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Brookings Cafeteria: What happened at the Trump-Kim summit in Singapore?

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O'HANLON: I think at this point I'm being I'm becoming relatively inoculated against surprise. You know if you had asked me six months ago could this have happened I would have said almost certainly not. So in a broader historic sense I'm quite surprised. I'm sort of strategically surprised. But in terms of the summit this week? No. I mean at this point these are the sorts of things I was just relieved frankly that it didn't break down. I still think the worst possible outcome is a complete breakdown and acrimony among the two leaders. The second worst is a bad deal. So those two worst case assumptions or worst case scenarios did not come to pass. Therefore on balance I would consider it a reasonable summit.

DEWS: Welcome to the Brookings Cafeteria, the podcast about ideas and the experts who have them. I'm Fred Dews.

Today's special episode is all about the historic summit between US President Donald Trump and North Korean leader Kim Jong un. Their meeting in Singapore on June 12th was the first meeting between leaders of the two countries.It came following increased tensions and a war of words between Trump and Kim in 2017, and a flurry of diplomatic activity in the last few weeks, including a temporary cancellation of the event.

But as the world saw, Trump and Kim greeted each other and shook hands before a wall of North Korean and American flags, and then proceeded to a private meeting and then an open discussion that included aides. At the end of the summit, the two leaders issued a Joint Statement articulating four key principles.

In this episode, five Brookings experts with deep expertise in Northeast Asia, diplomacy, security, and related issues offer their reactions to the event, their analyses of the key outcomes, and their assessments of what comes next. During the program I'll let them introduce themselves more completely, and so here I'll just mention their names: they are Ryan Hass, Michael O'Hanlon (who you heard from at the beginning), Jung Pak, Jonathan Pollack, and Thomas Wright.

In addition to this set of interviews, you can read a lot more from them and even more Brookings experts on the US-North Korea summit on our website, brookings.edu. I asked these experts to offer their own reactions to the summit, a high-level view of a complex and still evolving issue.

PAK: I think there are low expectations about the summit given how quickly it was thrown together and reports that the working level negotiators were having a hard time

reaching an agreement on what denuclearization meant and closing that gap between what the North Koreans think of denuclearization and what the U.S. thinks of denuclearization. You know I think most people were thinking that we're not going to get very much. At a minimum I suppose it started a diplomatic process that we can build on but it's a shaky loose foundation from which to build the diplomatic process.

My name is Jung Pak. I am a senior fellow in the Korea Chair at the Brookings Institution.

Kim Jong Un had a lot of partners in this and in getting President Trump to the table in that he had the support and the active participation of President Moon of South Korea who really wanted the North Korea U.S. summit to happen and really midwifed this whole process that led to the Singapore summit. So in that way Kim had a lot of help. Of course the Chinese are always in favor of stability. So the Chinese had been looking to use a lowering or have a lowering of tensions between Kim and Trump to ensure that there is some diplomatic process to resolve the nuclear issue.

I think for the most part Kim has done pretty well given that this is his first six months of real engagement with the outside world, and that while he spent the first six plus years of his rule in North Korea doing a lot of provocative acts such as missile ballistic missile launches and nuclear tests and cyber-attack, that he's shown a facility with engaging world leaders that I think is quite remarkable.

POLLACK: I'm Jonathan Pollack. And I'm a non-resident senior fellow in the John L. Thornton China Center in the Center for East Asia Policy Studies. Living in Los Angeles.

As I look at what transpired yesterday my overall assumption is that Trump President Trump is trying to sharply alter the terms of reference with respect to North Korea and its activities including its pursuit of nuclear weapons. Until now the Trump administration has been pretty specific about being unalterably opposed to the North's weapons programs and to sustaining a maximum pressure policy against North Korea, if those programs persisted.

What President Trump has now done however in meeting with Kim Jong Un, is number one he has legitimized Kim Jong Un. That was inevitable in the sense of the two of them being equal across the table or sitting chair to a chair. He has consented not explicitly but implicitly to the openhanded possession of a significant number of nuclear weapons by North Korea. That may be the necessary price to get into a kind of a negotiation here, but very frankly the communique yesterday was weak tea. It was stunningly unspecific much less detailed than any previous communique between the

United States and North Korea and not frankly a very good sign about where we are in that process. So however much there was this singular moment of a North Korean leader for the first time meeting with a sitting U.S. president, the outcomes that I see cause at least for me some definite disquiet.

O' HANLON: I'm Michael O'Hanlon senior fellow in the Foreign Policy Studies program and I work on national security issues. But certainly Korea ranks near the top of any such list.

