

The Trump-Kim Summit: What Really Happened in Hanoi?

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While the western media has written off last weekend's summit in Hanoi as a failure, the talks did help to burnish Kim Jong-un's reputation as a sincere statesman committed to peacefully resolving the nuclear issue. This is a significant development for the simple reason that Kim needs to continue to build popular support for his cause if he hopes to prevail in the long-term. In that regard, the lifting of sanctions is not nearly as important as Kim's broader goal of ending Washington's military occupation of the Korean peninsula and reunifying the country. In order to achieve those objectives, Kim will need the support of his allies in Moscow and Beijing as well as that of the Korean people. His disciplined performance in Hanoi suggests that he is entirely deserving of that support.

There's no way to know whether Kim expected President Trump to put the kibosh on the deal or not. But with uber-hawks like Mike Pompeo and John Bolton at the bargaining table, he must have figured that there was a high probability of failure. Was that why Kim made such a generous offer during the negotiations? Was it part of a plan to make him look good because he knew Trump would throw a wrench in the works?

It's hard to say, but it's clear that Kim emerged from the confab looking much more amenable and statesmanlike than Trump. From the very beginning, Kim appeared to be fully committed to working with his American counterparts to hammer out a deal that was mutually acceptable. He basically showed the world that he was willing to offer up the bulk of the DPRK nuclear weapons-ballistic missile programs on a silver platter in exchange for a partial lifting of sanctions. It was an extraordinarily generous offer which should have led to a real breakthrough, but it didn't. Instead, the offer was breezily rejected without debate or counter-offer. Why? Why would Trump shrug off an offer to permanently halt all long-range rocket and nuclear tests and to "completely dismantle all the nuclear production facilities" at Yongbyon, the DPRK's primary nuclear enrichment facility? Isn't that what Washington wanted from the get go?

Author Michael Haas disputes this account in an article at [antiwar.com](#). Haas says there WAS a counter-offer that expanded Washington's demands to include other weapons systems unrelated to the nuclear file. Here's an excerpt from the article:

"The most probable reason for lack of progress was that the United States made new demands at Hanoi. Although North Korea's proposal for limited if robust sanctions relief had been discussed weeks prior to the meeting, American negotiators in Hanoi suddenly asked for destruction of a second nuclear enrichment facility that Pyongyang had not previously acknowledged.

Even though North Korea apparently agreed to that demand, another unanticipated request was not only for full disclosure of all nuclear and missile sites but also for a full accounting of all biological and chemical weapons. In other words, the American negotiators moved the goalposts regarding the focus of the potential agreement, startling their North Korea counterparts, who then countered that such a step might require removal of all sanctions. Upping the ante on one side was mirrored by the other side, giving Trump an excuse to walk away." ("Why the Hanoi Summit Failed", antiwar.com)

Okay, so according to Haas, the Trump team deliberately blindsided Kim in order to sabotage the negotiations. That sounds about right. Of course none of this has popped up in the western media where US leaders are typically extolled for their unshakable virtue while their rivals, like Kim, are vilified as "brutal dictators who can't be trusted." Regrettably, the facts tell a different story.

What was particularly puzzling about the summit was the manner in which the negotiations were conducted, that is, there were no negotiations at all, not really. The Trump delegation simply listened politely to Kim's offers, scratched their chins and then rejected them without debate or counter proposal. In other words, the whole summit was a fraud. The US did not come to argue, dicker, quibble, wrangle or haggle on any of the key issues. In their minds, the final verdict was already set in stone before they ever touched down in Hanoi. It was a done deal. The sanctions would continue to be enforced until the DPRK government collapsed or until hell froze over, whichever came first. The media would like readers to believe that the credulous Trump narrowly escaped a lethal trap set by the evil despot, Kim Jong un. But that's not what happened at all. What happened is that Kim showed his willingness to go the extra mile for peace but was slapped down by an unreasonable, inflexible and intractable adversary who remains focused laserlike on preserving the status quo, intensifying the sanctions and paving the way to regime change. That's what the summit really proved, that one side is looking for compromise and resolution while the other favors confrontation and conflict.

So why did Trump agree to go to Hanoi if he had no intention of hashing out a deal? What did he hope to gain by looking rigid and unyielding while Kim made every effort to find common ground? Didn't he know that leaders in China, Russia and South Korea would be following every word, putting every minute detail under the microscope, and convening high-level meetings to decipher what really took place?

Maybe those things don't matter to Trump but they're certainly going to affect the way that Kim's allies address the sanctions issue in the future. After Hanoi, I would expect Russia and China will look for ways circumvent the sanctions in order to reward Kim for the steps he's taken towards denuclearization, after all, Russia and China do not seek a permanently divided peninsula or regime change. They simply want Kim to abandon his nukes program for the sake of regional stability. That was the original purpose of the sanctions, to stop the provocative nuclear and missile tests that were intensifying the clash with Washington. But now the sanctions have taken on a life of their own and are being used to pursue a geopolitical agenda that conflicts with Russian and Chinese national security interests. That wasn't plan.

