



Joint Statement by Leading Experts:

The US-China Summit Must Address Intensifying DPRK Threats

May 11, 2026

The Trump-Xi summit on May 13-15 offers a pivotal moment to restart high-level efforts to reduce the worsening threats that the DPRK poses to the US, South Korea (ROK), and China. While US-China bilateral trade issues and exchanges on the Iran war are likely to dominate the summit agenda, this meeting takes place amidst a rapidly expanding and increasingly diversified DPRK nuclear and strategic arsenal. Pyongyang has operationally deployed new missile systems and unveiled a nuclear-powered submarine. Its new Five-Year Defense Plan, announced in February 2026, further committed to advance its ground- and sea-launched ICBM programmes, while developing AI, electronic warfare, UAV, and anti-satellite (ASAT) capabilities.

Rejuvenating high-level engagement on DPRK security threats at this summit is one element of the urgent task of initiating new direct talks with Pyongyang. This task also mandates new US-ROK consultations to agree the preferred near- and medium-term goals and end-state which would define successful DPRK negotiations. This US-ROK consensus should be achieved before direct US-DPRK talks can begin.

This joint statement calls upon these consultations to confirm “stable co-existence” as the basis for talks with Pyongyang. This approach shifts from previous frameworks that focused on “denuclearisation” or a “nuclear-free Korean Peninsula”, which are increasingly unrealistic given the evolving nature of DPRK strategic threats. The statement is divided into recommendations for the US and China ahead of their May 2026 summit, and for the US and ROK to prepare the ground for successful DPRK negotiations. It draws from a larger policy report published simultaneously today.

Recommendations

US-China Diplomacy on the DPRK

- 1.** The US and China should place Korean Peninsula security on their bilateral agenda for the May 2026 summit and subsequent high-level interactions. China should acknowledge the seriousness of DPRK strategic and tactical challenges to regional stability. Both governments should engage in structured, working-level dialogues on how each defines Korean Peninsula stability, identifies major risks, and moves toward a common approach.
- 2.** Cooperation between the US and China on Korean Peninsula security should be decoupled from their broader relationship.
- 3.** Certain DPRK nuclear and strategic developments, such as potential space-based nuclear weapons, especially threaten core Chinese interests. Beijing should support US and global efforts to develop norms and constraints against development of these forces.
- 4.** The US should engage China, ROK and Japan – and Russia if ready to cooperate – on crisis management and cooperation mechanisms to be activated in case of a serious conflict instigated by the DPRK.

US Direct Engagement with the DPRK with ROK Support

- 5.** Washington should seek direct leader-level talks with Pyongyang at an early opportunity. However, these talks should be informed by prior internal and US-ROK consultations to agree the working definitions of key terms; desired outcomes; and concessions that Washington and Seoul are willing to make in return for achieving these outcomes.
- 6.** A framework of “stable co-existence” offers a more realistic basis for engaging Pyongyang than previous frameworks which emphasise “denuclearisation” or a “nuclear-free Korean Peninsula”. This framework offers a near- and medium-term focus on nuclear risk reduction and stability mechanisms to address the most immediate threats posed by DPRK, and a more viable outcome for Pyongyang’s relationships with Washington and Seoul. It also does not mean formally abandoning denuclearisation, which is most achievable as a potential

long-term result from a stable co-existence outcome. Reflecting the Lee administration's notable willingness to embrace the formulation "nuclear-free Korean Peninsula", it should be equally open to accepting that denuclearisation can be most feasibly attained in the long term through a more realistic focus on stable co-existence.

7. A high-level US-ROK taskforce should be established to expedite consultations and alignment on these above points and subsequently discuss progress on DPRK direct talks. The US should also appoint a Special Envoy for DPRK to both support this process and US-DPRK talks once these have commenced.
8. Following these consultations with Seoul, the US invitation to direct talks with the DPRK should foreground stable co-existence as the basis of these negotiations.
9. As part of this framework, Washington and Seoul should also consider proposing an end-of-war declaration to Pyongyang, including mitigation plans against its possible side-effect of undermining the rationale for US-ROK alliance commitments. Beijing would likely be interested in participating in the commemoration of this declaration, offering a further opportunity for deeper Chinese engagement on building sustainable Korean Peninsula security arrangements.

Experts endorse these points in solely their personal capacities, and their institutional affiliations are provided for identification purposes only.

Experts endorse all points unless marked otherwise.

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