I'm a little more hopeful than some of the colleagues around here and some people around town. I don't necessarily think there was any great accomplishment. And we have a long ways to go before any celebration is in order, and the Nobel Prizes should be awarded. But I actually was willing to give President Trump a little bit of space for the atmosphere he was trying to create. Even though there was an unsavory element to it of being so welcoming of a North Korean dictator who we know is basically a murderer (of his own people and his own family), and presides over the worst Stalinist regime left on earth. So it doesn't quite feel right to treat this guy as a buddy and put him up lavishly in a hotel at American taxpayer expense for a thousand dollars a night or whatever it was.

On the other hand if you're trying to create a dynamic by which there can be a good dialogue and we move away from the brinkmanship, and the insults of 2017, you probably have to overdo it slightly. So for that sort of thing, and other mini concessions that were made in the Singapore summit, I'm forgiving and even supportive. But of course it's all going to be that the proof in the pudding what comes next. What kind of deal is actually agreed to that Secretary of State Mike Pompeo can negotiate. Until we know the answer to that question we really can't even evaluate this summit.

DEWS: Prior to the summit there was a lot of attention to the level of preparation on both sides five days prior to the meeting. President Trump declared

TRUMP (FROM CNN INTERVIEW): "I think I'm very well prepared … it's about willingness to … and I think I've been preparing for this summit for a long time"

HASS: My name is Ryan Hass Rubinstein a fellow in the Foreign Policy Program at the Brookings Institution.

That the biggest surprise I have coming out of this summit was the lack of preparation that preceded. Typically in advance of summits there's a rigorous process

within the U.S. government to identify objectives, to identify who has responsibility for advancing those objectives, and to nail them down before the president walks in the room with his foreign counterpart. In this instance none of those attributes were present. What we saw instead was a president who has supreme confidence in his own persuasion and his own judgment. And rather than risk being boxed in by his bureaucracy felt that he could gain a better deal by entering the room and sorting things out leader to leader with his counterpart. And we've run that experiment and we've seen how it works. We have not achieved a lot. We've squandered this opportunity. And Kim Jong Un has come out feeling quite good. And I think that Beijing is the ultimate beneficiary of this process.

WRIGHTS: My name is Tom Wright. I'm director for the Center for the United States and Europe and a Senior Fellow in International Order and Strategy in the Foreign Policy program here at Brookings.

This summit I think was different than all of their summits because of the lack of preparation in advance. I think it's unprecedented actually. I can't think of a single example of a summit involving an American president since World War Two and probably well before that has been conducted so much on the fly and not given adequate preparation by supporting diplomats. You know they had a few weeks to prepare this and I think it showed in the outcome.

DEWS: Wright is the author of the recent book All Measures Short of War, in which he examines the new era of strategic competition among the United States, Russia, and China.

The summit concluded with President Trump and Chairman Kim signing a Joint Statement that outlined the two leaders' determinations, including President Trump providing security guarantees to the DPRK (North Korea), and Kim reaffirming his, quote, firm and unwavering commitment to complete denuclearization of the Korean Peninsula, unquote.

Here's Ryan Hass again, who called into our studio from Berlin, followed by Thomas Wright:

HASS: Going into the summit it was clear that there would be a joint statement produced. The key question was whether or not the joint statement would have precision or vagueness. Typically the United States pushes for a precise joint statement to lock in commitments from North Korea. The North Koreans prefer vague statements that give

them flexibility and wiggle room so that they don't have as much pressure to follow through on their commitments. So the question was where would the joint statement fall on the continuum between bigness and specificity?

What we learned coming out of the statement is that it was very vague. This joint statement contained four main elements all of which were recycled from past assurances that North Korea has offered and none of which broke new ground. And in fact it more resembles the joint statement that Kim Jong Un agreed to with South Korea's president Moon in this last month at the de-militarized zone. In fact much of the language has been copied and pasted from that joint statement into this one. So there did not appear to be a lot of creativity in the writing process for this joint statement, and it reflects the fact that there was not a lot of agreement on the more sensitive issues surrounding denuclearization and disarmament.

We had four points in the communique very, very, very vague and really nothing that hadn't been said before. There were several things that the U.S. was hoping to have in there that weren't in there because they didn't have time. President Trump actually said they didn't have time to get some of it in there. And so I think that was a clear sort of line between the lack of preparation and the outcome they were really just out of their depth I think they were unfamiliar with this as a diplomatic matter. And I think they got largely played in it.

DEWS: Jonathan Pollack shared what surprised him about what was not in the joint statement.

POLLACK: A lot of the expected outcomes, the anticipated outcomes, in terms of the expectation that there was going to be a declared end to the Korean War, some kinds of more explicit statements and assurances that the United States would provide to North Korea, and that the North Koreans might provide to the United States… none of that was present in the communique. It was an absolutely minimal document. Begging the issue of is there really a congruence of interest between the United States and North Korea here.

