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NORTH KOREA-SOUTH KOREA RELATIONS

AN UNPRECEDENTED YEAR, BUT WILL PROGRESS CONTINUE?

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Inter-Korean relations continued to forge ahead in the final four months of 2018. September's Pyongyang summit – the third in a year – was full of symbolism, including a trip by the two First Couples to sacred Mt. Paekdu. President Moon Jae-in and supreme leader Kim Jong Un reiterated earlier commitments while adding new ones, notably a raft of CBMs in and near the DMZ to reduce border tensions. Progress elsewhere was slower, since UN and other sanctions continued to block most inter-Korean economic dealings. Despite hopes, Kim did not come South in 2018, but he promised to meet Moon “frequently” in 2019. The US finally allowed a South Korean inspection train to cross the DMZ for joint surveys of the North's major tracks, and in December the two Koreas held a groundbreaking ceremony for relinking their transport networks – although no actual joint renovation work is feasible unless sanctions on the DPRK are eased. Kim Jong Un's New Year Address lauded progress made, but upped the ante by warning Seoul that all joint military drills with the US are unacceptable. Continued cyber-attacks, including a recent hack of defectors' personal data, cast doubt on the North's sincerity.

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Not much that involves North Korea is uncontroversial. Yet as 2019 begins, we can say without fear of contradiction that 2018 was the single most remarkable year in the entire history of inter-Korean relations. Let us begin by reviewing the year overall, and make good that claim.

First, three summits! For half a century after the peninsula's partition in 1945, the top leaders of the two Koreas never met. Till last year there had only ever been two inter-Korean summit meetings, in 2000 and 2007, both in Pyongyang. Eleven years had passed since the last one.

Against that backdrop, three summits in a single year – within five months in fact – if nothing else marks an extraordinary and welcome acceleration. With the DPRK's supreme leader Kim Jong Un [telling](#) ROK President Moon Jae-in that he hopes to meet “frequently” in 2019, what had hitherto been rare and exceptional may become the new normal. That can only be good.

Second, two meaty accords! Sometimes summits are held mainly for show. To be sure, both April 27's first Moon-Kim meeting at Panmunjom in the Demilitarized Zone (DMZ), and their third held in September in Pyongyang, were crafted with a canny eye to global media coverage. (Their second talks, at Panmunjom on May 26, were *ad hoc* and at short notice.)

Yet these meetings were far more than mere photo-opportunities. Each produced a substantial document, with detailed commitments and timelines. In that regard, both April's [Panmunjom Declaration for Peace, Prosperity and Unification of the Korean Peninsula](#) and September's [Pyongyang Joint Declaration](#) stand in marked contrast to the frankly thin and vague [Joint Statement](#) signed in Singapore in June by Kim and the US President, Donald Trump.

Third, actions speak louder than words. In the past, the two Koreas had reached agreements which were never implemented, notably December 1991's detailed but stillborn [Agreement on Reconciliation, Non-aggression and Exchanges And Cooperation](#). Not this time. On the contrary, in spring and autumn alike both sides moved fast to begin doing what they had just committed to; most strikingly in the military domain, with new measures to reduce tensions in and near the DMZ, described below. Here again the contrast with Singapore and its

aftermath (or lack of one), examined elsewhere in this issue of *Comparative Connections*, is striking. Whereas the US-North Korea process appears stuck, ties between the two Koreas continue to forge ahead – even if the former inevitably impacts the latter, another issue discussed below.

For our purposes, one consequence of these now intense North-South contacts is a new need to be more selective in our coverage. For much of the pre-2018 decade, with often little going on between the two Koreas, it was possible and seemed desirable to try to record every single interaction (although no doubt some were missed). That is no longer feasible, so this time and henceforth we shall focus on high-level and other important dealings – as one would, and my fellow-authors in this journal already do, if covering a normal bilateral relationship between two states. Indeed, perhaps the changes now unfolding can be characterized as a kind of inter-Korean normalization, at long last – subject to caveats raised later in this article.

The Pyongyang summit

The last issue of *Comparative Connections* was published in mid-September, on the eve of President Moon's visit to Pyongyang for his third meeting with Kim Jong Un; this time on the latter's home ground. Until 2018, the North had hosted all (i.e. both) inter-Korean summits, so it was good to break that one-sided habit before reverting to past patterns. Full reciprocity will only be achieved, however, if and when Kim Jong Un comes to Seoul; more on which below.

On Sept. 18, Moon Jae-in became the third ROK president to visit the DPRK, after Kim Dae-jung in 2000 and Roh Moo-hyun (2007). This was not Moon's first trip to Pyongyang; he accompanied Roh in 2007 as his chief of staff, so he had some idea what to expect. Also, after two earlier summits his Northern counterpart was by now a known quantity. By contrast, both 'DJ' and Roh were meeting Kim's father Kim Jong Il for the first time – and on his home turf.

