

A Possible Second U.S.-North Korea Summit: What Diplomacy Has and Hasn't Achieved

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Summary of January 2018-January 2019 Developments

In late January 2019, President Donald Trump said he would meet with North Korean leader Kim Jong-un "[probably at the end of February](#)." The summit would be the second between the two leaders, following their summit in Singapore in June 2018. As of January 22, the White House has not detailed the substance of the planned meeting. Washington and Pyongyang appeared to reach few substantive agreements ahead of the last summit, which Trump described as a "getting to know you" occasion.

If the Trump-Kim summit occurs, it would continue the high-level diplomacy that Pyongyang has orchestrated since early 2018. Over the past year, Kim has held three summits with South Korean President Moon Jae-in, four with Chinese President Xi Jinping, and one with President Trump.

To date, these diplomatic efforts have produced the following results:

North Korea's Nuclear and Missile Programs

- Kim publicly [agreed](#) to "work toward complete denuclearization of the Korean Peninsula," [pledging](#) the "permanent dismantlement" of nuclear facilities in Yongbyon, "as the United States takes corresponding measures." He promised to dismantle North Korea's Sohae missile and satellite launch site in the presence of international inspectors. Kim also agreed to allow experts to visit the Pyunggye-ri nuclear test site, where in May North Korea collapsed testing tunnels, to verify the site is no longer functional.
- Kim [pledged](#) to suspend nuclear or long-range missile tests while dialogue continues. No such tests have occurred since November 2017.

Diplomatic and Economic Developments

- Kim's international image has been boosted substantially.
- North Korea and China have restored close diplomatic relations. The relationship had been strained since Kim became leader in 2011.
- Several countries [appear](#) to be enforcing international sanctions against the DPRK less aggressively than before the rapprochement period began, possibly weakening the Trump Administration's "maximum pressure" approach. China and Russia have called for an easing of sanctions.
- Inter-Korean relations have blossomed. Kim [agreed](#) to visit Seoul, potentially the first trip to Seoul by a DPRK leader since the end of the Korean War. The two Koreas opened their first-ever permanent liaison office in North Korea, agreed to begin reconnecting road and rail links, and restarted family reunions and civil society exchanges.
- The DPRK, ROK, and the United States agreed to build a "peace regime," which could start with a declaration formally ending the Korean War.

Military Developments

- The two Koreas agreed to several military confidence-building measures, including creating a no-fly zone along the demilitarized zone (DMZ). Many of the military changes appear to have been made without the full support of U.S. military commanders.
- Trump unilaterally suspended major annual U.S.-South Korea military exercises following the Singapore summit, and expressed his preference to [withdraw U.S. troops](#) in the future. Subsequently, Congress inserted into defense authorization legislation ([P.L. 115-232](#)) a provision imposing conditions on the president's ability to reduce U.S. troops in South Korea.

Other Developments

- North Korea released three American detainees.
- The United States and DPRK opened talks on restarting efforts to recover the remains of U.S. troops unaccounted for during the Korean War. North Korea repatriated the remains of possible U.S. service members.

Questions

Several questions remain unanswered.

- **How significant are Kim's nuclear and missile pledges?** In 2018, Trump [tweeted](#) that "there is no longer a Nuclear Threat from North Korea," and Moon [said](#) that Kim's pledges, if fulfilled, would halt advances in its nuclear and missile programs. However, many U.S. and ROK experts are [skeptical](#) because North Korea has not agreed to disclose its nuclear stocks and facilities, including those *not* at Yongbyon, or to accept international verification of denuclearization. North Korea and the United States also have not publicly agreed on the meaning of "denuclearization" or the phrase "denuclearization of the Korean Peninsula." North Korea "continue[s] to produce fissile material," Secretary of State Mike Pompeo [testified](#) in July, shortly after U.S. intelligence agencies reportedly gathered [evidence of DPRK efforts to conceal](#) parts of its nuclear programs. Pyongyang also reportedly has continued working on [more advanced long-range missiles](#).
- **What "corresponding measures" does Pyongyang expect Washington to take if it dismantles Yongbyon?** Moon has stated that concessions by the United States and DPRK should be made in a "[balanced manner](#)," and that the United States should "put an end to hostile relations" and "provide security assurances to the North," as Trump promised in Singapore. However, disagreements over which side moves first and on what measures created a stalemate after the Singapore summit. In his annual New Year's speech, Kim [said](#) that U.S.-South Korean joint military exercises and U.S. military equipment "should no longer be permitted" on the Korean Peninsula.
- **Do the inter-Korean military agreements [limit the U.S.-ROK alliance's capabilities](#)?** Some defense analysts claim the dramatic expansion of existing no-fly zones and maritime buffer zones could curtail the alliance's ability to surveil on North Korean military activities.
- **Would a peace declaration weaken arguments for keeping U.S. troops in the ROK?** Moon said that he and Kim sought to issue a "[political statement declaring an end to the Korean War](#)" and launch negotiations for a peace treaty, which would be signed "when the North achieves complete denuclearization" and when U.S.-DPRK

relations are normalized. Moon said the initial declaration would "in no way affect the status" of U.S. forces in South Korea, which "depends entirely on a decision made between South Korea and the United States."

Nevertheless, some analysts worry that that issuing a preliminary peace declaration is premature before North Korea takes further steps to reduce the threat it poses, and that such a document could undermine the rationale for the presence of U.S. troops in South Korea. The United States and South Korea also have failed to reach a new host nation support agreement, under which Seoul helps defray the costs of U.S. troops in South Korea, to replace a deal that expired at the end of 2018. Washington reportedly [has demanded](#) Seoul increase its contribution by at least 50%.

- **Should negotiations include North Korea's other objectionable practices and programs**, like the DPRK's human rights record, cyberattacks, chemical and biological weapons, and/or conventional forces?