My take is that the U.S. has a lot of other demands if you will or expectations that they want to put on the table and see included in the communique and the North Koreans said no to almost all of them.

DEWS: Pollack has decades of experience with the political and security dynamics of the Korean Peninsula, and US defense policies in Asia and the Pacific. In addition to his

recent writings on the Singapore summit, you can learn a lot about the history of politics and military affairs on the Korean peninsula since 1945 in his book No Exit: North Korea, Nuclear Weapons, and International Security.

In an interview following the summit, President Trump affirmed that the US nuclear umbrella over South Korea wasn't on the table, and that North Korea would get rid of its nuclear weapons. Kim Jong-un, said the president:

TRUMP: "he's de-nuking the whole place, I think he's going to start now".

DEWS: Here's Jung Pak again

PAK: The statement says they're going to work toward denuclearization which is vague enough that they'll make efforts to that instead of committing to abandoning their nuclear weapons program which was what was in the 2005 joint statement. So there is a watering down of that commitment from North Korea and it reflects the problems that the negotiators had in talking with their North Korean counterparts in bridging that gap or closing that gap in the definitions of what the U.S. believes denuclearization should mean and what North Korea means. What the U.S. has been advocating is complete verifiable irreversible denuclearization or dismantlement.

So for North Korea denuclearized means that they'll think about getting rid of their nuclear weapons when the world has given up its nuclear weapons which is a pretty maximalist condition.

DEWS: Jung Pak is the author of a recent Brookings Essay titled, "The Education of Kim Jong-un," which you can find on our website.

Ryan Hass, Michael O'Hanlon, and Jonathan Pollack also elaborated on the meaning and challenge of denuclearization, and the differences between the U.S. side and the North Korea side.

HASS: Well the key challenges that all parties involved in this exercise (South Korea the United States and North Korea) have different conceptions of the word denuclearization. For North Korea denuclearization is part of a process that begins with trust building relationship building and over time maybe a very long time leads to a process that culminated in denuclearization once all three parties have established confidence in

each other and are comfortable with the security arrangements with each other. For the United States on the other hand, denuclearization is something that is very specific. It's giving up nuclear weapons removing them from North Korea and eliminating the threat of nuclear weapons being pointed at the United States homeland.

And so what was masked through the joint statements coming out of Singapore was a definition of which side the term denuclearization prevailed. And because there wasn't any definition around this question it is something that will likely be kicked down the road to future negotiations that Secretary Pompeo will pick up and carry forward.

O' HANLON: Well, from our point of view it means all the North Korean nuclear weapons off the peninsula. There are no American or South Korean nuclear weapons, we moved ours off a quarter century ago. The South Koreans have never built the bomb. So for us it would be a very simple straightforward exercise in North Korean disarmament. Of course they should give up their production capability to make more as well.

However, the North Korean definition of denuclearization as I think we're all beginning to appreciate more and more as we talk about it and hear them use it, is much different. And what they apparently mean is something whereby the perceived or purported American threat to their country diminishes. Because we're a nuclear power. So even if we don't have nuclear weapons in Korea we could deliver them to Korea. Therefore they think of denuclearization as something that ultimately links the United States from having any kind of security alliance against them. And whether that means that we just break off the U.S. South Korea alliance, whether we create some new joint operational control with both Koreas, we deploy as part of a peacekeeping force along the DMZ that's international and upholds and monitors a peace treaty… I don't know exactly what the North Koreans would mean. I'm not sure they even know.

But I am confident that for them denuclearization is going to involve a number of steps from us even though in our own minds we have nothing to denuclearize anymore in Korea.

POLLACK: Well you know the question that's raised here of course is A) what do we mean by duckweed denuclearization and how would we compare that to the way we think North Korea means it? And on that basis could we conceive of any circumstances under which North Korea would forego its nuclear weapons programs and activities. And when I suggest open ended, I simply mean that if we if we are adopting an American definition of denuclearization which would be the elimination of *any extant weapons* and

the means to deliver them the elimination of any means to produce further materials for these programs. To inhibit fully the activities of any North Korean scientists and engineers in being involved either within North Korea or prospectively beyond North Korea in a proliferation context we're talking at least 15 years. I mean that's a broad estimate and that assumes that there would be the good will to achieve it, because in order to fulfill those conditions you would have to have open ended inspections in the North, digging into every nook and cranny and tunnel and mountain. Disclosure by North Korea of everything in their inventory, the presence of American and other inspectors on a scale that North Korea has never accepted. The fundamental challenge of any denuclearization agreement according to American criteria would be in fact to verify that it is complete.

