# Trump on defensive over North Korean summit

**Peter Symonds**
**21 July 2018**

Already facing a hysterical storm of opposition after his summit with Russian President Vladimir Putin, US President Donald Trump has sought to stem criticism on another front—the failure of his much-vaunted meeting with North Korean leader Kim Jong-un on June 12 in Singapore to produce concrete results.

Both issues are bound up with vicious political infighting in Washington over the direction of American foreign policy. As Trump ramps up his trade war measures and confrontation with China, powerful sections of the military and intelligence apparatus backed by the Democrats are pressing for more aggressive moves against Russia and accuse Trump of "appeasement" towards Putin.

Trump's push for a summit meeting with North Korean leader Kim was driven in part by his desire for a diplomatic "win" to answer critics at home. More fundamentally, however, the White House is seeking a deal with Pyongyang, not so much over its nuclear programs, which pose no serious threat to the US, but rather to align itself with Washington against Beijing.

Following the Singapore summit, Trump declared that North Korea no longer posed a nuclear threat. His joint statement with Kim, however, spoke only in general terms about a commitment to the denuclearisation of the Korean Peninsula—a phrase that can, and will be, interpreted differently.

The gulf between the two sides was highlighted earlier this month. Following negotiations in Pyongyang with US Secretary of State Mike Pompeo, the North Korean regime issued a blistering denunciation of Washington's "gangster-like" demands, saying they ran "counter to the spirit of the Singapore summit."

In a bid to answer his critics at home, Trump on Tuesday declared that the US has no time limit for the concretisation of agreement that he struck in Singapore. Despite Pyongyang's condemnation of the talks with Pompeo, he told reporters: "Discussions are ongoing and they're going very, very well … We have no time limit. We have no speed limit."

Trump bragged about his administration's achievements, declaring: "The sanctions [on North Korea] are remaining. The hostages are back. There have been no tests. There have been no rockets going up for a period of nine months, and I think the relationships are very good, so we'll see how that goes."

The remarks underscore Washington's bullying methods in talks with North Korea. In return for a temporary, readily reversible, suspension of joint US military exercises with South Korea and worthless security guarantees, North Korea has halted its nuclear and missile tests, as well as handed over three imprisoned US citizens.

Moreover, the US has maintained crippling economic bans on North Korea and rejected suggestions by China and Russia that the sanctions be eased as a sign of good faith. UN and unilateral US sanctions block virtually all North Korean exports, and place severe limits on its imports, particularly of oil and petroleum products. Washington is also pursuing its unsubstantiated allegations that Russia, China and South Korea are breaching the sanctions.

Critics of the Singapore summit have pointed to North Korea's failure to begin to dismantle its nuclear weapons and programs, and accuse Pyongyang of extending its facilities. In other words, North Korea should unilaterally disarm, despite bellicose threats by Trump over the past year to "totally destroy" the country, and before steps to remove sanctions, let alone provide any genuine security guarantees.

© World Socialist Web Site

As well as hailing the achievements of the Singapore summit, Trump declared that his meeting with Putin would assist in forcing North Korea to accept US demands. He tweeted on Wednesday: "Russia has agreed to help with North Korea, where relationships with us are very good and the process is moving along. There is no rush, the sanctions remain! Big benefits and exciting future for North Korea at end of process!"

Pompeo also defended the deal struck in Singapore, echoing Trump in insisting there was no time-frame for denuclearisation. Speaking to Fox News on Thursday, he declared the critics were "simply speculating." He said North Korea had "consistently reaffirmed their commitment" to the agreement, adding: "No one was in any confusion that this was going to happen in hours or days."

After Trump's remarks this week, Japan's government said it did not expect any change to its policy on North Korea, and urged Pyongyang to follow through on its commitment toward "complete denuclearisation." At a news conference on Wednesday, Yoshihide Suga, Japan's chief cabinet secretary, said: "We are co-ordinating closely with the US regarding how North Korea will achieve denuclearisation."

The lack of any time-frame is undoubtedly generating concerns among US allies, South Korea and Japan, that their interests are being ignored in the talks between Washington and Pyongyang.

Last Friday South Korean President Moon Jae-in urged both sides to try harder to achieve a breakthrough in talks, warning they would "face the stern judgment of the international community" if their promises in Singapore were not kept. Moon has staked his own political capital on ending tensions and the danger of another devastating war on the Korean Peninsula, as well as transforming North Korea into a cheap labour platform for South Korean corporations.

While publicly backing the US-North Korean negotiations, Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe is seeking direct talks with Kim Jong-un to push his own agenda, including the return of Japanese citizens abducted decades ago by North Korea. Abe has exploited the North Korean "threat" to advance plans for Japanese remilitarisation. If Pyongyang were allowed to keep short- and medium-range missile—either through lengthy delays or tacit US agreement—Abe would quickly come under pressure from his right-wing, militarist constituency in the ruling elites.

The danger of a rapid slide back toward war remains. The comments by US Director of National Intelligence Dan Coats on Thursday at the Aspen Security Conference in Colorado underscore the cynical character of the Trump administration's approach to negotiations with North Korea.

Coats agreed with Trump and Pompeo that any agreement was "a much more complicated process than most people think" and was "going to take some time." He noted that the punitive economic sanctions were supported by China, Russia and other nations, dramatically driving down Pyongyang's exports and forcing Kim Jong-un to consider "a potential collapse of his economy if he can't do something moving forward with this."

In a rather off-hand justification for the talks, Coats declared: "Having the opportunity to try to succeed here instead potentially going to war with a potentially nuclear-armed nation and what we have evaluated as a somewhat unstable leader, why not give it a shot?"

In other words, if the economic pressure being brought to bear does not force North Korea to capitulate to US demands, the military option remains on the table. This would be a war, potentially involving nuclear weapons, that could drag in major powers such as China and Russia.

To contact the WSWS and the Socialist Equality Party visit:

**wsws.org/contact**

© World Socialist Web Site