

What You Need to Know About Negotiations with North Korea



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Takeaways

A summit between President Trump and North Korean Leader Kim Jong Un took place on June 12, 2018. An agreement between the two was signed but more in-depth talks between the United States and North Korea are scheduled to continue. Ultimately, negotiations with North Korea are the best way to reduce the threat the country's nuclear weapons pose to the United States and its allies in the long-term. But follow-on negotiations have to show progress for the United States, and Donald Trump has seemed far too willing to accommodate North Korean and Chinese demands.

A smart and tough deal with North Korea would include:

- Specific and immediate steps to eliminate North Korea's inventory of ballistic missiles capable of hitting parts of the United States.
- A path to reducing and eliminating their arsenal of nuclear weapons.
- A verification regime to ensure North Korea does not cheat on any deal to counteract the North's long history of violating nuclear agreements; and

- Security guarantees coordinated with U.S. allies, especially South Korea and Japan.

Trump did four things that put the United States in a weak negotiating position before this summit:

- Lowered his opening bid for negotiations every time he talked about the summit;
- Got outfoxed by China, which was more prepared for the talks, while Trump seemed desperate for a signing ceremony;
- Sowed chaos and confusion before negotiations even begin; and
- Alienated U.S. allies who are critical in securing a deal with North Korea.

President Trump gave away more than he gained for the United States at his summit with Kim Jong Un. While repeatedly fawning over him, Trump elevated the tyrant Kim on the world stage, claimed a victory lap for signing a weak and vague agreement that does little to address the nuclear threat from North Korea, and was outmaneuvered by China.

U.S. President Donald Trump met with North Korean leader Kim Jong Un in Singapore on June 12, 2018. This was the first time a sitting American president has ever met with the leader of this reclusive regime. The two discussed North Korea's nuclear weapons program in an effort to negotiate a resolution to the ongoing tension between North Korea and the global community.

Despite Trump's insistence North Korea is no longer a threat to the United States, North Korea continues to pose a tremendous threat to the United States and its Asia Pacific allies, through both its nuclear and conventional arsenals.

North Korea has spent years developing and testing nuclear weapons that threaten the region, including our allies, South Korea and Japan. Now, thanks to advances in its ballistic missile technology, North Korea has a functional nuclear weapon and inter-continental ballistic missiles capable of striking parts of the continental United States. Tensions between North Korea, the United States, and our allies have increased with the North's advancement of its nuclear and ballistic missile programs. North and South Korea technically remain at war after the

Korean War ended only in an armistice. In addition to nuclear weapons, North Korea has packed enough conventional firepower on its border to destroy the South's capital, Seoul, in a matter of hours if war ever broke out.¹ It also has a large arsenal of chemical and biological weapons. A war on the Korean Peninsula could lead to the deaths of millions of people on both sides of the border, including possibly hundreds of thousands of Americans.² This threat must be dealt with through negotiations to denuclearize North Korea.

Americans of all stripes support diplomatic efforts to resolve the crisis over North Korea's nuclear weapons program. There is reason to believe North Korea, feeling squeezed and isolated by years of global sanctions, could negotiate a deal that lowers the nuclear threat to the United States and its allies in exchange for economic incentives. This would be similar to the Iran nuclear deal from which President Trump just withdrew. Ultimately, negotiations between the United States and North Korea, not fighting, is the best way to reduce the threat of North Korea. But Trump gave away more than he received from North Korea at the summit and was outfoxed by China, which was more prepared for the summit than the United States.³

The Trump Administration has said that negotiations with North Korea over its nuclear weapons program will continue after this summit.⁴ Any further agreement between the United States and North Korea must be smart and tough and include actionable steps the North will commit to for complete, verifiable denuclearization.

A smart and tough deal with North Korea would include these things:

1. The elimination of North Korea's inventory of intercontinental ballistic missiles that allow for a nuclear bomb to be launched on parts of the United States.

North Korea possess an inventory of different types of vehicles that can deliver a nuclear warhead, including short-, medium-, and long-range ballistic missiles. In recent years, it has developed new and longer-range intercontinental ballistic missiles (ICBM) that are thought to be able to reach parts of the continental United States. This means North Korea could conceivably hit parts of the country with a nuclear bomb if it is not stopped.⁵ This is a real and serious threat to the United States. North Korea has also been one of the most prolific exporters of its ballistic missile technology for its financial gain, presenting tremendous security concerns about who the country has and could sell this technology to.⁶

A smart and tough deal with North Korea would immediately eliminate the country's ICBM capabilities as this presents a direct threat to the

United States. While it is a positive step that North Korea has agreed to suspend its ICBM testing to allow for negotiations,⁷ the country has made no commitment yet regarding its ballistic missile program. The United States and its allies as well as the United Nations have imposed a series of sanctions on North Korea for both its nuclear and ballistic missile programs but these sanctions have not put a stop to the country's advancement of these programs and many issues in getting other countries to comply with these sanctions and not do business with North Korea remain.⁸ Any deal the United States makes must aim to eliminate the threat of the country's ICBMs and deal with the threat of all ranges of its delivery vehicles to protect America's allies.