Now I happen to think based on a lot of years of work on North Korea that maybe in a way we shouldn't be surprised they are right now putting away equipment and material for a rainy day, just in case there is an inspections regime on the North. They probably are sequestering some of their actual finished weapons, because that would be their hedge their protection. They know that Donald Trump won't be president forever. Attitudes change, policies change. It would only be prudent from their point of view given what they now possess to try to make sure that some of it is set to one side.

But at the same time all of this presumes that North Korea has a mindset, that the leadership including Kim Jong Un really would be prepared to forego what they see as the singular strategic accomplishment of the last 50 or more years. It's been a dream of the Kim dynasty from very early on to possess their own nuclear weapons capabilities. The idea that they're going to walk away from them in any realistic future, absent the most profound internal changes in North Korea is to me very very dubious.

Now let me also clarify the North Korean definition of denuclearization is a very political definition. It presumes if there is a way in which the United States would walk back from a set of policies that that the North Koreans argue threatening them, remove any possibility that we might undertake military attacks against the North and the like, and provide other kinds of security assurances to the North. Assurances not only about at a military level but more importantly basically convincing Kim Jong Un that the Trump administration is prepared to give this guy job security forever.

No country can do that for any foreign leader. So it's not it's not in my view that we are trying to you know undermine his rule and overthrow him I think that that's a very hypothetical circumstance. I know it's often what the North Koreans talk about: their claim is if we didn't have nuclear weapons this is what would happen to us as it happened to Ghaddafi and Saddam. Without going into all the historical details, the United States has

not attacked North Korea in 65 years - when we had nuclear weapons on the peninsula and when we didn't have nuclear weapons on the peninsula. The North is trying to find a way to invalidate any kind of security commitment that the United States is prepared to undertake to protect South Korea.

And I would add based on the way they described this terminology, that would extend as well to Japan. So this would be fundamentally undermining the U.S. security position in Northeast Asia.

DEWS: If you want even more in-depth analyses of options for denuclearizing North Korea, these and other Brookings experts have a lot to offer.

Ryan Hass and Jung Pak co-authored a paper in December on a pathway to North Korean Denuclearization.This spring, Michael O'Hanlon's outlined a step-by-step plan for denuclearizing that country.Senior Fellow Robert Einhorn wrote a policy brief on this subject. Einhorn is a senior fellow in Foreign Policy at Brookings and was one of the top US negotiators for the Iran Nuclear Agreement, the JCPOA.

All of these are linked in the show notes for this episode, and on our website.

I followed up with O'Hanlon on a sometimes overlooked issue in the focus on North Korea's nuclear capabilities: the country's non-nuclear forces. As he explained:

O'HANLON: Just before the Singapore summit I heard Secretary of State Mike Pompeo use the expression 'weapons of mass destruction' which of course also includes chemical and biological weapons of which the North Koreans have plenty. And we've already seen them use those for example in the assassination of the half-brother. So this is a real concern and it's one of the reasons why I would not favor an end to the U.S. South Korea alliance even if we got complete North Korean denuclearization because there are other threats too.

And in addition to the chemical and biological if you were looking sort of at nonconventional threats broadly defined you could also add to that list missiles, and you could add to that list North Korean special-forces and you could add long range artillery. From its current positions for any of those tubes just north of the DMZ, they could actually hit Seoul from where they are. So all those needed to be added in a more general sense to the kind of things besides fighter jets, Navy ships, submarines, tanks, that could be a threat to South Korea. But nuclear weapons are at the to, then come chemical and biological weapons. [00:04:20] Then come these other sort of asymmetric or non-traditional threats like special forces missiles. And only then would I list North Korea's

regular military capabilities in a pecking order of seriousness in terms of threats to the alliance and threat to South Korea.

DEWS: The phrase in the joint statement that “president trump committed to provide security guarantees to the DPRK” opened the question for some as to what security guarantees means in this context, since this is a phrase typically associated with allies.

I asked Thomas Wright and Ryan Hass to address the question.

WRIGHT: Security guarantees come in two forms there's positive security guarantees which mean that a country will commit to come to the aid of another country if it's attacked and then there are negative security guarantees [06:16] whereby a country will promise not to attack another country. So in this case we're talking about regular security guarantees since the United States is now going to come to North Korea's aid if attacked by South Korea. In the unlikely event - impossible event - that was attacked by South Korea. So it's a negative security assurance that North Korea is looking for. President Trump I think hasn't really thought through with what this means.

I think he thinks it means strong rhetoric or words ‘we promise not to attack you’ but of course that's been offered in the past. What North Korea really wants is a negative guarantee that would show the United States does not have the capability to defend itself or to strike North Korea in extreme circumstances. This would mean the full withdrawal of troops not just from the Korean Peninsula but possibly from the wider Northeast Asian region.

