

The February 2019 Trump-Kim Hanoi Summit

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Overview

On February 27 and 28, President Donald Trump and North Korean leader Kim Jong-un met in Hanoi to discuss North Korea's nuclear and missile programs, as well as the establishment of a new relationship between the two countries. The two leaders had held [one prior summit](#), in Singapore, in June 2018. The Hanoi summit ended earlier than scheduled, with the cancelation of both a lunch and a ceremony to sign a joint statement. President Trump and U.S. officials [said](#) that the two leaders parted amicably, and that they expected dialogue would resume at a later date. An article in [North Korea's state-run media](#) also presented the summit in a positive light and mentioned that the two leaders agreed to "continue productive dialogues." South Korean President Moon Jae-in [offered](#) to help the United States and North Korea narrow their differences.

The United States and North Korea (Democratic People's Republic of Korea, DPRK) each attributed the summit's breakdown to their inability to resolve differences over the scope and sequencing of concessions, specifically DPRK denuclearization measures in exchange for sanctions relief.

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North Korea's Nuclear and Missile Programs

Several issues stymied a summit agreement on next steps for denuclearization.

- **Denuclearization Definition:** The two sides do not appear to have an understanding on the definition of complete denuclearization, a goal Kim Jong-un has committed to in several settings.
- **Fissile Material Production Facilities:** In a [post-summit press conference](#), North Korean officials said they had offered to shut down fissile material production facilities, which can be used to make plutonium or highly enriched uranium (HEU), at the Yongbyon nuclear complex. However, this step would not necessarily have ended North Korea's ability to produce all nuclear weapons material. [U.S. intelligence community reports](#) have said there are [additional uranium enrichment plants outside of Yongbyon](#). Before the summit, U.S. negotiator Stephen Biegun said that [disclosure of enrichment sites other than Yongbyon](#) was to be a key part of negotiations. President Trump in his post-summit remarks referred to a lack of agreement on North Korea's disclosing a second uranium enrichment plant.
- **Declaration:** Another possible sticking point is whether and when North Korea will declare all of its nuclear weapons related stocks (plutonium, HEU, and warheads) and related facilities (including those outside of Yongbyon).
- **Inspections:** In his press conference following the summit, DPRK Foreign Minister Ri Yong Ho said that North Korea had proposed that [technical inspectors from the United States come to Yongbyon](#) to monitor the shuttering of fissile material production facilities there. The U.S. response is unknown.
- **Missiles:** It is unclear whether the DPRK's ballistic missile program was discussed in Hanoi.

Sanctions

The two sides appeared to be far apart on the issue of sanctions relief. President Trump stated that North Korea demanded the removal of sanctions "in their entirety." DPRK Foreign Minister Ri claimed that they had only asked for relief from United Nations Security Council (UNSC) sanctions imposed since 2016 that target North Korea's export of coal, iron, and other minerals; imports of petroleum; and other sectoral industries. This sanctions relief would leave in place only sanctions that restrict imports of arms, dual-use items, and luxury goods. The 2016-2017 sanctions are considered the most likely to isolate North Korea's economy if fully enforced.

In the period between the Singapore and Hanoi summits, Biegun [suggested](#) that sanctions relief could be implemented as an incremental incentive and reward as North Korea, also incrementally, moves toward verifiable denuclearization. Relieving sanctions could keep all parties engaged, provide momentum for the diplomatic process, and help build trust between Pyongyang and Seoul, which [would like to implement a range of inter-Korean projects](#) but cannot under the current sanctions regime.

Some critics of this approach contend that easing sanctions in the 2016-2017 UNSC resolutions would, in essence, end the multilateral sanctions regime that may have been central to bringing North Korea to the negotiating table. Some Members of Congress, after the Hanoi summit, called on the Trump Administration to resume using the legislative tools already in place to strengthen and broaden sanctions to include, for example, banks in China that conduct business for North Korea. For example, in the North Korea Sanctions and Policy Enhancement Act of 2016 (P.L. 114-122), Congress provided a statement of the goals to be achieved before relieving the pressures of sanctions, including an end to North Korea's

currency counterfeiting, money laundering, compliance with all U.N. Security Council requirements, return of abductees of foreign nations, and improved conditions in DPRK political prison camps. U.S. and U.N. sanctions are imposed on North Korea to address a broad range of behavior; comprehensive sanctions relief in response to denuclearization could be seen to diminish the importance of the other rationales for sanctions.

Other Issues

- **Missile and nuclear testing.** According Secretary of State Mike Pompeo, Kim promised to [maintain the moratorium on nuclear and missile tests](#) that North Korea has had in place since late November 2017. Satellite imagery reveals that in recent weeks [North Korea has started restoring structures](#) at its Sohae missile and satellite launch site.
- **Peace declaration and liaison offices.** The United States and North Korea were expected to issue in Hanoi a declaration formally ending the Korean War and to announce the exchange of diplomatic liaison offices. After the summit, a senior State Department official involved in the negotiations [said](#) “... our view is that all these pieces [including denuclearization] fit together and ... have to move in parallel.”

U.S.-South Korea military exercises. On March 2, the United States and South Korea announced a [permanent halt to large-scale U.S.-South Korean military exercises](#) and their replacement with smaller exercises. President Trump [cited](#) the exercises’ cost as the reason for their cessation. Prior to Trump’s original suspension of the exercises after the Singapore summit, U.S. defense officials often said that the annual [large-scale exercises were critical to maintaining military readiness](#). According to the commander of U.S. forces in South Korea, over the past year [North Korea has continued to hold its own military exercises](#) “on a scale consistent with recent years.”

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