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By Ben McGrath
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Trump meets North Korean leader as part of broader anti-China agenda

US President Donald Trump and North Korean leader Kim Jong-un met Sunday for about an hour in Panmunjom at the Demilitarized Zone (DMZ) separating North and South Korea. The two leaders staged a photo op before holding one-on-one talks over North Korea's denuclearization on the southern side of the border.

Trump and Kim shook hands at the border demarcation line before the US president made the theatrical gesture of joining Kim on the northern side—the first time a sitting US president has stepped onto North Korean territory.

Both leaders offered grandiose words to mark the occasion. Trump called the meeting “historic,” adding, “I think the relationship that we’ve developed has been so much to so many people. And it is just an honor to be with you.” Kim stated, “We share a long unfortunate past, meeting at such a place shows that we are willing to put an end to the unfortunate past and also open a new future and provide positive opportunities in the future.”

The meeting itself seems to have taken place at the last minute when Trump tweeted Saturday that he would like to meet Kim “just to shake hands and say hello.” The US president was in Osaka, Japan for the G20 summit and had planned a two-day visit to South Korea.

The meeting was the third between Trump and Kim following a June 2018 summit in Singapore and a follow-up summit in Hanoi, Vietnam in February 2019. While the first

meeting ended in a vague agreement, Trump walked out of the Hanoi summit early and talks stalled.



Donald Trump shakes hand with Kim Jong Un on June 30, 2019. [Credit: The White House]

The US has demanded the complete denuclearization of North Korea before the US lifted any of its crippling economic sanctions. Pyongyang has called for sanctions to be removed step-by-step in exchange for a gradual scaling down of its nuclear program. It also wants security guarantees that it does not become a target of a regime-change operation such as was the case with Iraq or Libya.

Following the talks, Trump stated that the two leaders agreed to re-start working-level negotiations that halted after the Hanoi summit. “We are going to have teams, they are going to meet over the next weeks, they are going to start a process and we will see what happens,” Trump stated.

Trump said he and Kim were “not looking for speed. We’re looking to get it right.” He stated that “sanctions are on,” but also hinted at the possibility of an easing of the economic noose, saying, “At some point during the negotiation things can happen.”

The slow pace of negotiations is designed to keep immense pressure on North Korea, which faces bans on most of its exports and crucial imports such as energy. At the same time, Trump wants to resume talks with Pyongyang, after Kim warned in April that the result would be “gloomy and very dangerous,” if talks were not restarted by the end of the year.

Washington’s goal has nothing to do with peace on the Korea Peninsula but rather to further isolate China. Trump is holding out the prospect of economic development for

North Korea in exchange for toeing the US line against Beijing. The other option, as Trump threatened during the beginning of his presidency, is the complete annihilation of North Korea.

This latter option is still very much on the table and is supported by militarist figures in the US administration such as Secretary of State Mike Pompeo and National Security Advisor John Bolton. North Korea has previously denounced Pompeo as “gangster-like” and requested in April that he be removed from negotiations. Former US envoy to North Korea Joseph Yun has said of Trump’s national security advisor, “Bolton is a super-hawk. He really sees not much point in talking with North Korea as he doesn't see much point in talking with Iran.”

Trump’s decision to meet with the North Korean leader may also have been driven by Kim’s recent summit with Chinese President Xi Jinping in Pyongyang during which the two leaders pledged closer economic cooperation. Trump would have no doubt have taken the opportunity on Sunday to warn Kim against the consequences of growing too close to Beijing.

Trump’s approach to North Korea and his chummy relations with Kim stand in marked contrast to his bellicose threats against Iran. While Iran has no nuclear weapons or long-range ballistic missiles, unlike North Korea, Trump came within minutes last month of launching an all-out war against Tehran. Trump’s main objection is not Iran’s nuclear programs, but that it has refused, to date, to fall into line with US strategic interests in the Middle East. Similarly, Washington’s over-riding objective is to subordinate North Korea as it intensifies its confrontation with China.

The US Democrats have criticized Trump for failing to be aggressive enough in his meeting with Kim. Andrew Bates, the campaign spokesman for former Vice President Joe Biden, denounced Trump, declaring that the “coddling of dictators at the expense of American national security and interests is one of the most dangerous ways that he’s diminishing us on the world stage and subverting our values as a nation.”

Others like Senator Elizabeth Warren cloaked their calls for a tougher stance on North Korea with a phony progressive character. Warren said in a tweet Sunday, “We should be dealing with North Korea through principled diplomacy that promotes US security, defends our allies, and upholds human rights.” This is an entirely dishonest attempt to cover up the growing danger of war with China, a conflict that the Democrats do not oppose.

The Democratic Party has supported the massive military buildup in the Asia-Pacific, approving record military budgets. Presidential candidates like Bernie Sanders have denounced China for supposedly stealing American jobs and called on Trump to go even further in his trade demands. This is aimed at whipping up a chauvinist and nationalist campaign that would be used to justify war with China.

Trump's meeting with Kim only compounds the highly volatile situation in Asia. Rather than bringing peace to the Korean Peninsula, Trump is raising the stakes, forcing North Korea to eventually choose between Washington and Beijing. Whatever North Korea decides, US imperialism is engaged in a reckless drive to war with a nuclear-armed power that would have catastrophic consequences for humanity.

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