So this is really a trick I think a diplomatic trick by North Korea to put something on the agenda. It's unlikely to get agreed to. And I think President Trump fell for it.

HASS: Well the use of security guarantees was odd to put it frankly security guarantees are something that the United States typically provides to its allies: a guarantee of their security and a willingness to go to war to meet the obligations of those guarantees. In this context, North Korea clearly is not an ally of the United States nor anywhere close to becoming an ally of the United States. So an assurance would be one thing that could be understood and explained, the guarantee is quite confusing and raises more ambiguity than it does clarity in terms of what President Trump intended by that statement.

DEWS: I also asked Wright, as the director of the Center on the United States and

Europe at Brookings, to juxtapose President Trump's approach to Chairman Kim in the wake of the G-7 summit in Canada. On the flight from Canada to Singapore, President Trump had harsh words for Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau.

WRIGHT: The contrast between President Trumps meeting with Kim Jong Un and his meeting with U.S. allies at the G7, at the NATO summit last year, and other forums I think is really as stark. He had nothing but warm words for North Korean leader. He called him a friend. He said he trusted him, said they would have a great relationship. And he of course had those the famous or infamous putdown of Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau last week and at very difficult meetings with other G7 leaders last week and that's part of a pattern really over the course of the last year.

And I think what that goes to show is that President Trump is somebody (if one looks back over the last three decades) he's somebody who's always more frustrated and annoyed and angry at friends than with enemies. You know if you go right back to 1987 which is the first year we can really find him weighing into the foreign policy debate, he had a famous letter to New York Times, a number of interviews, he was thinking about running for president in 1988, and he's entirely animated by criticism of America's allies and trading partners and that has not changed thirty years later. So I think we shouldn't be surprised that he actually is trying to reach out to an enemy because the U.S. doesn't trade with North Korea. There's no alliance commitments, those are the things that really annoy him, and those are the reasons why he had very bad relations with Canada, Britain, Germany, Japan and others last week.

DEWS: Now that we've addressed some of the key policy issues to emerge from the Singapore summit itself, I want to shift to the experts' views on how the summit could be viewed by the key players in the region, including, of course, North Korea, as well as South Korea, China, and Japan.

How are people and governments in those countries responding to the Trump-Kim summit, and what opportunities and challenges does the outcome present?

First up, North Korea. Jung Pak, who served in important roles in the US intelligence community and led its production of strategic analysis on Korean Peninsula Issues, offered this view of how Kim Jong-un and the summit is being seen inside North Korea, and what he got out of it:

PAK: So far the state media has shown him out and about walking the night before.

Before the meeting with Trump he went sightseeing at night with the Singaporean foreign minister. He took selfies. He was walking in the city amid the twinkling lights of the city state, the bright lights of hotels, the restaurants, the amusement areas and that was in the state media. He was surrounded by lots of people: his bodyguards and his entourage. So it made it seem as if he was recognized on the world stage.

I think that's really important for the North Koreans especially for Kim. I think when he came to power in 2011 after his father died that there was a lot of disparaging comments about the way he looked, how young he was, how he was bound to fail. And I think ultimately one of the things that he was seeking with his nuclear weapons program was the status and the respect. Those are intangible things. Those are things that any leader would crave I think.

And he got that he stood shoulder to shoulder with President Trump. There was a lot of handshakes some smiling lots of arm touches. So I think I think the summit from that perspective was a pretty good one for Kim.

DEWS: Jonathan Pollack and Ryan Hass added their thoughts on Kim Jong Un's performance and what he gained at the summit:

POLLACK: There's this question of what was what was possibly surprising about the summit. I think to me Kim's comfort level. He held his own with Trump, he did not seem the least bit intimidated. I don't know to say that that's a surprise. But he came in very well prepared as I expected. All the North Korean officials were, a bit but he led this process. He had both the bilateral meeting with Trump and of course he led the discussions when larger groups were assembled not just the two leaders. So he let Trump do most of the talking. He didn't he just sort of held back. So I can't say that there were any big surprises other than the fact that President Trump seems to have particularly in his press conference, opened the door to a whole range of other possibilities whether he's serious about this or not. One never knows. He tends to flow out of ideas as he sees fit.

HASS: Well I think that Kim Jong Un, he was able to gain security guarantees supposedly from the United States. He was able to put an end to any notion of increasing maximum pressure on North Korea. He was seen standing shoulder to shoulder with the leader of the free world which provides a legitimate and legitimation both at home and abroad for Kim Jong un. He earned an invitation to the White House at a future date. So from Kim Jong-un's perspective I think that many of his requirements were met in

Singapore. The question is what did he give up to get those things? And to date all we can see is that Kim Jong Un repeated pledges that he and his predecessors have made in the past and so it's clear what Kim Jong Un has gained. It's less clear what the United States has achieved in the process.

