

Trump and Kim prepare for Tuesday's unpredictable summit

By Ben McGrath
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United States President Donald Trump and North Korean Chairman Kim Jong-un are scheduled to hold their first summit tomorrow in Singapore. While Trump has hailed the talks as a “mission of peace,” tensions will only continue to sharpen in the Asia-Pacific, regardless of the outcome.

Trump, who arrived in Singapore several hours after Kim, said he felt “very good” about the talks after landing. Kim met with Singaporean Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong after his own arrival, reportedly on board an Air China 747 reserved for the Chinese president. Thanking Lee for hosting the event, Kim said: “The entire world is watching the historic summit between the DPRK [Democratic People’s Republic of Korea] and the United States of America.”

Despite these pleasantries, any number of results can come out of the summit, though none will lessen the underlying conflicts in the region, which are rooted in the US drive to confront China. Ominously, while still in Canada for the acrimonious G7 summit, Trump said Kim had a “one-time shot” and stressed he could end the summit after a minute.

The US president said any deal with Kim would be “spur of the moment,” adding: “I think within the first minute I’ll know. Just my touch, my feel. That’s what I do. And if I think it won’t happen, I’m not going to waste my time. I don’t want to waste his time.”

This is a thinly-veiled threat that Trump could simply deliver an ultimatum to Kim and then walk out if the latter does not fully accede to US demands. That would set the stage for a military strike on the North, which could trigger a nuclear war with China and possibly Russia, both of which have borders with North Korea. Trump has previously threatened to destroy North Korea, a country of more than 25 million people.

The US is demanding North Korea “verifiably and

irreversibly” denuclearize, while Pyongyang above all wants security guarantees that it does not end up like Iraq or Libya. Both those countries attempted to reach deals with Washington but were ultimately devastated, and their leaders executed, by the US and its allies. For all of the North’s bombastic talk, which has only played into Washington’s hands, its weapon programs have been bargaining chips in trying to secure its own survival, and a peace treaty to formally end the 1950-1953 Korean War.

Washington has demonized Pyongyang over its nuclear and missile programs in order to continually justify the militarization of the region following the dissolution of the Soviet Union in 1991. Faced with its relative economic decline and the growth of China’s own economic strength, the US has turned its militarist aim toward Beijing.

Washington sabotaged two previous agreements reached with Pyongyang in 1994 and 2007, reneging on promises to provide energy and other assistance. In order to assert pressure on China, successive US administrations have blamed Beijing for allowing the North Koreans to develop nuclear and missile programs.

Under both the Obama and Trump administrations, the US has deployed massive amounts of military personnel and hardware, completely out of proportion to the supposed North Korean threat, including nuclear-capable bombers, aircraft carriers and assassination squads, sharply escalating tensions and risking the outbreak of war.

If Kim does acquiesce to Trump, it will only set the stage for a sharpening of the conflict between the US and China. The US is attempting to subdue China and carry out a re-division of Asia to gain access to new markets, labor power, and raw materials. North Korea

is a critical strategic location for the US, China, Russia and Japan, and also has an estimated \$6 trillion in mineral reserves underground.

As well as seeking foreign investment, Pyongyang is wary of China's intentions, having previously expressed anger toward Beijing for supporting United Nations' sanctions demanded by the US.

China's leaders are worried that North Korea could shift toward Washington. Since the Korean War, Beijing has seen the North as a buffer between itself and the US, which maintains nearly 80,000 troops in South Korea and Japan.

An agreement between Washington and Pyongyang could ultimately see US troops on China's border, and the pointing of North Korea's guns towards its former ally. North Korea could also potentially be brought into new trans-Asian trade routes to challenge Beijing's One Belt, One Road Initiative.

South Korean President Moon Jae-in stated during a speech in Berlin last year: "The severed inter-Korean railway will be connected again. A train departing from Busan and Mokpo [in South Korea] will run through Pyongyang and Beijing, and head towards Russia and Europe. Cooperation projects in Northeast Asia, such as the gas pipeline project connecting the two Koreas and Russia, may also be implemented."

No doubt Washington envisions cutting Beijing out of such an arrangement altogether. Such a deal would contribute to the economic pressure the US is bringing to bear on China, which now includes punitive tariffs.

A US-North Korea deal, even if it could be struck, would not benefit the Korean people, however. Pyongyang has opened up more than a dozen special economic zones, offering up its population as a source of ultra-cheap labor to the United States, South Korea and other foreign countries.

In the short term, Seoul envisions the re-opening of the Kaesong Industrial Complex, which was closed under the previous Park Geun-hye administration in 2016. Exploited by South Korean companies, North Korean workers there made only \$180 a month.

While North Korea may be opened up to foreign capital, workers there would not be allowed to leave for the South, while Southern workers would be forced to accept even more attacks on their wages and working conditions, in the name of remaining competitive.

Workers in all the countries involved have a common

interest. The only solution to the escalating military and economic tensions on the Korean Peninsula and throughout the Asia-Pacific is through the unity of the working class in Korea, China, Japan, the United States and internationally to carry out a socialist program and end the system of nation-state conflict and capitalist exploitation.

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