

The Singapore summit and the growing war threat

13 June 2018

The meeting between US President Donald Trump and North Korean leader Kim Jong-un has been one of the most heavily covered events in recent history, drawing thousands of journalists to the city state of Singapore to report on it live around the world.

The first face-to-face encounter between a sitting American president and a North Korean leader in history, the summit has been repeatedly characterized as “historic.”

It is far from clear, however, what will be the ultimate outcome of this brief encounter between the leaders of two countries that are still formally in a state of war, 65 years after the US, North Korean and Chinese militaries agreed to a cease-fire in a conflict that claimed the lives of over three million people and left North Korea in a state of ruin.

The brief 400-word joint statement signed by Trump and Kim declares a mutual agreement to seek “new relations” between the two countries and to build “a lasting and robust peace regime on the Korean Peninsula.” While Trump “committed to provide security guarantees to the DPRK [Democratic People’s Republic of Korea],” Kim “reaffirmed his firm and unwavering commitment to complete denuclearization of the Korean Peninsula.”

Beyond that, the Singapore declaration provided nothing of substance as to how these stated goals and commitments are to be realized.

The tone of the meeting, with Trump praising Kim as a “very talented” and “very smart” man who “loves his country very much,” marked a striking change from his ridiculing of the North Korean leader last year as “little rocket man” and threatening to “totally destroy” his impoverished and oppressed nation with “fire and fury... the likes of which this world has never seen before.”

In a press conference after the summit, Trump

referred to the implications of his militaristic policy toward North Korea with the casualness of an unabashed sociopath. “This is really an honor for me to be doing this because, I think, you know, potentially, you could have lost, you know, 30, 40, 50 million people,” he said.

There are clearly no guarantees that the Singapore summit will not prove to be the prelude to a renewal and escalation of US war threats against North Korea. Significantly, Trump announced that the negotiations on concretizing the vague agreement he signed with Kim would be left in the hands of his secretary of state, Mike Pompeo, and national security adviser, John Bolton. Pompeo, as CIA director, suggested that the road to North Korea’s nuclear disarmament lay through the assassination of Kim Jong-un, while Bolton, as recently as last February, made the case in the *Wall Street Journal* for an unprovoked bombing campaign against the country.

More recently, Bolton suggested that the US negotiations with North Korea follow the “Libyan model,” which began with Muammar Gaddafi’s agreement to dismantle his weapons of mass destruction and ended with Gaddafi’s lynching at the hands of US-backed Islamist militiamen.

Washington’s record in dealing with those countries that have carried out disarmament programs under the threat of US military aggression and in the face of economic sanctions is hardly reassuring. The “Libya model” is the rule, not the exception.

Iraq and Libya were subjected to US wars for regime-change ending in the deaths of their respective leaders. Iran, which is confronting the renewal of punishing sanctions after the Trump administration unilaterally abrogated Tehran’s nuclear accord with the major powers, issued a warning Tuesday to North Korea that Trump could cancel the Singapore

agreement “before returning back home.”

Washington is motivated in its dealings with Kim Jong-un not by fear of his insignificant nuclear arsenal, much less by any quest for peace in Northeast Asia. Rather, it is seeking to advance US imperialism’s interests and strengthen its position in the region at the expense of its chief rivals, Russia and China, as well as potential competitors such as Japan. Turning North Korea—which shares borders with both Russia and China—from a US foe into a client state would represent a significant step in the preparation for the “great power” conflicts that the Pentagon and the White House have declared are on the horizon.

Trump pitched this effort to “flip” North Korea in the crudest possible manner. He showed the North Korean leader and his aides a four-minute movie clip produced by a Hollywood production company in the style of an action movie trailer, contrasting a prosperous future for North Korea under the domination of American capitalism (shown in color) with the alternative, the country’s total nuclear destruction (presented in black and white).

In the post summit press conference, the US president spoke of North Korea as if he were discussing a real estate development deal. “As an example, they have great beaches,” he said. “You see that whenever they’re exploding their cannons into the ocean, right? I said, ‘Boy, look at the view. Wouldn’t that make a great condo behind?’ And I explained, I said, ‘You know, instead of doing that, you could have the best hotels in the world right there.’ Think of it from a real estate perspective. You have South Korea, you have China, and they own the land in the middle. How bad is that, right?”

While reflecting the crude and semi-criminal outlook of a New York City real estate speculator, Trump’s words got the basic idea across.

The Singapore agreement cannot be understood outside of its global context, dominated by the drive to trade war and great power conflict led by Washington, which is imposing tariffs against its trade partners and escalating military tensions against both Russia and China.

On his way to Singapore, Trump walked out of the G7 summit in Canada, becoming the first head of state to refuse to sign a final communiqué since such summits began in 1975.

Subsequently, he and his aides denounced Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau, ostensibly Washington’s closest ally, in terms reminiscent of fascist rhetoric of the 1930s, accusing him of a “stab in the back” and declaring that there was a “special place in hell” reserved for him.

The agreement in Singapore may well prove to have its own 1930s precedents in similar treaties signed by Germany’s Nazi regime pledging mutual non-aggression with Poland and Russia, only to be followed in short order by all-out invasion.

It is noteworthy that the opposition to Trump by the Democratic Party is entirely from the right. On Tuesday, Senate Minority Leader Chuck Schumer denounced the US president for having “granted a brutal and repressive dictatorship the international legitimacy it has long craved.” He went on to condemn Trump for suspending US military exercises in South Korea and describing them—accurately—as “provocative.” Should a deal actually be reached with North Korea, there is every likelihood that the Democrats will seek to rip it up, just as Trump did with the Iran accord.

Trump’s trip to Singapore was motivated in no small part by his desire to shift the story from the multiple scandals in Washington and the unrelenting attacks over his failure to take a tougher stance against Russia. He knows that even the pretense of a turn away from a threat of nuclear war over North Korea and his vague rhetoric about bringing troops “home” from the Korean peninsula strike a chord among broad layers of the American population.

But the logic of the crisis gripping US and world capitalism turns toward world war. The only viable basis for a struggle against this threat lies in the mobilization of the working class internationally against capitalism.

Bill Van Auken

To contact the WSWS and the
Socialist Equality Party visit:

<http://www.wsws.org>