Neither Putin nor Xi Jinping want to see North Korea brought to its knees creating another failed state that becomes a hotbed of terrorism and anarchy. That's not what they want at all. They want a North Korea that is ready to participate in their massive economic

integration plans (One Belt, One Road, Eurasian Economic Union etc) They want a North Korea that enjoys the benefits of modernization, state of the art technology and infrastructure, high-speed rail, gas pipelines and ever-improving standards of living. They want a North Korea that is an ally, a partner, and a friend that will participate in the shared vision of a giant pan-Asian free trade zone that benefits all equitably while respecting the sovereign rights of the individual nation-states. They want to implement a regional development plan that doesn't put western banks and corporations at the top of the ladder where they arbitrarily impose 'the rules of the game' on everyone else. This is what Beijing and Moscow want, and this is what Kim wants. He wants to set aside his nukes, end his conflict with Washington and get on with the business of making money. Sound reasonable?

The one fly in the ointment is Washington, which is determined to torpedo Kim's plan by any means possible. Pompeo and Bolton know what's going on, they know Kim is not a communist ideologue or a Marxist revolutionary. They know he aspires to be Korea's Deng Xiaoping, the leader who opened Chinese markets to the outside world. Here's how author John Delury summed it up in a recent op-ed in the New York Times:

"Mr. Kim wants to be a great economic reformer....From the moment Mr. Kim took power almost seven years ago, he signaled a shift in the regime's focus, from security to prosperity. ...He decentralized decision-making,...lifted curbs on informal grass-roots markets and small private businesses"....and "called for "a breakthrough" in "re-energizing" the economy. In April... he said, all efforts should go to "socialist economic construction."

Since then, the-economy-as-priority has been regular fare in North Korea's media and from propaganda organs. Mr. Kim spent the summer months visiting farms, factories and tourist resorts, often chastising cadres for failing to implement development projects fast enough. During recent festivities celebrating the country's founding, the parade featured floats with economic slogans and no ICBMs. If the iconic image of Mr. Kim in 2017 shows him watching a missile test, the one for 2018 shows him inspecting a fish cannery....

Mr. Kim wants North Korea to become a normal East Asian economy, catch up with and integrate into the region, and it's in everyone's interest to help him do so..."("Kim Jong-un Has a Dream. The U.S. Should Help Him Realize It", [New York Times](#))

The author is wrong about one thing, it is NOT in everyone's interest to help Kim achieve his objectives, in fact, Washington believes it's a threat to their national security and their so-called pivot to Asia strategy, which is a plan to economically dominate Asia through the next century. If Kim's regional economic integration plan goes forward, you can stick a fork in Washington's strategy. Here's more from the same article:

"On his visit to Pyongyang this week, South Korea President Moon Jae-in brought the heads of state-backed rail and energy corporations, along with the CEOs of South Korea's top conglomerates. No deals were struck, and the group has been mum so far about its meetings. But its presence was enough to send the message that South Korea stands ready to move forward with major economic cooperation projects with the North.

In one astonishing scene, Mr. Moon addressed a crowd of 150,000 cheering North Koreans and pledged to "hasten a future of common prosperity." He praised Pyongyang's "remarkable progress" and said he understood "what

kind of country Chairman Kim and his compatriots in the North want to build.”

In a formal agreement known as the Pyongyang Declaration, the two leaders committed to reconnect rail and road links between the two countries, reopen a frozen joint industrial zone in Kaesong and a tourist site at Mount Kumgang, and make plans for a special economic zone, of the kind Deng promoted to open up China to foreign investment in the 1980s.” (“Kim Jong-un Has a Dream. The U.S. Should Help Him Realize It”, [New York Times](#))

Can you see what’s going on? The economic integration plans are moving forward even before the nuclear issue has been resolved, the sanctions have been lifted, or a formal treaty ending the war has been signed. The entire region appears to be breaking out of Washington’s orbit and charting a new course on its own. Naturally, this has ruffled a few feathers at the White House where Trump’s advisers have concocted various means of derailing the project. Sabotaging the summit in Hanoi is just the first volley in this new confrontation., there are bound to be many more in the days to come. Check out this clip from Business Insider:

“US Secretary of State Mike Pompeo said Sunday that if North Korea agrees to fully dismantle its nuclear weapons program, then the United States will allow American companies to invest in the country.

“This will be Americans coming in — private-sector Americans, not the US taxpayer — helping build the energy grid,” Pompeo said in an interview on “Fox News Sunday.” “They need enormous amounts of electricity in North Korea, to work with them to develop infrastructure.”... Pompeo added that Americans will also help invest in North Korean infrastructure and agriculture to help feed its people if the country meets US demands.

All the things the North Korean people need — [including] the capacity for American agriculture to support North Korea so they can eat meat and have healthy lives,” he said. “Those are the things that if we get what the president has demanded, the complete, verifiable, irreversible de-nuclearization of North Korea, that the American people will offer in spades.” (“Pompeo says American companies could invest in North Korea if Kim Jong Un meets US demands”, [Business Insider](#))

See? None of this has anything to do with Kim’s nukes, it’s all about money. The administration wants the North to open its markets on Washington’s terms which means the free movement of capital, safeguards on foreign investment, the mass privatization of state-owned assets, and preferential treatment for the uncompetitive, monopolistic US-backed mega-corporations that control the state behind the illusion of democratic government. And that’s why the Summit failed, because Kim wants to join an emerging coalition of independent nations that are building a prosperous multipolar world for the future.

Washington is determined to prevent that at all cost, which is why Trump walked out of the meetings in a huff. He wants to nip this thing in the bud.

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