

Washington and Pyongyang in talks for second summit

Ben McGrath**13 September 2018**

Negotiations for a second summit between US President Donald Trump and North Korea Chairman Kim Jong-un have begun, according to the White House on Monday. Since the two leaders' first meeting on June 10 in Singapore, nothing has been resolved because Washington continues to demand North Korea denuclearize without any concessions from the US.

In announcing possible new talks, White House press secretary Sarah Sanders claimed that Trump had received a "very warm, very positive" letter from Kim in recent days. The administration pointed to Pyongyang's decision not to display intercontinental ballistic missiles during its September 9 founding anniversary parade as a supposed sign that it could be pressured to make further concessions to the US.

A second summit, if it even takes place, is indicative of the intense pressure the Trump administration is under from within and outside the government. Just three weeks ago, Trump cancelled Secretary of State Mike Pompeo's planned fourth visit to Pyongyang a day after its announcement, citing a lack of progress on negotiations.

US National Security Advisor John Bolton, who has previously called for military action against North Korea, struck a pessimistic tone toward any talks. "The possibility of another meeting between the two presidents obviously exists, but President Trump can't make North Korea walk through the door he's holding open. They're the ones that have to take the steps to denuclearize, and that's what we're waiting for," he said.

In other words, if Pyongyang refuses to denuclearize in line with Washington's agenda, the North will be responsible for the consequences of US actions, which would almost certainly include a military attack. In the short term, Washington is demanding that Pyongyang

hand over 60 to 70 percent of its nuclear weapons within a six-to-eight month period, while ignoring the North's requests for an easing of economic sanctions and a formal treaty to end the 1950-1953 Korean War.

Pyongyang fears that without the security guarantee of a formal treaty it will end up like Libya. After giving up its own weapons program, US imperialism still targeted Libya for regime change and murdered its leader Muammar Gaddafi.

North Korea has made a few overtures toward the US, including halting nuclear and missile tests, demolishing a missile-testing site, and returning the remains of US soldiers killed during the 1950-53 Korean War. Aside from postponing US-South Korea war games usually held in August, the US has done nothing to reciprocate Pyongyang's moves. Secretary of Defense James Mattis said at the end of last month: "We have no plans at this time to suspend any more [military] exercises."

Any shift toward ending the formal state of war on the Korean Peninsula would immediately call into question why 28,500 US troops continue to remain stationed in South Korea. As the US intensifies great power conflict, including war preparations with China, Washington has no intention of taking any action that cuts across this agenda, making any deal short of Pyongyang's complete capitulation unlikely.

At the same time, Trump hopes to secure a foreign policy victory ahead of the November 6 mid-term elections in the US. Trump told a campaign rally last week: "[Kim] said very strongly that we want to denuclearize North Korea during President Trump's tenure."

This is in response to pressure from the Democrats and their allies in the media who hope to exploit the president's alleged "softness" on US adversaries to

build up the military and intelligence agencies ahead of the election.

On Monday, former Secretary of State John Kerry criticized Trump's handling of the negotiations with Pyongyang. In an interview with PBS News Hour, Kerry claimed that Russia, China, and North Korea were taking advantage of the president.

Kerry alleged that North Korea continues to produce nuclear weapons in secret, stating: "What we hear from our intel community is that they are continuing the production behind the scenes, quietly, under the table. And there are great indications that, in fact, Chairman Kim is playing rope-a-dope."

However, what the Democrats mean is that Trump has failed to adequately ramp up pressure on Washington's targets, in particular Russia. The Democrats want to paint the US president as being played by foreign adversaries and therefore incapable of carrying out the demands of US imperialism.

An NBC News article on Monday cited three unnamed senior US officials who claimed that North Korea was secretly continuing to build and hide nuclear weapons. "They're trying to move [weapons] around so our sensors are confused," one official reportedly said. They claimed North Korea is still capable of producing five to eight nuclear weapons in 2018.

This criticism of Pyongyang, however, ignores the fact that no deal has yet been reached between the US and North Korea beyond a broad agreement at the Singapore summit to "denuclearize the Korean Peninsula."

Trump's ultimate target is China. The barely-veiled purpose of the first Trump-Kim meeting was to issue an ultimatum to the North Korean leadership: join the US war drive against China or be destroyed. While Trump may believe he can win Pyongyang away from Beijing by covering up these threats with public flattery, ultimately the belligerent language of all-out war that marked Trump's first year in office will be back on the table if Pyongyang does not play ball.

Trump has also continued to criticize Beijing, drawing direct connections between North Korea and trade with China. "President Donald J. Trump feels strongly that North Korea is under tremendous pressure from China because of our major trade disputes with the Chinese government. At the same time, we also know that China is providing North Korea with

considerable aid, including money, fuel, fertilizer and various other commodities. This is not helpful!" Trump said in a tweet on August 29.

Jin Qiangyi, a North Korea expert at China's Yanbian University, stated: "This is not just a political issue; it's crucial for the economic ties between North Korea and the three northeastern provinces of China." If economic relations between Beijing and Pyongyang improve, Washington fears it will lose a major tool in leveraging Pyongyang away from Beijing, voiding the purpose of Trump's overtures.

Whatever the immediate manoeuvres by the Trump White House, Washington will continue to seek to pull Pyongyang out of Beijing's orbit while resisting any changes to its own position on the Korean Peninsula as it prepares for war with China.



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