

## What if NK makes offer US can't refuse?

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North Korea has just reminded the U.S. that it is intent on negotiating with the U.S., not accepting an administration diktat, especially one explicitly modeled after the Libya deal, which ultimately ended in the gruesome death of Moammar Gadhafi, who agreed to its terms.

Secretary of State Mike Pompeo visited Pyongyang again recently and made Kim Jong-un an offer he hoped the North Korean supreme leader could not reject: abandon nuclear weapons and the North can "have all the opportunities your people so richly deserve." But the Trump administration should be careful what it asks for. What if Kim said "Yes, here are my nukes, now where are my benefits?"

The summit between Kim and President Donald Trump is set but suddenly in doubt. Secretary Pompeo went to Pyongyang to finalize the details and bring home three imprisoned Americans. While there he made a pitch for North Korean disarmament. It sounded like a good deal, probably like the similar pitch to Gadhafi sounded in 2003.

Although most Korea-watchers expected an ever-so-polite no from the Democratic People's Republic of Korea, however disguised, at the summit rather than ahead of time, the most challenging answer would be a fulsome yes.

No one outside of Pyongyang knows the extent of North Korea's nuclear program. Estimates of the number of weapons range from 15 to 60. Nor do American officials know where the weapons are located.

After the summit's usual opening pleasantries have been exchanged, imagine Kim announcing that he sees no reason why two decisive men of action cannot quickly reach an agreement. To demonstrate his good faith, he explains, at that very moment four North Korean nukes are on trucks just north of Panmunjeom, ready for America to take if a deal is reached.

He then promises to deliver his nation's remaining baker's dozen weapons — sadly, he explains, Pyongyang was unable to develop as many nukes as the imperialistic foreigners imagined — in a similar fashion as the U.S. fulfills Secretary Pompeo's promises and a bit more. Kim then makes a few simple requests: diplomatic recognition, peace treaty, sanctions end, economic aid, entry into multilateral development banks, military exercises terminated, U.S. troop levels reduced.

The two leaders' minions can work out the details regarding timetables and inspections, Kim observes. Now, with everything decided, time to break out the cognac, hold hands, and invite in the photographers.

How would President Trump respond?

Without knowing what weapons the North possessed, Washington would be flying blind. There would be widespread suspicion that the DPRK had more warheads than Kim said. But then what?

Declare he is lying and refuse his proposal? This approach seems like a bad idea on many levels, not the least that it would be very bad PR.

Insist on intrusive inspections first? What if inspectors can't find any additional nukes, only those helpfully piled together by the authorities in a central location? After all, Kim might be telling the truth. And if not, there are a lot of underground bunkers dug into a lot of mountains in the North.

If disagreement persists, then what? Blow up negotiations after the supreme leader offered everything Washington asked for? Explain to the South Koreans why the U.S. was plunging the Korean Peninsula back into a cold war? Tell the American people that war was back on the table, even absent hard proof that Kim was hiding much of his nuclear arsenal?

The easier path certainly would be for the U.S. to accept Kim's offer as sufficient. Claiming denuclearization would allow the president's partisans to continue to shout "Nobel!" Diminishing the North's arsenal while foreclosing future developments would be a genuine achievement.

China likely would accept such a deal. Beijing wants to keep a buffer state and prevent creation of a united Korea allied with the U.S. and hosting American troops. The People's Republic of China also benefits from a heavily-armed DPRK which causes trouble for the U.S.

No one knows how the upcoming Kim-Trump summit, assuming it still occurs, will go. Kim never seemed likely to rush to dismantle his nuclear arsenal and repressive state. In which case the U.S. should expect the unexpected.

In just four months Kim has transformed the region. There is no reason to expect him to abandon the initiative now. Is the administration ready for an offer it can't refuse?

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