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What Happens If North Korea Won't Deal with Joe Biden?

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In mid-June North Korean Supreme Leader Kim Jong-un brought together leaders of the Workers' Party of Korea to discuss their nation's economic problems, particularly a growing food shortage. He also opined on the state of relations with the United States. North Koreans needed to prepare for "both dialogue and confrontation" with America, he said.

Optimistic Washington policymakers interpreted this comment as reflecting openness to diplomacy. Perhaps, but under what conditions? Talking about confrontation after the Biden administration indicated its interest in talking seems less than welcoming. Nevertheless, National Security Adviser Jake Sullivan seemed hopeful, calling Kim's remarks "an interesting signal," while suggesting that a better response would be "to say, 'Yes, let's do it. Let's sit down and begin negotiations.'"

While visiting Seoul, Ambassador Sung Kim, Biden's special envoy to the North, reinforced Sullivan's message. The former urged a meeting "anywhere, anytime without preconditions." Alas, the message from the Democratic People's Republic of Korea (DPRK) appeared to be not just no, but "hell no!"

Kim's sister, Ki Yo-jong, again played the role of the attack dog, though her comments seemed unintentionally enigmatic. "A Korean proverb says that in a dream, what counts most is to read it, not to have it," she said in a statement. "It seems that the US may interpret the situation in such a way as to seek a comfort for itself."

Yo-jong also noted that “The expectation, which they chose to harbor the wrong way, would plunge them into a greater disappointment.”