DEWS: Pollack also spoke to how the South Koreans would see the summit's outcome, and what the role South Korea has been playing in making this meeting possible:

POLLACK: I think that the current government the Moon Jae-In government is thrilled by the outcome of the summit because it is an ample green light to South Korea to pursue exactly the kinds of engagement strategies that it wants to pursue. But it's being blessed if you will by the United States.

So you're not going to get any quarrel from South Korea. There was some evidence that President Moon was angling to get an invitation to Singapore so he would have been there at the same time as President Trump was there and Kim Jong Un. That didn't happen, but I don't think that the South Koreans feel that this will shut them out in any sense. In a way I think it's more appropriate that you just had a bilateral summit.

Moon's role throughout this extraordinary transformation of what's going on on the peninsula over the last six months has been critical. He was deeply worried about the United States threats to go to war against North Korea and he has tried very very hard to move that back. And of course that in fact is I think also one of the accomplishments of the summit. I should acknowledge that war is off the table. It's not an option at least not right now. But I see no reason to conclude that Moon Jae In is in any way uncomfortable with what the United States and North Korea have just agreed to.

DEWS: Staying with South Korea for a moment, President Trump surprised everyone during a solo press conference after the summit when he declared:

TRUMP: "We will stop working which will save us a tremendous amount of money unless we see the future negotiation is not going along right."

DEWS: Both Michael O'Hanlon and Jonathan Pollack spoke to this issue, but with somewhat difference perspectives, and emphasis. Here's O'Hanlon on the question of ending the large US-Republic of Korea joint military exercises, followed by Pollack:

OHANLON: I'm a little bit more supportive of President Trump than most people. For a year now I've been looking at these exercises that we do – there's two big ones each year essentially in the late summer and in the early spring. And they each involve 30,000 or so U.S. and South Korean forces. But I've compared those to the kind of training we do with American forces only in the United States. We never do a training exercise with 30,000 troops. Not to my knowledge. The normal way in which a military service would sort of peak out and culminate a training rotation would be an Army brigade of a few thousand soldiers that would go to Louisiana or California for a two or three week rotation. A very realistic training. Or of course an air force squadron or wing: 24 to 72 airplanes might go out to the Nellis weapons school. Or the Navy fighters might go to a Top Gun out in California (we all saw the movie in one way or another one time or another in our lives). And these training exercises are maybe a few hundred people maybe a couple thousand.

So the fact that we do such a big exercise in Korea is not out of military necessity. It's sending a message. It's a symbol of the alliance. It's a statement of resoluteness and solidarity with ourselves and South Korea. This means that we can be flexible about it if we see an advantage to doing so if we can see a way to perpetuate a positive spirit for negotiations. I wish that President Trump had not called the exercises provocative. I think that was a mistake on his part, but I think he's right to be willing to suspend them or scale them back or break them into pieces and have the pieces done separately. If that can serve the cause of a negotiation.

DEWS: O'Hanlon, who has called South Korea one of America's five best allies in the world, has a piece on our website that explores different concepts for what a future US military presence on the Korean peninsula might look like.

Here's Jonathan Pollack on Trump's call to suspend or end the joint exercises:

POLLACK: President Trump said he would suspend the military exercises that the United States undertakes claiming they are provocative (which is kind of ironic given the number of times we've accused North Korea of being provocative) and also because he thinks they cost too much money. It's intrinsically connected to his deep antipathies toward alliances.

He thinks the U.S. allies rob the United States blind, that we pay for their security, when in fact South Korea of all of our allies is among the most generous in defraying the costs of U.S. personnel and undertaking major, very very robust military efforts of their

own. So I don't accept the proposition that Trump makes, and his claim that these forces serve no strategic purpose. The current government of South Korea I believe would not be overly troubled by Trump's proposal because again it plays into their hope to diminish what they see as a threat driven policy against the North. President Moon has never been particularly comfortable with this and he's trying to find a way if possible to walk that back. So he in particular would not be discomforted by this.

Where you would get unease I believe is among many in the South Korean military, certainly in Japan - without any doubt at all. And also interestingly enough because this was all done unilaterally, it was a unilateral concession to North Korea. North Koreans didn't request it, but that basically Trump is raising the possibilities that over time U.S. forces will be drawn down and may be withdrawn altogether.