Spousal optics: images matter

If this latest summit yielded familiar images, there were also changes. One might be called – forgive the jargon – spousal optics. Both DJ and Roh had brought their wives with them, but they were little seen given the lack of any local counterpart (Kim Jong Il's marital history being,

shall we say, complicated). Not so this time. Right from the beginning, when Kim Jong Un greeted Moon and his party at Sunan airport with an honor guard, it was the two first couples in the spotlight rather than just the two leaders. That pattern continued throughout, climaxing in an unexpected finale on Sept. 20 when the two first couples flew (in separate aircraft) to Mt. Paekdu: the peninsula's highest peak, sacred to all Koreans, on the China-DPRK border, with its striking volcanic lake. Images – some doctored – from Paekdu-san had hitherto been confined strictly to the Leader Kims in person. So it was double progress not only to invite an ROK president to share this hallowed ground, but also for both Moon and Kim to be pictured alongside their [wives](#).



Figure 1 South Korean President Moon Jae-in and North Korean leader Kim Jong Un pose for photographs on the top of Mt. Paektu, North Korea, Sept. 20, 2018. Photo: VOA News

Widening the circle further, in [photographs](#) subsequently released by the Blue House on Sept. 23, ten other leading members of the ROK delegation were also pictured atop Paekdu-san. In one image which caused a stir in South Korea, Kim Jong Un posed with the visitors, making a heart-shaped finger gesture – or trying to – associated with K-pop (which Kim and his circle can access; ordinary North Koreans who do so risk severe [punishment](#)). It seems that ROK Foreign Minister Kang Kyung-hwa [put](#) him up to this. Unsurprisingly, that moment was cut from the 70-minute [documentary](#) of the summit aired by *Korean Central Television (KCTV)* on Sept. 22 and 23. It did however show the South Korean party making the hand gesture.

With image management a key priority for both leaders, who exactly was able to see and hear what, where, and when is an important question; helpfully answered by Martyn Williams, who runs the vital website [NorthKoreaTech](#), in a recent [article](#). Thus while

the outside world could watch Moon's arrival in Pyongyang live, thanks to an ROK TV pool – Williams thinks this is a first for an event in the DPRK involving Kim Jong Un – North Korean domestic audiences, as usual, were told and shown nothing until the next day. Such delay is likelier to be political than technical, allowing time for events to be framed with the desired message.

Similar considerations also apply to another 'first': Moon Jae-in's live [speech](#) to the 114,000-strong crowd at Pyongyang's May Day (Rungrado) stadium, where the two leaders watched a specially themed performance of the DPRK's famed mass games. Remarkably, Moon was not required to submit his text for prior approval, though he was hardly going to rock the boat on such an occasion. (Unlike Mongolia's then-President Tsakhiagiin Elbegdorj, who in 2013 – perhaps piqued after failing to meet Kim Jong Un – pointedly [told](#) a Kim Il Sung University audience, with DPRK dignitaries present, that “no tyranny lasts forever”.) By contrast Moon's remarks were short (seven minutes) and sweet; yet beyond the stadium, no North Koreans heard him. The aforesaid documentary showed him addressing the crowd, but – as is *KCTV*'s usual practice – with a stirring voiceover by the presenter, rather than him actually speaking.

Demilitarizing the DMZ

But we are running ahead, and must turn from symbols (vital though these are) to [substance](#). Like Moon and Kim's first meeting at Panmunjom in April, the Pyongyang summit produced a solid agreement. Indeed, in a sense it yielded two. The main Pyongyang [Joint Declaration](#), signed on Sept. 19, reasserts and recommits to activities already agreed in April's [Panmunjom Declaration](#) (e.g. family reunions, cultural and sporting events, and relinking cross-border roads and railways). Some of these it specified or deepened. Clause 4.1, for instance, declared categorically that the Pyongyang Art Troupe would perform in Seoul in October; but in fact it didn't. Or again, in clause 2.1 “The two sides agreed to hold a ground-breaking ceremony within this year for the east-coast and west-coast rail and road connections.” That did happen, as discussed further below. New areas of planned cooperation were added too, including on environmental issues – forestry in particular – and public health.



Figure 2 North and South Korean officials try to connect a railroad during a groundbreaking ceremony for a project to modernize access to the heavily armed border. Photo: Fortune

The most striking outcome of the Pyongyang summit, however, came not in the main Joint Declaration but in a longer [annex](#) signed by the two sides' defense ministers, ROK Defense Minister Song Young-moo and DPRK Minister of the People's Armed Forces No Kwang Chol. Officially styled as the "Agreement on the Implementation of the Historic Panmunjom Declaration in the Military Domain," this prescribes a range of confidence building measures (CBMs are always preferable to ICBMs) and practical steps to reduce tensions at the border. These include removal of guardposts within the DMZ, joint demining and search for MIA remains in two areas within the zone, and the establishment from Nov. 1 of specified no-fly limits on either side of the Military Demarcation Line (MDL). From that date all military exercises along the MDL aimed at the other side are also proscribed. Chung Eui-yong, who directs the National Security Office in the Blue House, [called](#) this a "de facto non-aggression agreement ... through [which] the South and the North can practically resume a preliminary level of operational arms control."

