

The June 12 Trump-Kim Jong-un Summit

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On June 12, 2018, President Donald Trump and North Korean leader Kim Jong-un met in Singapore to discuss North Korea's nuclear program, building a peace regime on the Korean Peninsula, and the future of U.S. relations with North Korea (known officially as the Democratic People's Republic of Korea, or DPRK). During their summit, the first-ever meeting between leaders of the two countries, Trump and Kim issued a brief joint statement in which Trump "committed to provide security guarantees to the DPRK," and Kim "reaffirmed his firm and unwavering commitment to complete denuclearization of the Korean Peninsula." The Singapore document is shorter on details than previous nuclear agreements with North Korea and acts as a statement of principles in four areas

- **Normalization:** The two sides "commit to establish" new bilateral relations.
- **Peace:** The United States and DPRK agree to work to build "a lasting and stable peace regime."
- **Denuclearization:** North Korea "commits to work toward complete denuclearization of the Korean Peninsula," as was also promised in an April 2018 summit between Kim and South Korean leader Moon Jae-in.
- **POW/MIA remains:** The two sides will work to recover the remains of thousands of U.S. troops unaccounted for during the Korean War.

Speaking at a press conference without Kim after the summit, Trump said

- U.S.-DPRK denuclearization negotiations would continue and resume at an early date;
- Kim pledged to destroy a "major missile engine testing site";
- He will invite Kim to the White House;

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- He raised human rights issues with Kim, though “relatively briefly compared to denuclearization.” Trump appeared to downplay the state of DPRK human rights by saying that human rights conditions are also “rough in a lot of places”;
- The United States would suspend annual U.S.-South Korea military exercises, which Trump called “war games” and “provocative,” during nuclear negotiations. He said the move, which was not accompanied by any apparent commensurate move by Pyongyang and reportedly surprised South Korea and U.S. military commanders, would save “a tremendous amount of money.” Trump also expressed a hope of eventually withdrawing the approximately 30,000 U.S. troops stationed in South Korea. Postsummit remarks by the Administration created confusion about whether all exercises or only some types will be suspended.

Notable items not present in the statement or Trump’s remarks include details about a timeframe or verification protocols for denuclearization, and a commitment by Kim to dismantle the DPRK’s ballistic missile program.

Outcomes

The summit highlighted the change from 2017, when escalating tensions between North Korea and the United States led to increasingly tight U.S. and international sanctions and fears of a military conflict. In addition to the reduction of tensions, both sides can point to specific gains that have occurred since early 2018.

U.S. gains include

- Kim Jong-un’s public statements committing to begin a process of negotiating complete denuclearization;
- North Korea’s moratorium on nuclear and missile testing while dialogue continues;
- North Korea’s apparent destruction in May of its Pyunggye-ri nuclear test site before international journalists;
- Kim’s statement that he would destroy a missile test site; and
- North Korea’s release of three U.S. detainees and agreement to restart the POW/MIA recovery program, which the United States suspended in 2005.

DPRK gains include

- Breaking free from its diplomatic isolation. Following Trump’s March 2018 announcement that he would hold a summit, Kim has re-established friendly relations with China and Russia, and held two summits with South Korean President Moon;
 - Boosting Kim’s legitimacy and prestige by using nuclear and missile advancements to obtain a meeting with the U.S. President as an equal;
 - Loosening enforcement of sanctions against the DPRK economy;
 - An expectation of future foreign investment and economic and energy assistance if it denuclearizes;
 - A U.S. promise to provide “security guarantees”; and
 - Trump’s announcement of a unilateral cessation of U.S.-South Korean military exercises and his statement that he hopes to withdraw all U.S. forces from South Korea.
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Questions

The summit meeting raises numerous questions, including

- **Did North Korea promise to abandon its nuclear weapons?** What specific steps are needed to realize the DPRK's commitment "to work toward *complete* denuclearization?" [emphasis added] Should a timeline be set? Will this be subject to international verification? Some Korea-watchers worry Kim will use a prolonged negotiation, dismantlement, and verification process as a delaying tactic while sanctions pressure eases.
- **What does "denuclearization of the Korean Peninsula" mean?** Does this mean the same thing to both countries? Does this phrasing have implications for the U.S. alliance with South Korea?
- **How will talks about denuclearization, a possible peace declaration, and U.S.-DPRK normalization be sequenced and/or linked, if at all?** Will the Trump Administration link these talks to inter-Korean talks, and vice versa?
- **Will the United States be able to maintain a global pressure coalition while engaging with North Korea?** Although Trump Administration officials have said international pressure against North Korea will continue until North Korea either denuclearizes or takes concrete and irreversible steps (as yet undefined) to denuclearize, the incentives for countries to maintain the intensity of the pressure campaign, and scrutiny of countries' implementation of sanctions, arguably have diminished.
- **What are the implications for U.S. alliances, especially with South Korea?** Combined with his apparent lack of prior consultation with Seoul, Trump's statements on U.S. troops in South Korea are likely to weaken U.S. allies' confidence in the durability of U.S. security commitments and provide China and Russia with an argument against future U.S. exercises with allies.
- **Should negotiations include North Korea's other objectionable practices and programs,** like the DPRK's human rights record, cyberattacks, chemical and biological weapons, and sizeable conventional forces?
- **What will Congress's role be?** Congress could play a direct role in several aspects of an evolving U.S.-DPRK relationship. In addition to approving funding to implement various U.S. commitments and new U.S. diplomatic offices in North Korea, Secretary of State Mike Pompeo has testified that a U.S.-DPRK nuclear agreement would be submitted to the Senate as a treaty. Congress could also support or oppose moves not to enforce or lift sanctions. Congress may also weigh in on moves that affect U.S. alliances with South Korea and Japan.

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