

Trump to hold second summit with North Korean leader

Peter Symonds
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The dates and place for a second summit between US President Trump and North Korean leader Kim Jong-un have been set following the visit last week to Pyongyang by US special representative for North Korea Stephen Biegun. The summit is due to take place on February 27-28 in Hanoi, Vietnam.

For Trump, a great deal hinges on the meeting amid ongoing criticism in ruling circles in Washington over the lack of significant progress towards North Korea abandoning its nuclear weapons and facilities, following the first summit in Singapore last June. The US president lauded the outcome of that meeting although the joint statement amounted to nothing more than a general agreement to denuclearise the Korean Peninsula.

Trump was effusive about the prospects, tweeting that he was looking forward “to seeing Chairman Kim & advancing the cause of peace!” In a subsequent tweet on Friday, he held out the prospect of transforming North Korea economically if a deal could be reached at the summit.

“North Korea, under the leadership of Kim Jong-un, will become a great economic powerhouse. He may surprise some but he won’t surprise me, because I have gotten to know him & fully understand how capable he is. North Korea will become a different kind of rocket—an economic one!” Trump declared.

Trump is undoubtedly holding out the possibility of ending decades of diplomatic and economic isolation of North Korea to encourage Kim to make significant steps towards denuclearisation. However, the tweet also suggests that Trump is seeking to entice North Korea into closer diplomatic and economic ties with the US and distancing itself from its ally China.

The Hanoi summit takes place on the eve of Trump’s deadline for a deal with Beijing to avert the

implementation of harsher trade war measures on China. Trump’s economic warfare is part of his broader confrontation with China, including naval provocations near Chinese islets in the South China Sea and a broader military build-up throughout the Indo-Pacific region. Encouraging North Korea out of China’s orbit is part of US efforts to isolate Beijing diplomatically.

There are, however, major obstacles to a deal at the Hanoi summit. Pyongyang remains understandably cautious about giving up its nuclear arsenal, which it regards as its only protection against a US-backed regime change operation or invasion of the country. Kim is well aware of the fate of the leaders of Iraq and Libya who bowed to demands to give up their so-called weapons of mass destruction only to be ousted and killed.

North Korea has repeatedly called for steps towards a peace treaty with the US to formally end the 1950-53 Korean War that concluded only with an armistice to halt fighting. Washington has so far refused to make such a concession. While North Korea has halted all weapons testing, the US, in return, only suspended major war games with South Korea.

US special representative Stephen Biegun held talks last week with his North Korean counterpart Kim Hyok-chol, to establish the agenda for the Trump-Kim summit. A US State Department statement said that the two had discussed “advancing Trump and Kim’s Singapore summit commitments of complete denuclearisation, transforming US-DPRK relations, and building a lasting peace on the Korean Peninsula.”

Biegun told a visiting South Korean delegation in Washington yesterday that he had reached a basic framework of agreement with North Korea but that “negotiations will take time.” While the discussions

had been “constructive and productive,” he declared, the punitive sanctions regime on North Korea had to remain in place until final, fully verified denuclearization was achieved.

Biegun added that differences remained and that he planned to hold another meeting with North Korea’s special representative prior to the Hanoi summit in a bid to resolve outstanding disagreements. Pyongyang has insisted on a step-by-step reduction in sanctions, rather than their removal only after it has completely given up its nuclear weapons.

Trump’s critics have repeatedly pointed to signs that North Korea has continued its nuclear and missile programs as proof of bad faith. However, the first summit in Singapore did not lay out a detailed plan for denuclearisation, nor did it bind the North Korean regime to completely abandon the production of weapons. Pyongyang is acutely aware that two previous denuclearisation agreements in 1994 and 2007 were effectively sabotaged by Washington.

Moreover, while suspending its joint exercises with South Korea, the US has never taken the military option to attack North Korea off the table. Less than two years ago, Trump was threatening to completely destroy North Korea if it did not meet a US demand to give up its nuclear arsenal.

Speaking at a hearing of the Senate Armed Services Committee yesterday, General Robert Abrams, commander of US Forces Korea, said that while a second Trump-Kim summit was positive, North Korea remained a potent threat.

“I remain clear-eyed about the fact that despite a reduction in tensions along the DMZ and a cessation of strategic provocations coupled with public statements of intent to denuclearize, little to no verifiable change has occurred in North Korea’s military capabilities,” he said.

It was necessary for the US military to “maintain a postured and ready force to deter any possible aggressive actions,” Abrams declared, making clear that the US has no intention of removing its 28,500 military personnel from South Korea. In fact, the US has just bullied South Korea into agreeing to a new basing agreement that will cost Seoul \$890 million for 2019.

The real threat of war comes not from North Korea, but from the US. If a deal is struck with North Korea, it

will not enhance the prospects of peace, but will rather accelerate the US war drive against China. US imperialism is determined to prevent China becoming a threat to its ambitions for global domination, by any means, including a potentially catastrophic war between nuclear-armed powers.



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