

On the Trump and Kim Jong-un's nuclear summit

Wednesday 6 June 2018, by [BENJAMIN Medea](#), [BORGES Julian](#), [HAAS Benjamin](#), [Press Agencies](#), [WRIGHT Ann](#) (Date first published: 5 June 2018).

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What will be the outcome?

What will be the outcome of Trump and Kim Jong-un's nuclear summit?

Without progress on nuclear disarmament, the meeting will be called a failure - but Trump will need to make big concessions.

Rarely in modern in history has there been a summit with higher stakes and greater uncertainty over its outcome than the planned meeting in Singapore a week from now between Kim Jong-un and Donald Trump.

On one side of the table will be the leader of a highly reclusive, isolated state that has devoted the past three decades to the development of nuclear warheads and missiles.

Kim Jong-un claims to be on the point of a historic pivot toward economic development - but the regime has made similar claims before and stopped well short of surrendering weapons it believes to be a guarantee of survival.

Across the table will be a US president unlike any other in history: capricious, disdainful of advice from even his own officials and entirely convinced that his instincts - his feel for the "art of the deal" - are always the best guide to action.

That unpredictability has driven several whiplash turns in the past few days alone.

Trump threatened the regime with Libyan-style "decimation" if Kim did not do a deal, called the summit off, then declared it back on and welcomed Kim's right-hand man to the White House with more personal warmth than he has hitherto shown to any US ally.

In these circumstances, there is no absolute guarantee that both men will be at Singapore Capella hotel at the appointed hour of 9am next Tuesday, for what would be the first ever encounter between a sitting US president and a North Korean leader.

But advance teams are in Singapore urgently working to prepare the meeting at short notice. And the opening moves have already been made, well ahead of the formal negotiations.

North Korea has stopped its nuclear and long-range missile tests, and made some moves towards dismantling a nuclear testing site – though the significance of what was blown up is in doubt.

For his part, Trump has given the regime more respect and recognition than it has ever received from the US in its 70-year history, with his effusive welcome of top aide Kim Yong-chol on Friday and his abrupt abandonment of previous US negotiating positions the same day.

He accepted the North Korean insistence that any future denuclearisation would not be an “all-in-one” event as US officials had insisted, but a drawn-out phased process, involving multiple summits along the way. And the president unceremoniously dropped his mantra of “maximum pressure” that had hitherto defined his North Korea policy.

US sanctions are rooted in congressional legislation and by law can only be lifted once North Korean behaviour changes demonstrably. UN sanctions are similarly grounded in security council resolutions but their enforcement varies considerably. There are already signs that China is relaxing restrictions on North Korean trade.

The road to an agreement immediately gets much steeper on 12 June if and when the two leaders sit down. Trump has sought to play down those expectations, characterising the meeting as “getting-to-know-you, plus”.

But without a substantial “plus” in the form of progress in the direction of disarmament, the meeting will widely be deemed a failure. And to achieve that progress, Trump will have to make significant gestures towards what Kim wants most – security guarantees.

Both leaders will go into the Singapore meeting with cards in their hands, representing quick, deliverable concessions. The big question next week will be which cards they play and in what sequence. At a minimum, Kim will be expected to formalise the current suspension of nuclear and missile testing. He could go further by declaring a cap on his existing arsenal freeze on other nuclear activity like uranium enrichment.

His biggest element of his opening offer, however, would be a statement on his plans to dismantle his nuclear weapons programme, and here everything will be in the details – how clearly denuclearisation is defined, and whether Kim commits to a timetable.

“I do believe that North Korea is most probably willing to say that at the end of the day they are willing to denuclearise, but there will be fine print, and that fine print has to be negotiated,” said Joseph Yun, a former US special envoy for North Korea policy now an adviser at the US Institute of Peace.

For Robert Gallucci, who led negotiations with the North Koreans in the Clinton administration, a detailed declaration on denuclearisation will be the key to Trump’s success or failure in Singapore.

“If he doesn’t get anything else, that would be a win,” Gallucci said at a discussion at the Stimson Centre thinktank in Washington. “And if he gets everything else but doesn’t get that, that’ll be a loss.”

Another element that would be expected to be in Kim’s opening offer is an agreement to allow international inspectors to visit the regime’s declared nuclear sites, principally the nuclear complex at Yongbyon.

“When I think of what would be a big success coming out of the summit, I think getting the inspectors back in has to be one of our top goals,” said Suzanne DiMaggio, a director at the New America foundation who has led backchannel negotiations with the North Koreans.