Now we know what all those prior inter-Korean military meetings, which (as noted in our last issue) failed to issue any press statements at the time, were all about. They had a big, detailed agreement to craft and get right. The result is a long and in parts technical document, which specialists should read carefully; there are also some good [exegeses](#) available. Here we must focus on the big picture. Once again the two sides set to work on implementation with a will, producing remarkable scenes and memorable images. With the DMZ having for decades (belying its name) been a place bristling with tension, it was astonishing and heart-warming to watch soldiers from North and South working

together in peace in no man's land, as they removed guardposts and mines and searched for the remains of former comrades or enemies. How can this not be progress?



Figure 3 North Korean and South Korean soldiers work together removing guardposts and mines in the DMZ. Photo: ROK Ministry of Unification

Broader evaluation requires perspective and balance. South Korean right-wingers – on the ropes currently, with the last two conservative presidents both in jail; but they'll be back – [criticize](#) Moon for leaving the ROK vulnerable. Some on the left, by contrast, hail the arrival of permanent peace. Both these extremes exaggerate the impact of what are really no more or less than CBMs. Demolishing a few guardposts is largely symbolic. There is no suggestion, despite earlier kites flown, that either side is about to redeploy its front-line forces, such as the many thousands of KPA heavy artillery pieces positioned along the DMZ. That said, and as discussed elsewhere in this issue, Washington is [unhappy](#) about the no-fly zones – and the fact that Seoul failed to coordinate on this with its ally. It remains to be seen how this plays out; and also how soon other provisions of the accord, such as establishing a formal joint military committee and a 'peace zone' in the West (Yellow) Sea, will be addressed.

Needling the *chaebol* over noodles

Not everything in Pyongyang went smoothly. A storm in a teacup (or rather, a noodle bowl) erupted over a month later, with media reports suggesting that Ri Son Gwon, North Korea's point man on the South, was disrespectful to *chaebol* heads who accompanied Moon Jae-in. Exactly what he said, and what he meant, remain [contentious](#). At a lunch of cold noodles (*naengmyon*), a Northern specialty, Ri allegedly

asked the tycoons if the noodles were sliding down their throats easily. Critics saw that as a slur (or slurp), implying they were complacent. By some accounts he was more direct, berating them for not investing in the North.

But as Ri knows, sanctions make that impossible. Lest they forget, amid media reports that major *chaebol* were preparing for longer-term ventures in the North, several conglomerates – including four of the largest: Samsung, Hyundai Motor, LG and SK – were [telephoned](#) by the US embassy after the Pyongyang summit to ask about those plans. A leading conservative daily criticized the US action, in an editorial [headlined](#) “Lay off our companies.”

This was addressed equally to Ri, who in any case should know better. Even in the ‘sunshine’ era (1998–2007) when no sanctions stopped ROK firms investing in the DPRK, it was notable that almost no big *chaebol* went in. The sole exception was Hyundai, driven by its Northern-born founder Chung Ju-yung’s patriotism and ambition. Result? After Chung died, his son killed himself over illicit payments to Pyongyang, and Hyundai fell apart – having lost a fortune due to the North’s greed and duplicity. If North–South relations are really to start a new chapter, the Kim regime must do some serious self-criticism and break from that past.

Many meetings, few outcomes

In the months after the Pyongyang summit, the two Koreas continued to meet at lower levels to discuss implementing its provisions (for full details, see the Chronology.) However, other than the military CBMs just discussed, this was a rather frustrating time for both sides. It remains the case that almost all economic dealings with the DPRK risk breaching sanctions; whether multilateral ones (imposed by the UN Security Council), or bilateral (chiefly from the US, but also some imposed by past ROK governments). Even an area as innocuous as forestry cooperation fell foul of this. It took until Nov. 29 for the South to [send](#) 50 tons of pesticide to combat pine wilt. (That is self-interest as much as altruism; for pine trees and their diseases, the DMZ is a less impassable barrier than for humans.)

Sanctions and related restrictions especially stymied the Koreans’ hopes for cooperation in transportation. Readers will recall that in

August the UN Command (UNC) – meaning the US – had stopped South Korea from sending a train across the DMZ to conduct railway inspections in the North. Even after the Pyongyang summit, it took a while before Washington relented. Not till Nov. 30 did the South’s inspection train finally [cross](#) the DMZ; surveys of Northern roads followed in late December, notionally. The rail survey was comprehensive and fairly thorough, affording the Southern visitors an unprecedented glimpse of the whole length of the North’s two main trunk lines along the west and east coasts up to the Chinese and Russian borders, respectively. Speeds were painfully slow and in some places the track was damaged, so the inspectors had to resort to [buses](#) instead.