Again, that reflects his attitude about alliances. So in a curious way the agendas and the needs here of North Korea, which all along has seen the dilution of the U.S. security relationship with South Korea and the role of U.S. forces as one of its core objectives. But that that now aligns to an extent with what Trump wants to undertake and what he wants to undertake. I happen to think that there are a lot of risks in that scenario. It doesn't mean that we should you know be absolutely rigid about what our exercises are like what they do. But in my view the major withdrawals of U.S. forces should not be in any way pursued unless and until we see objectively the kinds of changes in the security environment on the peninsula that's simply at this point are not evident. North Korea has not have to forego anything that it does for where it now finds itself and we need to bear that in mind.

DEWS: Moving on from South Korea, it’s time to address the summit from the perspective of China. That country has long been allied with North Korea, fought on its side against US and United Nations troops during the Korean War, and continues to be the source of the vast majority of trade that North Korea has. How does the summit’s outcome affect China?

Here’s Michael O’Hanlon again, noting that China is one of the most important countries for the Koreas that was not in Singapore:

O’HANLON: China is easily the most important additional country that wasn't in Singapore this week in terms of its overall significance to the Koreas. China’s you know accounting for 90 percent of all of North Korea's trade it's North Korea's only military ally. And over time in the future it's probably South Korea's main security worry if we can ever

get through this North Korean threat period. Then still China looms right next door and huge like almost a cat looking down on a mouse that it's capable of pouncing upon. I'm not suggesting the Chinese have a malevolent design on South Korea but if you were a South Korea you might not want to be stranded all by yourself in Northeast Asia over the longer term, which is one of the reasons I think the U.S. South Korea alliance should probably perpetuate well into the future even if we can solve the North Korea problem.

DEWS: Ryan Hass and Jonathan Pollack also spoke to the outcome for China, but had different takes. Here's Hass, followed by Pollack:

HASS: The big winner coming out of Singapore my mind at least is China. China for a long time has sought a reduction of military forces by the United States in Northeast Asia and a widening of the gap between the United States and its allies and partners not just in Northeast Asia but around the world. That is what came about in his closing press conference.

President Trump talked seemingly extemporaneously about his desire to withdraw troops from the Korean peninsula. He did so in a manner that was not preceded by any coordination with Seoul and Tokyo. It will exacerbate the very concerns that our allies not just in Northeast Asia but around the world have about the reliability of U.S. commitments. The idea that what was once sacrosanct pledge to fight and die to preserve the credibility of our commitments could be degraded and traded at moments of convenience when it serves US interests. And so it's too early to assess the damage from that statement but it clearly is a source of alarm.

POLLACK: China's role is speculated about a lot. Some people are claiming that China is the big winner in this process because the possibility that America will withdraw some of its forces takes away a big security problem for China. I don't accept that proposition. You may hear otherwise from other Brookings colleagues but because one of the few things on which all the governments in South Korea have always agreed both on the right and the left is that U.S. forces on the peninsula are there to protect South Korea. They are not they are for other missions. South Korea has never consented to any kind of strategic role for U.S. forces air ground whatever other than deterring an attack from the north and then helping defend South Korea in the event that deterrence fails. So in that sense I don't accept that kind of a proposition that many people are arguing it's really China now that wins big because U.S. forces could come out. On the other hand, China

has not been a central actor in this process of rapprochement of the key actors of course have been Moon Trump and Kim.

So to some extent they too have been a bit on the outside but Kim has now through two visits to try to reassure the Chinese. He doesn't want to lose some level of support from China. And of course the Chinese and symbolically (this is really important), they loaned him a plane. So will Kim Jong Un flew to Singapore on a plane that often the Chinese leadership uses. Its a Boeing 747, the same thing that Trump flew in on. So it gave the North Koreans notional equivalence.

But you know the Chinese have been very uneasy about what was the push towards war the concerns about the possibility of a war, on Peninsula, something that they simply do not want to see. They're also they also continue to be deeply troubled by the North's nuclear weapons programs. So I think the prevailing sentiment in China would be one that is encouraged by the summit, a little uneasy about the possibility that somehow the United States might displace China in terms of its potential influence in Pyongyang. But my view is really been very simple for a long time: nobody has significant influence on decision making in Pyongyang except for the North Koreans themselves. I think it's a mistake to assume that somehow China could control North Korea. But I think on the whole the Chinese would be therefore quietly encouraged, but wanting to make sure that if moves proceed toward let's say some form of a peace agreement, that they cannot be excluded from that process. One of the signatories to the July 1953 armistice agreement they get a vote and they get a voice.

And they're reminding this of this of it of that fact just in case some people assume that they can somehow be excluded from any ultimate outcome. They can't. They have an enormous influence and a set of interests on the longer term strategic configuration of Northeast Asia. We should, assuming that we can make headway with North Korea which is a pretty big assumption in my view, but they must be increasingly involved in this process as well.