Such concessions would be on a par with what North Korea has offered in previous agreements. To break new ground, Kim would have to go further. At this summit or in subsequent meetings, the US is likely to ask for a full inventory of its nuclear programme, declared and undeclared – an issue on which previous deals broke down.

To be meaningful, that would have to be verified by access for inspectors, whether they come from the International Atomic Energy Agency or a specially assembled ad hoc inspection organisation.

Trump has various ways in which he can reciprocate. One is “negative security assurances”, a pledge not to attack, something the president has already gone a long way towards in his tweets and casual remarks. He has also hinted he might be ready to start negotiations aimed at a formal peace treaty to end the conflict that currently is subject only to the 1953 armistice.

At the same time, the US could establish a liaison office in Pyongyang and allow a North Koreans to set their own up in Washington, a step towards mutual recognition.

Another way the US could demonstrate flexibility and sensitivity is to tone down its joint military exercises with South Korea, curbing the use of what Pyongyang views as “nuclear and strategic assets”, like F-22 stealth fighters and B1-B bombers.

The fear in Seoul and Tokyo is that Trump will be persuaded to give too much away under this category, offering to withdraw troops or otherwise weaken US alliances in the region, to which the president has not shown much commitment anyway. Anxiety in the region has swung from concerns Trump will not engage to anxiety he will be too eager to please.

The full dismantling of the North Korean arsenal (estimated at between two and three dozen warheads), the destruction of missiles and the removal of fissile material and production capacity is likely to take a decade at least, according to Siegfried Hecker, a Stanford-based physicist with firsthand experience of the North Korean nuclear programme.

At the same time, Pyongyang would be expected to join the Nuclear Non-Proliferation treaty (NPT) and sign the Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty (CTBT), to set its non-nuclear status in stone.

On the other side of the ledger, sanctions would have to be lifted in tranches, and North Korea’s place in the international institutions would be secured, as part of a general normalisation of diplomatic relations.

Such aspirations are likely to lie beyond the horizon as seen from Singapore. What will matter next week is whether the summit negotiations end up headed in that general direction, and whether Kim shows some proof that this time the regime is serious about foregoing its nuclear arsenal.

“Kim Jong-un is 34 years old. I think he’s looking to live another 40 years or more, and he has experience living overseas,” Ambassador Yun told a Senate committee on Tuesday. “All through their history they have not shown any signs that they want to denuclearise, but ... it is a hypothesis worth testing ... War is not an option.”

Julian Borger in Washington

* The Guardian, Tue 5 Jun 2018 23.00 BST Last modified on Tue 5 Jun 2018 23.55 BST:
<https://www.theguardian.com/world/2018/jun/05/donald-trump-north-korea-summit-kim-jong-un-explained>

North Korea has taken big steps. Now it's Trump's turn to show goodwill

Opinion. From easing the travel ban to humanitarian aid, there are many ways the US could show its commitment to progress.

Respect and reciprocity are key elements in Korean culture. During our recent trip to South Korea as part of an international women's peace delegation, South Korean women complained that Donald Trump's erratic conduct showed disrespect for the mediating role of their president, Moon Jae-in. They also commented on the lack of US reciprocity for North Korea's goodwill gesture of returning three imprisoned US citizens and blowing up three of the four tunnels and all the administrative buildings at the Punggye-ri nuclear testing area.

Assuming the US-North Korea summit takes place and marks the start of a long negotiation process, President Trump will need to make gestures of goodwill and sincerity along the way. The lifting of sanctions that have been so devastating to the North Korean economy is a priority for the North, but the US administration has indicated it will not lift sanctions before significant progress has been made. In the interim, here are three easy but significant measures Trump could take to build trust.

1. Open a US interest section in Pyongyang and allow a North Korean interest section in Washington. Already we have seen how the lack of a good communication system almost derailed the 12 June summit. In the absence of diplomatic relations and embassies, interest sections in our respective capital cities would facilitate communications between the two governments and provide an opportunity for US and North Korean officials to become more familiar with the workings of their respective governments and gain greater insight into each other's cultures and societies.
2. Lift the travel ban. North Korea became the only country to which Americans are totally banned from traveling. The ban came in the aftermath of the tragic death of 22-year-old American student Otto Warmbier. Warmbier was arrested on 2 January, 2016 for allegedly stealing a propaganda poster and sentenced to 15 years of hard labor. Seventeen months later, he returned home in a coma and died on 19 June 2017.