It is hard to take the [road](#) inspections seriously. Time was short, snow lay on the ground, and in one area (the southeast) there was doubt, or discord, as to exactly which roads were to be examined. Overall, then, these joint surveys were arguably more symbolic – this is a recurring theme this time – than substantial. But no matter, as there is no immediate prospect of actually starting any renovation works. Honor was satisfied so the two sides could fulfill their summit pledge and have a ‘groundbreaking’ ceremony this year, even if no more ground will get broken for a while. This was duly held on Dec. 26 at Panmun station, just north of the DMZ.

Kim a no-show, this year

Another pledge, however, went unfulfilled. The sixth and final clause in the Pyongyang Declaration reads: “Chairman Kim Jong Un agreed to visit Seoul at an early date at the invitation of President Moon Jae-in.” That was understood in the South to mean within the year. As time passed with no sign of such a visit, speculation mounted, becoming feverish in December, fomented by the Blue House even while the Unification Ministry (MOU) clarified that no actual talks on this were happening. Some observers [noted](#), plausibly, that the North’s insistence on tight advance secrecy regarding its leader’s movements meant that official denials should not necessarily be taken at face value. But this time they turned out to be true.

By way of consolation, on Dec. 30 Kim sent Moon a [letter](#). The full text was not disclosed, but according to the Blue House Kim regretted

that he could not come South in 2018, and promised they would meet “frequently” in 2019. He also expressed an “intent to resolve the denuclearization of the Korean Peninsula together.” For his part Moon, who must be feeling squeezed between Kim and Trump, in his own New Year press conference on Jan. 10 [called](#) on Pyongyang to take bolder steps toward denuclearization – and for the US to reward these.

Kim Jong Un’s New Year Address

Readers will recall that 2018’s turn towards peace [began](#) when Kim Jong Un, in his New Year address, offered an unexpected olive branch to South Korea by backing the then imminent Pyeongchang Winter Olympics. A year on, therefore, there was naturally keen [anticipation](#) – extending [beyond](#) the usual specialists – as to what he would say this time. In a striking change of format, Kim abandoned his usual stern posture – standing behind a microphone-festooned lectern – for a cozier image: seated in a burgundy leather armchair, backed by images of his father and grandfather, in a library in the Party (WPK) headquarters building. (Full text of the speech can be found [here](#).)

If the presentation was new, the content was less so. These speeches are primarily aimed at a domestic audience. As such and as always, most of Kim’s address was about the economy; albeit with little concrete detail and no hard numbers. Though beyond our remit here, it is odd for a leader who prioritizes economic development to say nothing about the changes ongoing in that sphere. Instead, he just churned out the same old hectoring boilerplate. The problems never change, either. “We should direct primary efforts to relieving the shortage of electricity The whole country should render active ideological and spiritual, material and technical assistance to coal mines.” How many times did his father say the same, and his grandfather? This sort of thing took up the first two-thirds of the address, some 3,600 words.

Kim then turned his gaze outward: first and foremost to North-South relations (900 words) and then more widely (600 words). On inter-Korean developments his tone was triumphant: “Last year was a stirring year which witnessed a dramatic change unprecedented in the history of national division spanning over 70 years ... we took proactive and bold measures to effect a great turn in north-south ... north-south

relations entered a completely new stage.” And much more in similar vein.

Nowhere were the ROK or its president acknowledged by name, which would have been a step forward. But there was a new demand: “[W]e maintain that the joint military exercises with foreign forces ... should no longer be permitted and the introduction of war equipment including strategic assets from outside should completely be suspended.” That ups the ante. In June 2018, President Trump, after meeting Kim in Singapore, unilaterally cancelled the annual US-ROK *Ulchi Freedom Guardian* joint military exercises due that August. Other maneuvers later in the year were scaled back. In November, Jim Mattis, the then US Defense Secretary, [said](#) that the next big annual joint exercise – *Foal Eagle*, due in March 2019 – will be “reorganized a bit to keep it at a level that will not be harmful to diplomacy [and] “reduced in scope.” It remains to be seen whether that satisfies Kim, or whether Moon will rebuff Kim’s blatant interference in ROK sovereignty and attempt to drive a wedge into the alliance.

More positively, Kim expressed willingness “to resume the Kaesong Industrial Park and Mt. Kumgang tourism without any precondition and in return for nothing.” But there is in fact a precondition. Neither of these former joint ventures can legally be resumed while the DPRK remains under UN and other sanctions. Kim knows that, of course. He continued: “When north and south join hands firmly ... no external sanctions and pressure will be able to hinder us We will never tolerate the interference and intervention of outside forces who stand in the way of national reconciliation, unity and reunification with the design to subordinate inter-Korean relations to their tastes and interests.”

Even if you regard a step-by-step process including some sanctions relief as the only feasible way forward, this formulation is tendentious. A dozen resolutions, all unanimous, of the UN Security Council cannot simply be dismissed as partisan foreign interference. Regarding military exercises, Kim is piling the pressure on his dialogue partner while seeking to foment division. This makes life harder for Moon, and does not inspire confidence in Kim’s sincerity.

