



Here's How Trump Can Win Big at the North Korea Summit

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The summit between United States President Donald Trump and North Korean leader Kim Jong-un is almost certainly going to happen. After all, neither party can afford to cancel this late. So the question is how best to make it a success?

We know the result will not be denuclearization as defined by the U.S. All that talk about speedy complete, verifiable, irreversible denuclearization (CVID) was apparently just talk. The idea of loading North Korea's weapons, centrifuges, and perhaps even physicists onto American planes and spiriting them away was fanciful. Furthermore, so were any plans to collect any other parts of North Korea's various weapons of mass destruction programs. We will not implement the Libya model, despite what National Security Adviser John Bolton said.

So what is the objective? After Trump announced that the summit was on he 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."

Such a statement makes one wonder who is this person, and where is the president who threatened to unleash "fire and fury" on the Korean peninsula?

A process can be helpful, and the right process can be critical. Still, a 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 by eliminating all of their nuclear weapons and their entire atomic infrastructure. Of course, words alone have little value. But the document would set the stage for further negotiations and be useful in holding North Korea to account if it again grows recalcitrant.

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. The U.S. could pay for such a concession with something that

could be easily revoked if the Democratic People's Republic of Korea changed its mind and again began testing. For instance, Washington and Seoul could suspend joint military exercises.

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. That should be followed by Security Council recognition since the allies fought under the auspices of the UN.

Fourth, the president should propose a move toward diplomatic relations. That would not be a reward; after all, America currently recognizes the legitimacy of scores of unpleasant, sometimes bloody governments. The objective would be to create a regular communications channel while establishing an outpost for learning more about what long was accurately termed the Hermit Kingdom. With South Korea recognized by the North's war-time allies, China and Russia, the U.S. could easily do the same for North Korea.

Fifth, Washington would explain that expanding the 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. After all, recognition would be intended to promote robust dialogue. While it would be essential to enter any such discussions without illusions, similar engagement with the Soviet Union ultimately increased pressure for change.

Sixth, on landing in Singapore, the president should announce an end to the ban on Americans traveling to the North. Additionally, 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. Nothing suggests that a "Korean Spring" is imminent, but foreign contacts in and out of the North help spread knowledge of the outside world and undermine regime propaganda. An internal, organic transformation led by North Koreans would be far better than an external 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 CVID. Winning North Korean agreement for actual denuclearization still is a long-shot. But doing so is an important objective worth making significant concessions. Moreover, denuclearization would eliminate any need for a U.S. garrison in the South. This would have the additional advantage of shifting decisions over the future of the Korean peninsula to the Republic of Korea, which obviously has much more at stake than America. U.S. security would be enhanced if Washington did not insist on inserting itself in every controversy in every region on Earth, especially one as dangerous as Northeast Asia.

Eighth, the two leaders should establish the "process" that the president mentioned. A set of negotiations should be initiated with CVID 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 essential step toward denuclearization, which the North previously refused to take. Reintroduction of inspectors to declared nuclear sites would be another forward step. A freeze on additional nuclear weapons production, also backed by inspections, would be a major security gain. Measures to reduce the possibility of a

conventional clash would be advantageous to both parties and would be an important test of Pyongyang's sincerity.

Moreover, Washington should simultaneously encourage the Kim government to engage both South Korea 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, indicating that Washington desires to step back militarily, especially in the event of reunification, which, of course, remains a very distant possibility. 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.

When candidate Trump said he was willing to talk with Kim Jong-un, most professional Korea watchers snickered. It is hard to imagine any other president who would have agreed to a summit under these circumstances.

However, President Trump deserves credit for taking the risk. He even was right to step back from demanding immediate CVID, since expecting too much could have resulted in a catastrophic summit break-down and thereby returned the two countries to sort of dangerous confrontation which dominated last year. Whatever happens in Singapore, North Korea will still be a nuclear state when the sun rises on June 13 this year, and next year too.

Nevertheless, much good could be done at the summit and beyond. 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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