



## The Second Trump-Kim Summit: The Devil Is in the Details

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President Donald Trump and Supreme Leader Kim Jong-un will meet for a second summit in late February, most likely in Vietnam. The first Trump-Kim summit, held in Singapore last June, was a historic event; for the first time, a sitting U.S. president met with their North Korean counterpart. There was not much substance to the Singapore summit, however, which caused a diplomatic stalemate between Washington and Pyongyang. While a second summit may break the current impasse, many U.S. arms control experts have expressed concern that another summit will just bring more pageantry instead of progress.

The Trump administration should take these concerns to heart. A lack of detail in the first summit was expected given the increasingly threatening rhetoric and the real risk of armed conflict in 2017. It was folly to expect Trump and Kim to reverse course entirely and achieve a breakthrough with one summit after such a tense and dangerous period. However, a repeat performance that is low on substance will not be good for the United States, especially if Trump continues making overly-optimistic statements about what he has achieved.

Trump's primary goal for the second summit should be moving away from the sweeping declarations and promises made at Singapore and toward more detailed agreements. To borrow from baseball, instead of swinging for a grand slam Trump should just try for a base hit.

Reining in U.S. goals and ambitions for the second summit would better align the U.S. diplomatic approach with the much more successful inter-Korean process. For instance, shortly before Singapore, South Korea's president Moon Jae-in met with Kim at Panmunjom for a summit that had more style than substance. However, after this initial meeting, the two Koreas made substantial progress on establishing working-level diplomatic communication channels to work toward the lofty goals set forth at Panmunjom. In late 2018, Moon visited Pyongyang for another summit where the two Koreas signed a very-detailed military agreement designed to reduce tensions along the demilitarized zone. North Korea's implementation of the inter-Korean military agreement shows that Kim will follow through on his promises, so long as there are reciprocity and specificity in the agreement.

The United States and South Korea have a different order of priorities—the former is focused on denuclearization while the latter wants denuclearization but sees a stable bilateral relationship as its primary goal. A shift in U.S. diplomatic strategy would not mean giving up on the ultimate

goal of denuclearization. Rather, learning from South Korea's experience would help Trump and his administration craft better agreements that Kim would be more likely to accept and implement. Furthermore, closer alignment in diplomatic strategy could also help smooth over some areas of disagreement in U.S.-South Korea relations that have popped up as both countries have engaged North Korea with varying success.

Examples of narrowly-focused demands that Trump could raise with Kim include a freeze on fissile material production and greater access to nuclear and rocket facilities that Kim had previously agreed to dismantle to verify their destruction. Trump should also be prepared to give something to Kim if North Korea agrees to U.S. demands. Given Kim's new domestic line that prioritizes economic development, relaxing U.S. restrictions on inter-Korean infrastructure projects or sanctions against some sectors of the North Korean economy would preserve the broader economic pressure regime while showing a general willingness to engage in reciprocal diplomacy.

A second Trump-Kim summit as devoid of substance as the first would not produce many gains for the United States, but it would likely not throw the region back into the tension and fear of 2017 either. Kim's charm offensive is working. Russia, China, and even South Korea are not interested in returning to "maximum pressure," and so long as the North doesn't resume ballistic missile or nuclear weapons testing, they will likely see more to gain by engaging Kim than shutting him out. If North Korea doesn't lash out, it should be able to keep up diplomacy with its neighbors. This is good news for a domestically-embattled Trump. Pivoting to more detailed diplomacy with North Korea is likely to reap benefits while failure is unlikely to result in a catastrophe.

It is time for the United States to shift its approach toward North Korea. The successful inter-Korean diplomatic process is producing small but real benefits for peace and stability by being specific and offering reciprocal measures. If Trump can use the second summit with Kim to move away from sweeping statements of denuclearization and focus on narrowly-defined issues, he could break the current impasse and open the door to significant progress toward stability and even denuclearization in 2019.

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