Prospects for 2019

We conclude with a paradox. There is no gainsaying the remarkable achievements of 2018. But unfortunately these do not guarantee that inter-Korean momentum will continue in 2019. This disconnect has both extrinsic and intrinsic causes. The main factor is the uncertainty of US-DPRK relations. Despite concessions elsewhere, notably in suspending maneuvers, the Trump administration has so far held the line on refusing any major easing of sanctions. Indeed, in December it imposed new ones bilaterally. If Washington maintains that stand, inter-Korean economic cooperation will remain blocked. That will frustrate Moon, and may prompt Kim to press him harder. A Jan. 5 [commentary](#) in the Party daily *Rodong Sinmun*, headlined “Inter-Korean Relations Can’t Be Appendage of DPRK-U.S. Relations,” highlights what will surely be a major issue in 2019.

However, contrary to Pyongyang’s unobvious nationalist framing, the US is not the only one applying the brakes; nor is this the only factor. I posed some queries in a recent [article](#). There are things the two Koreas could do more of right now, despite sanctions. For example, in the Pyongyang Declaration Moon and Kim pledged to “strengthen humanitarian cooperation to fundamentally resolve the issue of separated families,” including establishing a permanent facility at Mt. Kumgang, and arranging video meetings and messages “as a matter of priority through inter-Korean Red Cross talks.” Yet in contrast to the inter-Korean energy on other fronts, there appears to be no sign of further reunions or talks; even though the sad elderly cohort involved continues to dwindle daily due to mortality. In practice, then, this seems not to be “a matter of priority”: why not? Let us hope for better as 2019 progresses.

Foot-dragging is one thing, cyber-attacks another. On Dec. 28, MOU [disclosed](#) that personal data on almost 1,000 North Korean defectors had been hacked from a computer at one of its resettlement centers. It did not point the finger at Pyongyang, diplomatically; but who else has any motive to do this? A week later on Jan. 4 MOU revealed [another](#) cyber-attack. This time the senders cheekily impersonated the ministry, using an infected file including MOU’s analysis of Kim Jong Un’s New Year Address. Again the ministry refused to blame the North, but others in Seoul are less reticent. EST Security, an ROK IT firm which monitors such

matters, linked these latest attacks to what it called a continuous and very active campaign of similar efforts by North Korea, including previous attempts to glean data on defectors.

We have highlighted this issue before, and make no apology for doing so again. It is crucial, yet gets oddly little attention. The Pyongyang Declaration’s military annex reiterated April’s commitment at the Panmunjom summit: “South and North Korea agreed to completely cease all hostile acts against each other in every domain.” In our last issue we flagged an article published on July 5 by the semi-official ROK news agency *Yonhap*, bearing a paradoxical headline: “N. Korean hackers suspected of continuing attacks amid friendly inter-Korean relations.” Six months on, the suspicions and the cyber-attacks continue. Even if the Moon government says nothing in public (but why not?), one hopes it is protesting vigorously in private – and threatening to go public unless Kim calls off this aggression once and for all.

‘Symbol or substance?’ has been a recurring theme this time. It remains a key question. The two Koreas made remarkable progress in 2018, yet experience counsels caution as to whether this is sustainable and what the Kim regime’s game really is. As so often, I long to be wrong. A definitive end to North Korean cyber-attacks on the South – and indeed worldwide – in 2019 would send a welcome signal that Kim Jong Un is not just playing a brilliant game, but genuinely means to build a different, non-threatening, non-criminal DPRK.

CHRONOLOGY OF NORTH KOREA-SOUTH KOREA RELATIONS

SEPTEMBER – DECEMBER 2018

Sept. 5, 2018: President Moon Jae-in's special envoy, National Security Adviser Chung Eui-yong, [flies](#) to Pyongyang heading a five-person delegation (the same quintet as on [March 5-6](#)). They meet Kim Jong Un, who *inter alia* reaffirms his commitment to denuclearization amid warm words for Moon and for Donald Trump. The delegation flies [home](#) to Seoul the same evening and immediately reports back to Moon, at 9.44pm local time.

Sept. 6, 2018: Chung Eui-yong [announces](#) that Moon Jae-in will visit Pyongyang on Sept. 18-20 for his third summit with Kim Jong Un. (Earlier [speculation](#) had predicted Sept. 12-13.)

Sept. 6, 2018: In Kaesong, the two Koreas' cultural authorities [discuss](#) potential cooperation in several fields. They agree to resume a joint archaeological project; see Sept. 11, below.

Sept. 7, 2018: ROK Ministry of Unification (MOU) spokesman Baik Tae-hyun [says](#) the two Koreas have reached agreement on all aspects of the planned inter-Korean liaison office in Kaesong. A later report [confirms](#) that this will start work (24/7) on Sept. 14, with 15-20 staff drawn from each side.