2. Specific, measurable steps to eventually eliminate North Korea's nuclear weapons arsenal.

North Korea has a significant stockpile of nuclear material to make a large number of weapons that could cause massive destruction and loss of life to our allies and conceivably parts of the United States. Some U.S. intelligence estimates have indicated that North Korea has enough fissile material for up to 60 nuclear warheads,⁹ with up to 20 of these warheads possibly already assembled.¹⁰ Of tremendous concern, a 2017 assessment from the U.S. Defense Intelligence Agency reportedly assessed that North Korea has the capability to miniaturize a nuclear warhead that can actually fit onto an ICBM,¹¹ which, if true, would be a significant step in giving the country the capability to hit parts of the continental United States. Since 2006, the country has also conducted a number of nuclear tests, which may be done to test the capabilities of its weapons.¹²

Any deal with North Korea must focus on laying out specific, measurable steps the country will take to eventually eliminate its arsenal of nuclear warheads, including the massive amount of fissile material it holds to continue to fully assemble new warheads. The ultimate end-goal of any negotiated deal should be the complete, verifiable denuclearization of North Korea.

3. A strong inspection and verification regime to prevent more broken promises.

North Korea has a long history of breaking its promises on nuclear deals. In 1994, North Korea negotiated an Agreed Framework under which the United States agreed to supply North Korea with light water reactors in exchange for freezing its nuclear program.¹³ But the deal fell apart in 2002 when the United States alleged North Korea started its program back up again.¹⁴ In 2003, North Korea pulled out of the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT), which requires non-nuclear weapons states to commit to not developing or acquiring a nuclear weapon. In 2009, Six-Party Talks on North Korea's nuclear program that involved the

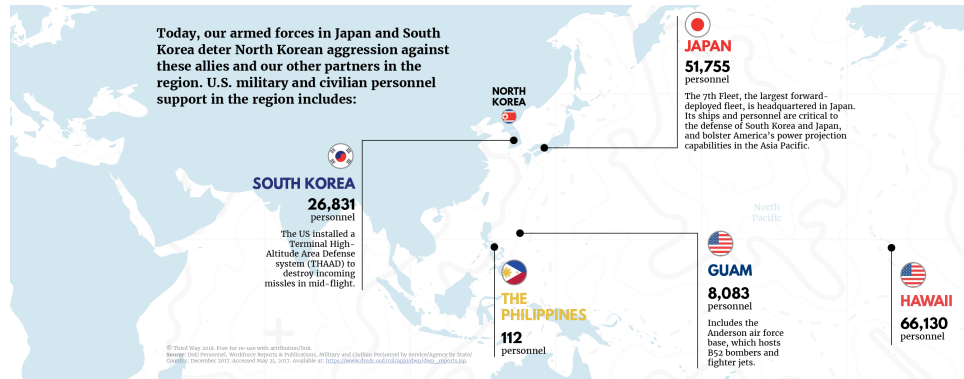
United States also broke down after North Korea walked away. More recently, in 2012, North Korea promised to stop enriching uranium and halt new tests while allowing international inspectors to enter the country in exchange for humanitarian aid. But this promising development quickly fell apart when North Korea conducted a long-range missile test.¹⁵

This time, North Korea could try to avoid its obligations by playing on differences in definitions with the United States on what denuclearization would mean. North Korea had threatened to cancel the summit over U.S. insistence that “unilateral nuclear abandonment” is the starting point for negotiations. Instead, North Korea wants denuclearization to apply to the entire Korean Peninsula, including the removal of U.S. conventional forces on the Peninsula, which could mean abandoning our South Korean allies. The summit did not resolve this fundamental tension.