The Trump administration then banned all US travel, with some waivers granted for reporters, humanitarian workers and those traveling "in the national interest". Previously, only about 1,000 Americans visited North Korea every year. Most were tourists but they also included between 200 and 500 Korean Americans who traveled for reunions with family members from whom they were separated during the Korean war.

The new restrictions put an end to these family visits and tourism, and have also complicated the few ongoing exchanges that have kept the door to the United States open in this hermetic country, such as the agricultural assistance program that US Quakers started back in 1997. The ban prohibited our recent women's delegation, organized by Women Cross DMZ and the Nobel Women's Initiative, from traveling to North Korea to meet with women's groups, as we did in 2015.

Trump should encourage visits by citizen diplomats, from farmers to athletes to birdwatchers (North Korea is a major migration route for millions of birds, including cranes and songbirds). Direct interactions with North Koreans help humanize the American people in a country that has been so isolated from the west.

The administration should also lift the 2017 ban prohibiting North Koreans from entering the United States and renew academic exchanges that have been taking place since the 1990s in areas such as agriculture, medicine and economics.

3. Provide humanitarian support, especially in light of the devastating effect of sanctions on the economy. More than 10 million people, or 40% of the population, are believed to be in need of humanitarian assistance, and one-quarter of children are stunted due to malnutrition.

UN-wide appeals for North Korea, while small in dollar amounts, are chronically underfunded. Only seven governments, led by Russia and Switzerland, contributed to the \$113.5m requested by the UN Office of Humanitarian Assistance (OCHA) in 2017 and only 30% of the goal was reached. Of the tiny \$16.5m 2018 Unicef request for North Korean children, a mere \$6.7m has been raised from the international community.

The United States stopped assistance to North Korea in 2009, with the exception of \$900,000 provided in 2011 for flood victims. To show goodwill, the US government could easily kick in the \$10m shortfall for Unicef, and – for the cost of one B-52 bomber – it could fund the entire 2018 OCHA request of \$111m. Together, these funds would enhance food security, reduce malnutrition, and increase access to healthcare, water and sanitation services for one-fourth of the nation's 24 million people. Paying for life-saving programs would certainly be an inexpensive way to win hearts and minds.

Considering that North Korea has blown up a nuclear facility and has returned three American prisoners, these easy-to-do measures would demonstrate a US commitment to dialogue and communication that could help smooth the way in what will undoubtedly be a very bumpy road ahead.

Medea Benjamin and Ann Wright

Medea Benjamin, co-founder of the peace group Codepink, is a former UN nutritionist and economist. Ann Wright, a retired US colonel, served 29 years in the US army and 16 years as a diplomat in the state department. Both recently returned from an international women's delegation of peace and security experts in South Korea and are members of WomenCrossDMZ.

* The Guardian, Mon 4 Jun 2018 13.03 BST Last modified on Mon 4 Jun 2018 19.14 BST:
<https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2018/jun/04/north-korea-us-summit-nuclear-goodwill>

North Korea sacks top three military officials, as nuclear summit nears

US officials believe there was dissent over Kim Jong-un's approach to foreign diplomacy.

North Korea's top three military officials have been removed from their posts, a senior US official

said on Sunday, a shakeup that could signal the North's leader, Kim Jong-un, is working to silence dissent ahead of a summit with Donald Trump in Singapore next week.

The US official, who spoke to Reuters on condition of anonymity, was commenting on a report by South Korea's Yonhap news agency that all three of the North's top military officials were believed to have been replaced.

Trump on Friday revived the proposed 12 June summit after cancelling it a week earlier. The US is seeking a negotiated end to North Korea's nuclear weapons program.

US officials believe there was some dissent in the military about Kim's approaches to South Korea and the US. Kim likely wants to ensure any deal struck in his meeting with Trump will not face opposition at home.

Since coming to power in 2011, Kim has conducted several purges in an effort to consolidate power. The young leader was just 27 years old when he took power in a society that reveres older cadres.

Mintaro Oba, a former US diplomat who focused on North Korea policy, said Kim might be using the upcoming summit "as leverage to get rid of internal hardliners". It was also possible the "summit created such a risk to his internal power he felt he had to protect himself by moving people around".

"It's worth considering whether this round of summit diplomacy has given Kim Jong-un an opportunity to get a more favourable group of people at the top," Oba said.

Kim had his uncle and potential rival for control, Jang Song-thaek, tried and executed in 2013. Kim's older half-brother, Kim Jong-nam, was assassinated last year in an operation widely believed to have been directed from Pyongyang.

