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Column: How Trump can make the most of the summit

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The summit almost certainly is going to happen. Neither party can afford to cancel this late. How best to make it a success?

We know the result will not be denuclearization as defined by the U.S. We will not implement the so-called Libya model, collecting North Korea nukes, despite what National Security Adviser John Bolton said.

So what is the objective? Said President Donald Trump after announcing that the summit was on: “We are going to start a process. And I told them today: take your time. We can go fast, we can go slowly.”

It makes one wonder: who is this person, and where is the president who threatened to unleash “fire and fury” on the Korean peninsula?

Process can be helpful. Still, process is only a means to bring about a substantive result. So what should the latter be?

First, contra the president, the two leaders should sign something, even if just a short, but specific promise by the U.S. to end what might be considered “hostile policy” toward North Korea in return for Pyongyang’s commitment to denuclearize, specifically eliminate the North’s nuclear weapons and entire atomic infrastructure.

Second, Washington should seek to make permanent the North’s freeze on nuclear and missile tests. That commitment would be easy to police and would limit the reach of missiles and inhibit improvement of nuclear weapons.

Third, President Trump and Supreme Leader Kim Jong-un should declare that they view the Korean War to be over and agree to negotiations that include the other major combatants, South Korea and China, to forge a peace treaty formally ending hostilities.

Fourth, the president should propose a move toward diplomatic relations. That would not be a reward; the objective would be to create a routine communications channel, while creating an outpost for learning more about what long was accurately termed the Hermit Kingdom.

Fifth, Washington would explain that expanding an American mission into a full-scale embassy would depend on North Korean officials being willing to engage on a range of political topics, including human rights.

Sixth, the president should announce an end to the ban on Americans traveling to the North. At the meeting he should offer to initiate a liberal visa policy for North Korean visitors, who would be invited to come to America for sports, cultural, educational, and other purposes. An internal, organic transformation led by North Koreans would be far better than an outside attempt to impose regime change.

Seventh, the president should override his “alliance forever” advisers and indicate his willingness to withdraw U.S. troops from and close America’s “nuclear umbrella” over South Korea in return for denuclearization. It is an important objective worth making significant concessions. Moreover, denuclearization would eliminate any need for a U.S. garrison in the South.

Eighth, the two leaders should establish the “process” that the president mentioned. A set of negotiations should be initiated with denuclearization as the formal objective, but capable of reaching more limited agreements along the way. For instance, an inventory of the DPRK’s nuclear assets, backed by inspections to verify its accuracy, would be an important step toward denuclearization.

Washington should simultaneously encourage the Kim government to engage both the ROK and Japan, since their support would add to the success of a shift toward a more peaceful environment. At the same time, the U.S. should discuss the future of the Korean peninsula with China. Nevertheless, the Trump administration should encourage a more cooperative Beijing by indicating that the latter need not fear an American attempt to turn the peninsula into another military outpost in a regional containment system.

President Trump deserves credit for taking the risk of meeting Kim Jong-un. The president even was right to step back from demanding immediate denuclearization, since expecting too much could have resulted in a catastrophic summit break-down, returning the two countries to sort of dangerous confrontation which dominated last year.

Making the summit a success will involve process, as the president suggested, but also will need to address the right substance as well. The president still might fall short of a Nobel, but he could help defuse one of the world’s hot spots. And that would be an accomplishment worth celebrating.

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