

Trump to meet North Korean leader in “three or four weeks”

By James Cogan
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At a campaign rally in Michigan yesterday, US President Donald Trump indicated that he would meet with North Korean leader Kim Jong-un in the next “three or four weeks,” at a still undisclosed location. His supporters chanted “Nobel,” “Nobel,” echoing calls by Republican Party congressmen for Trump to be awarded the peace prize, just as Barack Obama was in 2009 even as his administration continued the occupation of Iraq and escalated the war in Afghanistan.

Trump boasted that the talks last Friday between Kim and South Korean President Moon Jae-in were the outcome of his “strength”—meaning his administration’s reckless threats to “totally destroy” North Korea unless it submits to US demands to give up its nuclear programs and dismantle its nuclear weapons.

After a diplomatic pantomime in which the South and North Korean leaders held hands and hugged, the erstwhile hostile states signed a “declaration” committing to cultural and economic cooperation; the signing of a formal peace treaty to end the 1950–53 Korean War; and, “through complete denuclearisation, a nuclear-free Korean Peninsula.”

Over the weekend, further details of what was and was not agreed was revealed by both the South Korean government and Trump’s new secretary of state, former CIA director Mike Pompeo.

The South Korean presidential office stated yesterday that North Korea would allow US and South Korean inspectors to verify the closure of its Punggye-ri nuclear test, which Kim announced earlier this month. Kim also reportedly told Moon Jae-in: “There is no reason for us to possess nuclear weapons ... if mutual trust with the United States is built... and an end to the war and non-aggression are promised.”

In early March, the North Korean regime announced its willingness to hold “denuclearisation” talks. China’s collaboration in enforcing harsh sanctions has reportedly caused the country’s exports to collapse by more than 90 percent. Militarily, North Korea could not hope to defeat the combined forces of the United States, South Korea and other US allies without substantial Chinese assistance. If it used its small nuclear arsenal, it would face annihilation.

Deprived of overt Chinese backing, Pyongyang has signalled its preparedness to make a deal, providing that any arrangement preserves the position and wealth of its ruling clique. The situation on the Korean Peninsula nevertheless continues to hang in the balance.

During the Michigan rally, Trump repeated his previous threats to walk out of talks and return to a policy of war unless US demands are met. “Whatever happens, happens,” he declared. “I may go in, may not work out, I leave.”

Yesterday, Pompeo, who was sent by Trump to Pyongyang at the end of March to negotiate the basis for any potential meeting, told ABC News chief White House correspondent Jonathan Karl that North Korea “understood” that the US terms for a deal were “complete, verifiable, irreversible denuclearisation.” He asserted: “We’re not going to make promises. We’re not going to take words. We’re going to look for actions and deeds.”

Karl asked: “If diplomacy fails on this, is there a military option?” Pompeo replied: “We’re not going to allow Kim Jong-un to continue to threaten America.”

In an even more ominous comment, Trump’s newly-installed national security advisor John Bolton told Fox News that a “model” for North Korean denuclearisation could be the deal made with Libya in

December 2003. In exchange for the destruction of chemical weapons and components for nuclear weapons, the major powers restored relations with the Libyan regime of Muammar Gaddafi.

Barely eight years later, the US and Europe turned on Gaddafi as part of their efforts to contain the revolutionary upsurge that erupted in Tunisia and, of greatest concern, in Egypt. The imperialist powers intrigued with Islamist and separatist “rebels” to provoke civil war in Libya, then used the fighting to justify a massive air attack on Gaddafi’s regime and military. Gaddafi was brutally assassinated by the pro-imperialist rebels in October 2011.

In the past the North Korean regime has cited the fate of Libya and Gaddafi as a reason to refuse to submit to the US-led demand to abandon its nuclear weapons program.

While moves are proceeding toward talks, they may entirely break down over the definition of “denuclearisation” and a “nuclear-free Korean Peninsula.” North Korea may, for example, continue to insist on the withdrawal of US military assets capable of delivering nuclear weapons and the end of the US-South Korean alliance.

The prospect of talks collapsing is foreshadowed in the stream of commentary in the anti-Trump sections of the US media, such as the *New York Times*. Ridiculing Trump’s rhetoric that he forced Kim into talks, *Times* columnist Bret Stephens asserted that the administration was legitimising a “violator of human rights,” allowing North Korea to “drive a wedge between Seoul and Washington” and “being played by Pyongyang.”

Openly indicating a preference for war and “regime-change,” Stephens wrote: “Yet the fact that all the options are bad does not, as some argue, make negotiations the ‘least bad’ among them.”

The Trump administration, in other words, goes into any talks under immense domestic pressure to take the hardest possible line. Any deal that does not involve the complete capitulation of North Korea is likely to come under withering criticism for being “too generous.”

China and Russia, which border North Korea and view it as a useful militarised buffer against the US forces in South Korea, are indicating opposition to any agreement that undermines their strategic interests.

Russian deputy foreign minister Igor Morgulov insisted Saturday that regardless of the outcome of US-North Korea discussions, only “six-party talks” involving Russia, China and Japan, as well as the US and the two Koreas, could solve the “sub-regions’ problems.”

While the Chinese government has made no statement, Chinese commentators have opposed the possibility, hinted at in the Korea declaration, of a “peace treaty” being signed without Beijing’s participation. Lu Chao, from the Liaoning Academy of Social Sciences, told the *South China Morning Post*: “From a legal perspective, if an armistice is to turn into a peace treaty, all signatories should take part in the process, meaning China should also get a seat at the table.”

After the March 8 announcement that Trump was prepared to meet Kim, both Russia and China quickly organised their own diplomatic initiatives. Kim was invited to Beijing for his first-ever visit, and Chinese President Xi Jinping announced his intention to visit Pyongyang “soon.” Wang Yi, China’s foreign minister, will conduct a two-day trip to Pyongyang on May 2–3 to discuss developments. Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov will travel to North Korea at an unspecified date.

These intrigues, diplomatic as well as military, will only escalate.

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