The United States should pursue a strategy of *not trusting but verifying* in negotiations over North Korea’s nuclear weapons program. This must include an agreement by North Korea to declare the scope of its nuclear program and then an extensive architecture established to allow international inspectors to verify the scope of the North’s program and regularly inspect that the country is upholding its end of any deal. North Korea has a track record of talking, shaking hands with high-level diplomats, signing agreements—only to break them. President Trump has signaled eagerness to conclude some sort of deal, lavishing Kim Jong Un with praise for gestures like releasing American hostages held by North Korea. The United States should stay focused on measurable denuclearization, including a strong and transparent verification and inspection regime, and not be satisfied with symbolic gestures.

4. Coordination with our allies in the region, particularly South Korea and Japan.

The United States has strong partnerships with South Korea and Japan, who are essential negotiating partners. The United States has signed separate treaties with South Korea and Japan that provide for the mutual defense of our nations. Over 28,000 American troops are stationed in South Korea¹⁶ and around 40,000 in Japan¹⁷, in part to deter against North Korean aggression. They would bear the greatest human cost of any conflict with North Korea, which is why any security guarantees in these negotiations must be carefully coordinated with our allies.



North Korean demands that the United States withdraw its forces from the Korean Peninsula in exchange for ending its nuclear weapons program could further undermine the U.S. relationship with its allies while strengthening China's hand in the region. Any negotiations on a change in the U.S. force posture in the region must be coordinated with these allies. It appears that President Trump has already caved in to North Korea demands to cancel joint military exercises with South Korea.¹⁸ These joint exercises are essential preparation for American troops working with South Korea partners to be ready for conflict and canceling them undermines American military readiness. The United States should not make concessions that weaken our military while the threat from North Korea's nuclear weapons program remains unabated. Any concessions should be reciprocal as North Korea takes specific steps of their own.

Four ways Trump has weakened our negotiating position:

The Trump Administration has said it wants to "quickly" achieve denuclearization in North Korea while believing this can be done in one or a few meetings.¹⁹ There have been many agreements made with North Korea under previous U.S. administrations that the North has not abided by. To think this will be a quick process is to ignore the history of North Korean nuclear negotiations. Decades of sanctions and isolation of the North Korean regime have only caused the country to advance its nuclear weapons and ballistic programs, not dismantle them. North Korea will not just hand over its weapons without getting something in return and there is no history to suggest otherwise. This summit must be viewed as the beginning of a negotiation process not the end in and of itself. If the United States cannot address all of the key issues for a tough and smart deal than it needs to keep returning to the table until it can.

The Trump Administration has shown it will be unable to do this, however, if it continues to:

1. Lower bids even before negotiations start.

The Trump Administration has claimed symbolic steps as “victories”²⁰ before the Trump-Kim summit was even held, and in doing so constantly lowered expectations for what the United States would accept as an outcome. The goal for a deal with North Korea is reducing the threat the country poses to the United States, not publicity for the President. It is possible that North Korea’s destruction of its nuclear test site may have been only a symbolic gesture, and at worse a total ruse. No nuclear experts (just journalists) were on site to verify whether the destruction was done fully and is not reversible.²¹ The release of three American hostages were seen as important confidence-building measures leading into negotiations, but these actions also underscore the brutality and capriciousness of the Kim regime. While the United States insisted first on complete denuclearization, later, they shifted to a series of steps, and then President Trump set expectations as simply getting to know Kim Jung Un. Negotiating against himself is no way to get a good outcome for America.

The United States must go into further negotiations being clear on a realistic strategy with viable end-goals and strong demands for North Korea. The agreement signed by President Trump and Kim Jong Un did not include any agreed upon definitions or commitments as to how North Korea will denuclearize and what verification for this process would look like. By inflating small concessions as big “victories,” the United States is sending the wrong signal to North Korea that our biggest priority is achieving a deal the Administration can showcase and not a smart and tough one.

2. Let China run the show.

China continues to whisper in North Korea’s ear throughout this process. Kim visited China immediately before the summit and shortly thereafter—meeting both times with Chinese President Xi Jinping. The resolution of hostilities with North Korea must not also open the door for China to have more power and impose its will on our allies in the region. China’s cooperation and leverage would likely be critical for an effective and sustainable deal with North Korea,²² but China is playing a long game. China continues to threaten our allies over a number of territorial disputes, and has a history of malicious behavior toward the United States such as cyber-attacks.²³ Already, President Trump has signaled a willingness to not ban Chinese telecommunications company ZTE from doing business in the United States even though the U.S. Intelligence Community has said it presents a security threat to American consumers.²⁴ While the President’s motivations for doing so are unclear, the United States must be careful not to make China the big winner in negotiations.