The US official did not identify the three military officials. Yonhap identified them as defence chief Pak Yong-sik; chief of the Korean People's Army's (KPA) general staff, Ri Myong-su and Kim Jong-gak, the director of the KPA's General Political Bureau.

Trump wants North Korea to "denuclearise," meaning to get rid of its nuclear arsenal, in return for relief from economic sanctions. North Korea's leadership is believed to regard nuclear weapons as crucial to its survival.

Citing an unnamed intelligence official, Yonhap said No Kwang-chol, first vice minister of the Ministry of People's armed forces, had replaced Pak Yong-sik, while Ri Myong-su was replaced by his deputy, Ri Yong-gil. It said army general Kim Su-gil's replacement of Kim Jong-gak was confirmed in a North Korean state media report last month.

The White House, State Department, CIA and Office of the Director of National Intelligence did not immediately respond to requests for official comment.

Lower-level US-North Korean talks to prepare for the summit are continuing but have made only "halting progress," according to a second US official briefed on the discussions.

That official said US negotiators' efforts to press for definitions of immediate, comprehensive, verifiable and irreversible denuclearisation by North Korea had run into opposition from the White House.

In a remarkable shift in tone eight days after cancelling the summit, citing Pyongyang's "open hostility," Trump welcomed North Korea's former intelligence chief Kim Yong-chol to the White

House on Friday, afterward exchanging smiles and handshakes.

Benjamin Haas in Seoul, and agencies
@haasbenjamin

* The Guardian, Mon 4 Jun 2018 07.22 BST First published on Mon 4 Jun 2018 00.27 BST :
<https://www.theguardian.com/world/2018/jun/04/north-koreas-top-three-military-officials-sacked-as-nuclear-summit-nears>

Donald Trump says North Korea summit on 12 June is back on

Trump reverses previous position after visit of Kim Jong-un's top aide and says talks will go ahead in Singapore as planned.

Donald Trump has announced that a 12 June summit with Kim Jong-un will go ahead as planned in Singapore, saying it would mark the beginning of a negotiating process with North Korea that could involve several such meetings.

Trump was speaking to reporters after meeting Kim's top aide, Kim Yong-chol, in the Oval Office. It had been billed as a brief courtesy visit but it continued for more than an hour and 20 minutes. In a lavish show of hospitality, Trump escorted his visitor, a former spy chief and general who is under US sanctions, outside the White House for more informal talks and to pose for photographs with the North Korean delegation.

Trump also appeared to accept the North Korean position that its denuclearisation would be a drawn-out process – not the all-in-one surrender of the regime's nuclear arsenal that Trump officials had previously demanded.

"The big deal will be on June 12," Trump said. "It's a process, we're not go in and sign something on June 12 and we never were. We are going to start a process. And I told them today: take your time. We can go fast, we can go slowly. I think they'd like to see something happen and if we can work something out that will be good."

But in a dramatic downgrading of expectations from the summit, Trump said Singapore meeting would be a "getting-to-know-you meeting, plus".

Such a meeting, the first ever between a sitting US president and a North Korean leader, has been a longstanding objective of the Pyongyang regime. To achieve it, it has suspended nuclear and long-range missile tests, but has given no undertakings on the scale or speed of its nuclear disarmament.

On Friday night the US defence secretary, James Mattis, hinted at some of the agenda for the 12 June talks, saying the "separate and distinct" issue of America's troop presence in South Korea would not be on the table and "nor should it be". If diplomacy with North Korea worked, then troop levels and similar issues could come up, but only in discussions between the US and South Korea. "Our objective remains the complete, verifiable, and irreversible denuclearisation of the Korean peninsula," Mattis told the Shangri-La Dialogue, a security summit in Singapore.

North Korea has entered agreements several times before in which it has promised to disarm, but those agreements all collapsed.

In his remarks on Friday, Trump said that – although existing sanctions would stay in place – no new measures would be added, ditching the slogan that has defined his policy towards North Korea up to now.

“I don’t want to use the term maximum pressure any more,” Trump said. “We have hundreds of new sanctions ready to go ... but why would I do that when we’re talking so nicely?”

The president said that North Korea’s human rights record was not discussed in the meeting.

Kim Yong-chol, the first top North Korean official to visit the White House in 18 years, was met outside the West Wing by the White House chief of staff, John Kelly, and the head of the CIA Korea department, Andrew Kim, who ushered the 72-year-old regime veteran into the Oval Office to meet Trump.

Far from being hustled in through the back door of the White House, Kim was welcomed at the south lawn entrance in front of massed ranks of cameras and escorted to the Oval Office, where the secretary of state, Mike Pompeo, was waiting with Trump.

