

Inter-Korean summit a good start for Trump-Kim meeting

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The meeting between South Korean President Moon Jae-in and North Korean Supreme Leader Kim Jong-un was picture perfect. The symbolism of the summit could not have been better.

But what the two leaders decided matters little until they act on their promises. And that won't happen unless President Donald Trump and Kim reach not only symbolic but also practical agreement. While possible, it won't be easy.

The good of the Korean tete-a-tete is obvious. Two previous South Korean presidents ventured north. This is the first time a North Korean leader traveled south, even if but a short distance, into the Republic of Korea.

Moreover, Kim looked and acted like a modern figure. Kim even brought his wife and sister -- previously, the North's rulers kept women, even family members, largely invisible, especially overseas.

The two leaders engaged in talks at which all the right words were expressed. Kim was quoted as saying: "I came here to put an end to the history of confrontation."

Moon and Kim set as objectives negotiating and cooperating on various issues, ceasing "hostile acts," formally ending the Korean War, which remains only in abeyance through an armistice, establishing a liaison office and undertaking phased disarmament. They also "confirmed the common goal of realizing, through complete denuclearization, a nuclear-free Korean Peninsula."

That outcome creates a positive atmosphere for the Trump-Kim meeting, expected in May or more likely June.

However, despite the obvious value of the inter-Korean summit, it is important to remember that all of this occurred before. The Kim dynasty's founder, Kim Il-sung, was set to meet South Korean President Kim Young-sam, only to die shortly before that planned summit.

Kim Jong-il, father of the current ruler, hosted two South Korean presidents. Kim also met Secretary of State Madeleine Albright and almost scored a summit with President Bill Clinton.

These meetings led participants to hold hands, sing patriotic tunes, exchange heartfelt compliments, and even dance a bit. Out of the summits emerged the "Sunshine Policy," which transferred some \$10 billion in money and aid to the Democratic People's Republic of Korea.

Within just a few years, however, the Sunshine Policy was kaput, North Korea was conducting both nuclear and missiles tests, the North and South were exchanging artillery fire, the DPRK was testing ICBMs along with nuclear weapons, and the U.S. president was threatening to unleash "fire and fury" in return.

Moreover, the only summit that really matters is between Trump and Kim. Unless Moon is willing to send American troops home, he will always be the junior partner in the alliance with the U.S.

Although Moon has done his best to create a positive environment for the planned Trump-Kim meeting, several important questions remain:

- 1) Is Kim willing to yield up weapons that cost so much to develop, are so tied to his dynasty's legitimacy and give the regime international status? And what security assurances will he demand, given Washington's dangerous proclivity for regime change, willingness to take out Muammar Gaddafi after he surrendered his, and readiness to tear up past agreements, such as the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA) with Iran?
- 2) Is Trump willing to offer more than verbal assurances and paper guarantees to Kim in exchange for full and irreversible denuclearization? Would Trump put the U.S. troop presence in South Korea on the table, since the ROK is capable of providing for its own defense?
- 3) Is it possible to create an inspection regime that can certify the elimination of unknown nuclear weapons and unknown missiles from unknown locations? Would such an intrusive system be acceptable to Pyongyang?
- 4) If the big nuclear deal proves beyond reach, are the two leaders willing to settle on a more modest agenda? Would they consider beginning small, with a shared commitment to common goals accompanied by small steps forward to expand cooperation and build confidence?
- 5) If the Trump-Kim summit fails to occur or ends in failure, can Kim and Moon develop a relationship and implement policy to keep the peace if Trump returns to threatening war? Could Moon find a path to peace if it turns out there is none to denuclearization?

The principal objective for all should be keeping the peace. Denuclearization is but a means to that end. If denuclearization fails, there still will be a peace to keep.

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