3. Sow chaos and confusion before negotiations even begin.

The Administration was unprepared for the summit, and it showed in a lack of a consistent strategy and messaging on North Korea that only served to create chaos and confusion instead of advancing peace. For example, the Administration's mixed-messaging on whether it would be using Libya as a model for negotiations and what that means only served to reinforce North Korea's long-standing fears that the United States is solely interested in removing the country's leadership from power. Libya abandoned its much less advanced nuclear program in 2003; the country's leader Muammar Gaddafi was killed by his own people following a U.S.-led military intervention in 2011. By mentioning Libya and then backtracking, at the very least it shows the Administration is divided when it comes to North Korea.

Further, President Trump's recent decision to tear up the Iran nuclear deal has also contributed to the chaos and confusion surrounding negotiations with North Korea. This decision demonstrated that the United States might be willing to violate any deal it makes on countries' nuclear weapons programs in the future and go it alone without our allies. The signal this sends to North Korea is unmistakable—what the United States agrees to today may, in fact, not be what the United States respects tomorrow. President Trump's decision to walk away alone from the Iran deal, particularly when the United States and international inspectors agreed that Iran was not violating the agreement, sends a message to adversaries like North Korea that they cannot take the United States at its word in negotiations.²⁵

4. Alienate America's allies.

South Korea's President Moon Jae In has been a critical partner to the United States pushing North Korea to the negotiating table.

Unfortunately, in return, when President Trump cancelled the summit with North Korea he did not notify South Korea ahead of time.²⁶

Further, his cancellation letter focused only on the discussions between the United States and North Korea, minimizing the roles of our allies.²⁷

An effective and sustainable deal with North Korea can only be negotiated if our partners in the region are in lock-step with us. Any deal will likely have to involve changes to U.S. and international sanctions on North Korea and for that to work it requires U.S. partners who have imposed these sanctions to agree to do so. Keeping them in the dark on negotiations will only set up a deal for failure.





Trump Gave Away More Than He Gained at the Summit

President Trump and Kim Jong Un signed an agreement after the June 12th summit. It contained only four vague commitments: (1) establishing new U.S.-North Korean relations; (2) building lasting and stable peace on the Korean Peninsula, (3) reaffirming the North Korean commitment toward complete denuclearization, and (4) recovering remains of prisoners of war or those missing in action.

This deal may actually end up hurting America’s security instead of bolstering it. It made vague promises of “denuclearization” in exchange for security guarantees, but included no specific, measurable steps on either and failed to even offer an agreed upon definition of denuclearization—a major sticking point in past agreements. Trump sacrificed the readiness of American troops in South Korea without achieving any major concessions from North Korea. He has given North Korea legitimacy as a nuclear power on the global stage while giving away key leverage the United States had for negotiations. Moreover, by praising Kim Jong Un profusely despite his grotesque human rights record, Trump has made the United States look desperate for a deal while giving credibility to a brutal dictator.

Trump has made false claims about the concessions he received from Kim Jong Un regarding North Korea’s ballistic missile program in return.²⁸ Thus far, North Korea has not dismantled any of its known missile launch and engine test facilities, despite his claims to the contrary.²⁹ Nor has Kim agreed to inspections of his facilities by neutral independent weapons inspectors, simply allowing a few journalists with no expertise in weapons design tour one facility.³⁰ The commitment President Trump secured from North Korea on denuclearization has been secured by multiple former U.S. Presidents in past agreements, but past Presidents were also able to obtain specific commitments to halt or roll back particular elements of North Korea’s weapons complex.³¹

AMERICAN PRESIDENTS VS. NORTH KOREA

	Pledge Denuclearization	Nuclear Testing Freeze	Ballistic Missile Testing Freeze	Submit to International Inspections	Suspend Reprocessing & Enrichment	Destroy Nuclear Facilities
 Clinton	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
 Bush	✓			✓		✓
 Obama	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	
 Trump	✓					

America's security will suffer further if the United States signs another weak and vague deal like this one in follow-on negotiations.

Conclusion

North Korea poses a tremendous threat to the United States and its Asia Pacific allies. Ultimately, negotiations are the best option to reduce the threat of North Korea and maintain the security of the United States and its regional allies. But a smart and tough deal with North Korea must include strong and transparent inspection and verification mechanisms to ensure the North is not able to cheat on any deal, be closely coordinated with U.S. regional allies who provide critical deterrence against North Korean aggression, and eliminate the capability of North Korea to hit the United States with a nuclear bomb. In signing the June 12 deal with Kim Jong Un, President Trump gave more and got less than any American President before him. Let's hope the next time around he can get a better deal.

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