

ORANGE COUNTY REGISTER

Where Should the Kim-Trump Summit Take Place?

Doug Bandow

April 30, 2018

Plans for a Trump-Kim summit continue apace. But one critical issue remains unresolved. Where will the two leaders meet?

Guesses include the Korean Peninsula, China, and U.S. Pacific possessions, but sources claim none of these are on the final list. Europe supposedly accounts for six possibilities, led by Geneva. Mongolia, Thailand and Singapore allegedly also are being considered. The main problem with Europe is the fact that Kim lacks a plane that he can use to fly there without refueling—a significant embarrassment. Mongolia would be unusual, to say the least. After all, would the president be willing to stay in a yurt on the steppes? Bangkok is a messily complex, overcrowded metropolis. Singapore seems better suited for a serious meeting, though it is not typically known as a summit host.

Why not the Korean Peninsula, which is well within the range of North Korea's Air Force One? There's no luxury hotel at the Panmunjom crossing for President Trump. Pyongyang raises security concerns for the president. Seoul might be seen as biasing the proceedings toward America. Beijing would seem perfect, but Washington might fear that the Chinese authorities would influence the conference. Tokyo is close, but North and South Koreans share an intense hatred of Japan.

Instead of focusing on predictable venues, the North's supreme leader and America's president should think creatively. Choose the right locale and everything else should fall into place.

For instance, there is Tokyo Disneyland. It properly mirrors the otherworldly aspects of a meeting between the Donald, America's most unusual president, and the thirty-four-year-old supreme leader of one of the strangest states on earth, one which should be preserved as a national theme park. The location also should hold fond memories for Kim. He's never been there, but his older half-brother's attempt to visit using a forged passport helped knock the latter out of the race to succeed their father. Kim showed his appreciation by apparently ordering Kim Jong-nam's assassination last year.

Another option would be Xian, in China's Shanxi Province. This city is distinguished by the famed terracotta army, created by Emperor Qin Shi Huang who wanted to be protected in the afterlife. President Trump undoubtedly wants a royal welcome wherever he goes, and he can be

told that these were assembled just for him: more than 2000 years ago the Chinese emperor was helpfully thinking of the American president. In contrast, Supreme Leader Kim can imagine that the assembled army will come to his defense if Washington violates its pacific promises and attempts coercion at some future date.

Matamata, New Zealand, would be a nice location. With more sheep than people, New Zealand would take the contending leaders away from the hurly-burly of urban life. The two leaders could set up camp in the mountains where Lord of the Rings filmed the bucolic scenes involving the Shire in Middle Earth. Both Trump and Kim could imagine themselves battling great evil and banishing dangerous threats from their respective homelands. In Matamata they could easily go for a walk by themselves, far from the prying eyes of the international media.

Monaco should be considered. The European microstate is a playground for the rich and not so famous. It would be a perfect destination for both leaders if their futures prove difficult. Can Kim retain control of his bizarrely ideological system if negotiation leads to greater openness to the West? Where might Trump go if he does get indicted? Monaco would welcome either leader if deposed. They could treat the summit as a scouting expedition.

Moscow also would be a good fit. President Trump could make such a trip a twofer, seeing Russian president Vladimir Putin as well. Meeting with the latter won't take much time: this administration has been tougher towards Russia than its predecessor and has left very little room for improving relations. After just a few minutes both sides likely would be finished. Why force either the American or Russian president to make an unnecessary trip to see each other?

A sojourn in Russia's capital would remind Kim that he doesn't have many options for asylum if the result of acquiescence or submission to Washington's demands leads to his overthrow. The city is nice in the summer. But fall is short and winter then hits brutally. In the latter season Moscow is frigid and dreary. Kim's wife, the fashion-conscious Ri Sol-ju, might be particularly unhappy with such a home.

For someplace really different the two leaders might consider Damascus. It would offer a powerful reminder on why a peaceful resolution of the Korean conflict is in everyone's interest. The Democratic People's Republic of Korea would lose in any war, whether just limited strikes by Washington or the full-scale conflict likely to result from any outside attack. But the United States and South Korea would scarcely be winners. Moreover, a North Korean collapse could be even worse than a nuclear North: civil war, loose nukes, mass refugee flows, regional chaos.

Still, the Vatican might be a better choice. Although the prospective summit offers an unusual opportunity to end more than seven decades of confrontation on the Korean peninsula, it also could explode spectacularly. If the president leaves feeling betrayed, he might return to his previous warmongering strategy. After all, that would be more consistent with sentiments expressed by National Security Advisor John Bolton and Secretary of State nominee Mike Pompeo.

Proximity to the Pope would offer the potential for substantial prayer support. Heck, the Holy Father might call together a special meeting of bishops or cardinals to advance the cause of

Korean peace. It wouldn't quite be a Papal Conclave, which chooses a Pope. But if the gathering helped push the two blustering, obnoxious, threatening leaders together, then it might go down in history for its accomplishment.

Finally, why not Honolulu? It would be perfect. Beautiful, comfortable, and midway between the two capitals. Filled with people apparently fearful of being nuked by the DPRK. In truth, that was never likely. But bringing President Trump to Honolulu might remind him why war would be a stupid idea, even if he imagined it would be only "over there" in Northeast Asia. The sight of such a wonderful city might encourage Kim to think about retirement. Surely the Supreme Leader needs a break. Maybe the president would do the same.

The prospective summit is a dramatic, unpredictable step that just might fix a problem that once appeared to be insoluble. The location of such a meeting should be equally unique. Geneva is predictable and boring, but that is not true of Xian, Damascus, and several other locations. Both President Trump and Supreme Leader Kim have a flair for the dramatic. Why shouldn't their location choice for the summit reflect a little daring?

Doug Bandow is a senior fellow at the Cato Institute and a former special assistant to President Ronald Reagan. He is author of Foreign Follies: America's New Global Empire.