The ceremonial arrival represented a propaganda coup for a regime that has endured decades of isolation.

The content of the letter was not immediately apparent. Trump at one point described it as “interesting” and then claimed not to have opened it.

“I may be in for a big surprise, folks,” he said.

The Wall Street Journal reported it simply expressed Kim’s interest in going ahead with the Singapore summit, and does not change North Korea’s negotiating positions.

Trump’s national security adviser, John Bolton, and Mike Pence, the vice-president – both hawks on North Korea – did not take part in the meeting and were nowhere to be seen before and after. Trump’s agreement to enter into a drawn-out negotiating process with North Korea, puts a question mark over Bolton’s future in the White House. He has insisted that any US agreement with Pyongyang would have to involve the regime’s unilateral and rapid surrender of its nuclear weapons programme, which Bolton referred to as the “Libyan model”.

The North Korean leader laid his position out during a visit by the Russian foreign minister, Sergei Lavrov, on Thursday. Quoted by the state news agency, KCNA, Kim said “the denuclearisation of the Korean peninsula will be solved on a stage-by-stage basis” in which each party addressed the interests of the other.

Vipin Narang, an expert on the North Korean nuclear weapons programme at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, said it now appeared that Trump “seems to be ok with a stage-by-stage process”.

“It won’t result in disarmament but a lot of good can still happen,” Narang said.

The only other senior North Korean official ever to visit the White House was vice-marshal Jo Myong-rok, who delivered a letter to Bill Clinton from Kim Jong-un’s father, Kim Jong-il. That peace effort collapsed with the election weeks later of George W Bush, who cut off contacts with Pyongyang.

Julian Borger in Washington

* The Guardian, Fri 1 Jun 2018 20.19 BST First published on Fri 1 Jun 2018 18.38 BST:

<https://www.theguardian.com/world/2018/jun/01/kim-jong-uns-top-aide-delivers-letter-to-donald-trump>

Japan urges caution on any North Korea agreement

Defence Minister Itsunori Onodera says sanctions on Pyongyang should stay in place, citing previous violations.

Japan's defence minister has urged the international community to keep sanctions and surveillance on North Korea, saying it has a history of reneging on agreements.

Itsunori Onodera said North Korea agreed to give up nuclear weapons as early as 1994, but has continued to develop them in secret and until last year threatened surrounding countries with a series of ballistic missile launches.

"In light of how North Korea has behaved in the past, I believe that it is important not to reward North Korea solely for agreeing to have a dialogue," he said.

"We have seen history repeat, where North Korea would declare to denuclearise, thereby portraying itself as conciliatory and forthcoming, only to turn around to void all international efforts towards peace."

The comments by Japan's defence chief marked a sharp contrast with his South Korean counterpart, who said there was no reason to doubt the sincerity of North Korean leader Kim Jong-un.

Song Young-moo said: "Just because we have been tricked by North Korea in the past doesn't guarantee that we will be tricked in the future. If we believe that, we will never be able to negotiate with them and make peace with them."

The South Korean defence minister said that if the talks on North Korea's nuclear weapons are successful, they could be compared with the 1989 Malta Summit between former President George H W Bush and Soviet leader Mikhail Gorbachev, less than a month after the fall of the Berlin Wall.

China has also given the talks its approval.

The country's foreign ministry said in a statement posted on its official WeChat account that it viewed the meeting between the United States and North Korean leaders as key to achieving denuclearisation and lasting peace on the Korean Peninsula.

The Japanese and South Korean defence ministers were speaking at an international security conference in Singapore, which is set to host the landmark summit between US President Donald Trump and Kim Jong-un on June 12.

Trump meeting

The comments in Singapore came as Trump confirmed the June 12 talks were officially back on after initially cancelling the summit and days of ambiguity on whether it would be reinstated.

Trump made the announcement on Friday, following a two-hour-long meeting with North Korean senior official Kim Yong-chol at the White House.

While admitting that dealing with North Korea was “going to be a process”, Trump said he believed the effort would ultimately be “successful.”

However, the US leader ruled out signing anything at the June 12 meeting.

Kim Yong-chol delivered a letter from the North Korean leader to Trump during their meeting at the Oval Office.

Trump told reporters after the end of the meeting that he had not yet read the letter.

SOURCE: NEWS AGENCIES

* Al Jazeera, 2 Jun 2018:

<https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2018/06/japan-urges-caution-north-korea-agreement-180602052545026.html>