Sept. 7, 2018: South Korea's Foreign Ministry (MOFA) [reports](#) that on Sept. 6 the two Korean states wrote jointly to UN Secretary General Antonio Guterres to request that the Panmunjom Declaration be circulated as an official UN document.

Sept. 7, 2018: Latest Gallup Korea [poll](#) finds President Moon's approval ratings, on the slide since mid-June, below 50 percent for the first time. Negative appraisals rise to 42 percent. While this is attributed mainly to economic dissatisfaction, media comment [notes](#) that North Korea is no longer a booster factor for Moon.

Sept. 7, 2018: Blue House (Cheongwadae, the ROK Presidential office and residence) [says](#) that on Sept. 11 Moon's government will submit a bill to the National Assembly to formally ratify April's Panmunjom Declaration.

Sept. 8, 2018: Ahead of a state visit by Indonesian President Joko Widodo, Moon Jae-in [tells](#) the Indonesian newspaper *Kompas* that his goal is to make "irreversible progress" by the end of the year toward denuclearization and a permanent peace on the peninsula. He adds that the "special envoy's visit [to Pyongyang] went well, and the results exceeded expectations."

Sept. 9, 2018: In Pyongyang, parades and mass displays mark the [70th anniversary](#) of the DPRK's foundation. No ICBMs appear in the military [parade](#), while the mass games stress economic development and conclude with a giant video of April's Kim-Moon summit.

Sept. 9, 2018: Korean Council for Reconciliation and Cooperation (KCRC), a quasi-official umbrella body representing some 200 South Korean NGOs, [says](#) it will meet its Northern counterpart in late October at Mount Kungang to call for sincere implementation of the Panmunjom Declaration. Further details will be worked out by fax and email.

Sept. 10, 2018: Center-right *JoongAng Ilbo*, Seoul's leading daily, [claims](#) that the Joint Chiefs of Staff (JCS) have completed a report comparing the two Koreas' military strengths, which Moon Jae-in ordered ahead of the Pyongyang summit.

Sept. 10, 2018: Blue House Chief of Staff Im Jong-seok [invites](#) nine parliamentarians to accompany President Moon to Pyongyang. At least three decline. National Assembly Speaker Moon Hee-sang pleads being too busy, while the leaders of two conservative opposition parties, the right-wing Liberty Korea Party (LKP) and the more centrist Bareunmirae, criticize the forthcoming summit as a "show-off without substance."

Sept. 10, 2018: Floor leaders of South Korea's three largest political parties reach an [accord](#) that the National Assembly will debate ratification of April's Panmunjom Declaration after the third Moon-Kim summit. The government submits a [motion](#) on Sept. 11.

Sept. 11, 2018: ROK Cultural Heritage Administration (CHA) [announces](#) that joint North-South excavations at Manwoldae, the royal palace of the Koryo dynasty (918-1392 CE) in Korea's then-capital Kaesong, will resume on Sept. 27 for three months. Seven rounds of joint archaeological work were conducted at the site between 2007 and 2015. In 2016 then-ROK President Park Geun-hye suspended the program amid rising inter-Korean tensions.

Sept. 11, 2018: In Vladivostok for the Eastern Economic Forum ROK Prime Minister Lee Nak-yeon [envisages](#) "a new avenue opening for three-way cooperation among South and North Korea and Russia."

Sept. 12, 2018: A 22-strong DPRK shooting squad [flies home](#) from Gimhae airport, via Beijing, after bagging two silver and two bronze medals in the International Shooting Sport Federation (ISSF) World Championship held at Changwon in the ROK's southeast.

Sept. 12, 2018: ROK government [rejects](#) opposition charges that it is playing down the expense of implementing the Panmunjom Declaration. Critics are contrasting MOU's figure of 298.6 billion won (\$264.8 million) with the ministry's estimate a decade ago that similar projects envisaged in the 2007 inter-Korean summit would cost 14.3 trillion won.

Sept. 13, 2018: Working-level military talks are held at Panmunjom, lasting [17 hours](#). As usual no press statement is released. *Yonhap* [reports](#) that the two sides wrapped up a military agreement, which Kim and Moon will announce at their summit in Pyongyang next week.

Sept. 14, 2018: Working-level talks at Panmunjom [finalize](#) details of the impending summit.

Sept. 14, 2018: North and South Korea [open](#) their new permanent liaison office at Kaesong.

Sept. 18, 2018: President Moon Jae-in, with a large entourage including business leaders, flies into Pyongyang's Sunan airport where they are greeted by Kim Jong Un.

Sept. 19, 2018: Moon and Kim sign a fresh agreement, the Pyongyang Joint Declaration. Their defense ministers also sign a major new accord, the "Agreement on the Implementation of the Historic Panmunjom Declaration in the Military Domain."

Sept. 20, 2018: Moon and Kim and their entourages head north for a photo-opportunity on Mt. Paekdu, a sacred peak (Korea's highest) on the Chinese border. The ROK party flies directly back to Seoul from Samjiyon airport in the northeastern DPRK.

