region except North Korea. The U.S. administration and Congress should act quickly to allow DPRK participation. This is a risk-free option; the Center teaches good governance, not military tactics. North Korean attendees would have the opportunity to interact with professionals from across the region in a unique Aloha-inspired environment that fosters understanding and cooperation.

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Step One has to be replacing the existing Armistice with a formal peace treaty. This will be difficult, detailed work and a formal Republic of Korea (ROK)-DPRK-U.S. process should begin immediately. Trump made an apparent commitment to suspend U.S.-ROK military exercises conceding that the wargames as unnecessarily provocative. North Korea has a long history of more direct and dangerous provocations, including abduction, murder and military attacks. The DPRK must be put on notice that any future provocation on its part will be deal-breaking.

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This is clearly the most important, and most challenging of the tasks. Elaboration of the steps to denuclearization in writing is essential — as it stands, this is a philosophical agreement without timeline or teeth, and that has to change. Eventually, Kim is going to have to explicitly agree to the notion of CVID — Complete, Verifiable, Irreversible Denuclearization. Anything less will not be accepted.

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Commit to recover POW/MIA remains, including the immediate repatriation of those identified.

Trump indicated that this task was a last-minute addition, offered by Kim. The remains of over 6,000 U.S. personnel may still be in North Korea, and clearly their recovery and identification is important to their family and friends. Achieving this goal will be a test of DPRK commitment, and an opportunity to demonstrate and practice, cooperation and collaboration lacking in the past.

There are many doubters about the substance of the Singapore summit. Timely action to address these four tasks will begin to create the substance and make real progress toward a lasting peace.

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