Sept. 20, 2018: The Blue House [announces](#) that, as in 2000 and 2007, North Korea has sent a gift of two tons of pine mushrooms, a Northern delicacy, to commemorate the recent summit. These will be distributed to members of separated families who could not meet North Korean family members in the latest reunions, in August. Only 100 out of 57,000 applicants, selected by lot, made the cut. Some in South Korea [claim](#) there is a risk that the mushrooms, harvested in the DPRK's northeast, could be radioactive.

Oct. 4-6, 2018: A 160-strong ROK delegation, mainly of NGOs and activists but including Unification Minister Cho Myoung-gyon, [flies](#) to Pyongyang to participate in ceremonies marking the 11th anniversary of the second inter-Korean summit in 2007; the first time this has ever been thus commemorated. They fly [back](#) on Oct. 6.

Oct. 15, 2018: High-level talks on implementing the Pyongyang Joint Declaration are held at Panmunjom. A seven-point [agreement](#) recommits to further talks and/or specific activities in seven areas: military, transport, forestry, health, sport, Red Cross, and art performances.

Oct. 22, 2018: Two Koreas meet in Kaesong to discuss cooperation in forestry. They issue a four-point [agreement](#), whose provisions include Southern aid to combat pine disease and for Northern tree nurseries, as well as ecosystem restoration.

Oct. 23, 2018: ROK Cabinet [ratifies](#) the Pyongyang Joint Declaration and military agreement. Opposition parties protest that this sidelines the National Assembly, where a bill to ratify the earlier Panmunjom Declaration remains bogged down in partisan wrangling.

Oct. 26, 2018: Two Koreas hold what are officially the 10th Inter-Korean General-level Military Talks at Panmunjom to discuss implementation of the military agreement signed in September. They issue a six-point [statement](#), reconfirming that accord's various provisions and updating on concrete progress and future plans.

Oct. 31, 2018: Kim Min-ki, a lawmaker of South Korea's ruling Democratic Party (DP), [tells](#) reporters that the ROK National Intelligence Service (NIS) has observed North Koreans "conducting preparation and intelligence activities that seem to be in preparation for foreign inspectors' visit" at Punggye-ri nuclear test site and the Sohae satellite launching ground.

Nov. 1, 2018: Major provisions of September's North-South military agreement take effect, including no-fly zones and restrictions on maneuvers within specified distances of the DMZ.

Nov. 2, 2018: Meeting in Kaesong, the two Koreas' vice-ministers for sport [agree](#) to officially inform the International Olympic Committee (IOC) of their intent to co-host the 2032 Summer Olympics. They will also send a combined team to the world handball championships in January.

Nov. 5, 2018: Two Koreas launch a month-long joint [survey](#) of the Han and Imjin River estuaries on their west coast border. Ten military and hydrographic experts from each side, in six ROK sonar-equipped vessels, will measure water depths to plot safe channels for navigation along a 70 km stretch of estuary and coast in both the ROK and DPRK.

Nov. 7, 2018: Two Koreas hold vice-ministerial [talks](#) in Kaesong on health cooperation.

Nov. 8, 2018: The Blue House [declares](#) the North's pine mushrooms safe to eat.

Nov. 12, 2018: MND [announces](#) that yesterday and today ROK military planes flew 200 tons of tangerines from Jeju island to Pyongyang, as a return gift for the pine mushrooms sent by the DPRK.

Nov. 26, 2018: The first ever joint submission by the two Koreas to UNESCO [succeeds](#). Meeting in Mauritius, the UN body's World Heritage Committee agrees to inscribe *ssirum* (Korean traditional wrestling) as an Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity.

Nov. 28, 2018: Two Koreas [agree](#) that joint inspection of the North's main west and east coast railway lines will begin on Nov. 30.

Nov. 29, 2018: South Korea [sends](#) 50 tons of pesticide to the North, to treat disease affecting pine trees. The truck convoy crosses via the western land route, unloading in Kaesong.

Nov. 30, 2018: A six-car South Korean train, with a 28-strong ROK inspection team aboard, [crosses](#) the DMZ to begin an 18-day joint inspection of DPRK railway lines.

Nov. 30, 2018: ROK MND [reports](#) that (having secured an exemption from UNSC sanctions) it delivered optical and copper cable transmission equipment and communication conduits to the DPRK for use in the west coast inter-Korean military communication line.

Nov. 30, 2018: ROK MND [announces](#) the completion of joint work to demolish 10 front-line guardposts on each side and de-mine a ridge in the DMZ, begun in October.

Dec. 1, 2018: ROK military says that a Korean People's Army (KPA) soldier [defected](#) earlier that day across the eastern sector of the DMZ.

Dec. 5, 2018: ROK railway inspection team [returns](#) home, having completed a six-day joint survey of the DPRK's western main line.

Dec. 7, 2018: Media reports [claim](#) the South has suggested Dec. 12-14 as dates for Kim Jong Un to visit Seoul, but has gotten no reply yet. Such speculation persists throughout the month.

Dec. 7, 2018: MOU says that a [meeting](#) today between the joint heads of the North-South liaison office at Kaesong – ROK Vice Unification Minister Chun Hae-sung and Jon Chong Su, vice chairman of the DPRK Committee for the Peaceful Reunification of the Country (CPRC) did not discuss Kim Jong Un visiting Seoul. (These meetings, set originally to be held weekly, are in fact taking place approximately monthly.)

Dec. 8, 2018: After a brief home break, South Korea's rail inspection team [heads](#) back to the North: this time by bus, using the eastern land route.

Dec. 9, 2018: In a joint statement, the ROK Ministry of Oceans and Fisheries (MOF) and the Ministry of National Defense [declare](#) that the two Koreas have completed their 35-day joint inspection of estuarine and coastal waterways along their western border. A day later, the (South) Korea Hydrographic and Oceanographic Agency (KHOA) [reports](#) that much dredging work is needed, especially in the estuary near Kaesong.

Dec. 10, 2018: MOU says the [budget](#) allocated to its inter-Korean cooperation fund in 2019 will be 1.1 trillion won (\$983.4 million): up 15 percent from 2018, and the first time since 2016 that this has exceeded a trillion won.

Dec. 11, 2018: The ROK Cabinet [approves](#) an MOU proposal to revise the Inter-Korean Exchange and Cooperation Act, so that any future curtailment of co-operation with the North must be reviewed by the Cabinet.

Dec. 12, 2018: Senior officials from the two Koreas' health ministries [meet](#) in Kaesong to discuss potential co-operation, including to control influenza.

Dec. 14, 2018: After sports talks led by vice-ministers in Kaesong, the two Koreas [announce](#) that they will meet the International Olympic Committee (IOC) in Lausanne, Switzerland on Feb. 15 2019, to discuss their joint bid to co-host the 2032 Summer Olympic Games.

Dec. 17, 2018: ROK Joint Chiefs of Staff (JCS) [confirm](#) that the DPRK has demolished 10 guardposts in the DMZ. ROK has done the same. The two sides had planned to destroy 11 each, but decide to keep one apiece (albeit now disarmed) "in light of their historical value."

Dec. 17, 2018: South Korean officials and experts [return](#) home after completing a 10-day inspection of North Korea's eastern railway line. The 28-strong team crosses the MDL in the eastern sector, by bus.

Dec. 18, 2018: ROK train, which covered 2,600 km over 18 days surveying the DPRK's western and eastern main lines, is [returned](#) via Dorasan, north of Seoul.

Dec. 18, 2018: Seoul city government [estimates](#) that co-hosting the 2032 Olympic games with Pyongyang would require a budget of around 3.9 trillion won (\$3.44 billion).

Dec. 21, 2018: Ten-strong ROK team [enters](#) the DPRK by the east coast route, to conduct a three-day joint inspection of a 100-km section of highway from Goseong up to Wonsan.

Dec. 22, 2018: MOU [says](#) it repatriated three DPRK sailors, and the body of a fourth, after the ROK Coast Guard rescued them and their boat found drifting in the East Sea on Dec. 20. No further details are given.

Dec. 23, 2018: *Uriminzokkiri*, a North Korean external propaganda website, [calls](#) South Korea "two-faced" for supporting a UN resolution passed by the General Assembly (for the 14th successive year) on Dec. 17 condemning DPRK human rights abuses.

Dec. 24, 2018: Ten-strong Southern team [enters](#) the North to inspect a short 4 km stretch of the main western Gyeongui highway.

Dec. 25, 2018: ROK Foreign Ministry, [confirms](#) that yesterday (just in time) the UN Security Council granted a sanctions waiver for tomorrow's symbolic groundbreaking ceremony for relinking Northern and Southern roads and railways.

Dec. 26, 2018: Approximately 100-strong ROK delegation, including the unification and transport ministers, crosses the DMZ to attend the symbolic groundbreaking [ceremony](#) for rail and road reconnection and modernization, held at the DPRK's Panmun Station in Kaesong.

Dec. 30, 2018: Blue House discloses that Kim Jong Un has sent Moon Jae-in a [letter](#), regretting he did not make it to Seoul this year but hoping to meet "frequently" in 2019.

Jan. 1, 2019: Kim Jong Un delivers his annual New Year [address](#). Regarding North-South relations, he praises 2018's achievements but warns that "joint military exercises with foreign forces ...should no longer be permitted."

Jan. 5, 2019: Thae Yong Ho, a senior North Korean diplomat who defected in 2016, in an open letter [urges](#) the former DPRK *chargé d'affaires* in Rome, Jo Song-gil, who is reportedly seeking asylum in the US, to choose South Korea instead. Thae calls this "an obligation, not a choice" which will accelerate reunification.

Jan. 10, 2019: In his New Year press conference, Moon Jae-in [calls](#) on Pyongyang to take bolder steps toward denuclearization – and for the US to reward these.