DEWS: Japan is another country in the region that has a lot at stake in the North Korean issue as a key U.S. ally the outcome and ongoing impact of the Trump kempt summit will be of particular interest to Tokyo. Jonathan Pollack shares his view that:

POLLACK: of all the powers in the Japanese are the most uneasy about it. Prime Minister Abe has gone to more plants than any other U.S. ally to cultivate relations with President Trump but they're on the outside really looking in here and they're very uneasy

about it because they see possibilities that President Trump in the context of any future agreements about denuclearization will concentrate disproportionately on the presumed ICBM threat that North Korea does or could pose to the United States. Leaving aside a whole array of missile systems and other capabilities that continue to play a security risk to Japan - and in a different way frankly still to of course to South Korea despite the changes in government policy in South Korea under President Moon. So this leaves Japan very uneasy. They don't feel that their interests have been kept in mind. And I must say some of the North Korean views of Japan which continue to appear in the North Korean media are almost gleeful about the fact that Japan is on the outside looking in. Abe seems to be eager to also have a meeting with Kim but he would be coming at it in his view with a disadvantage relative to the protection of his own interests so the Japanese I'm sure this is being conveyed to the United States regularly are really the true outside actor to this that cannot look upon the summit outcome and other developments with a lot of assurance about where things are headed.

DEWS: I'll wrap up this episode with some thoughts from junk pack and how President Trump did at the summit followed by what the experts see as next steps. First here's Pak with a critical reminder about Kim Jong un.

PAK: It was clear that President Trump was going to try to use flattery to build that rapport with Kim Jong un. After calling him Rocket Man and Little Fat Boy and other pejorative things that President Trump did a pivot on that and said Kim is very honorable he's sincere he cares about his people and really from my perspective went a little bit overboard at the summit saying all of those nice things about Kim and how his people are faring under him. It seems a bit gratuitous to say all of those things. I think I understand why Trump was saying those things to try to get and to maintain that the personal relationship with Kim. But at the end of the day we can't paper over the fact that he is a brutal dictator who represses his people. Really we have to remember that even though there might have been chemistry between Trump and Kim that doesn't mean very much for denuclearization. The North Koreans have been very clear that they're not going to give up their nuclear weapons.

DEWS: Here's Thomas Wright on what he thinks will happen next with particular insight into the chaotic policy process inside the coming administration that must carry forward the work on the principles put forth in the joint statement of President Trump and

Chairman Kim.

WRIGHT: I think they won't be very keen to dive massively into the detail because that's where the devil is as the saying goes. But I do think they'll want to keep momentum. So I expect that they'll announced another big summit or another big meeting either in the United States in Mar a Lago or Pyongyang to try to keep things moving along. [00:48:00] But you know they're not really keeping things moving along and substantively it's really stylistically. I think President Trump is pushing the agenda. He wants this to happen. He accepted the meeting. He announced without consulting with his team or even really with the South Koreans. I mean they brought it to him, I don't think they expected him to accept it so quickly. But there is a bit of a division. Nevertheless John Bolton is skeptical I think he tried to wreck it that backfired because he almost lost his job or certainly he was sidelined from the process. He's back in now in some way but he's on the skeptical side but slightly chastened I think. And then we had Mike Pompeo who's trying to get a deal and sort of keep that momentum is really siding with Trump on this. I think the Pentagon is concerned about the alliance and the troops, and that's their main equity in this and then of course there's Congress as well which is skeptical. So I think there's a divide obviously but I think the crucial point though is that we can't forget that President Trump I think is the most important figure in his own administration. You know he's not going to do what his advisers tell him to do just because they say it. He's going to do what he wants to do expect them to follow suit. So I think he is actually the one driving this.

DEWS: Wright continued on actions flowing from the joint statement itself while it's so vague.

WRIGHT: I think that the North Koreans to be perfectly happy to have a working group looking at the meaning of the denuclearization of the Korean peninsula that will last indefinitely for years and years and years. I don't think there's really any prospect of fast implementation. I think the prospect of actual comprehensive verifiable irreversible denuclearization (CVID) is close to zero. I think there's just no evidence at all that they're interested in that. So I don't think we'll see really any real progress. Maybe we'll see some progress on the point about returning the remains of American troops who died in the Korean War and others so there might be some progress there that might be achievable. But the larger sort of strategic questions of denuclearization. I think that's very very unlikely that there'd be anything close to what the administration is telling us.

DEWS: Michael O'Hanlon offered this view of what comes next after the joint statement.

O'HANLON: Well the summit declaration is vague that may not be a fatal flaw but it certainly reminds us that it's just a first step towards where we need to get and I think Secretary of State Mike Pompeo now has the big challenge of trying to negotiate a step by step process where North Korea begins to do meaningful things that become irreversible with time and for which we provide certain incentives or at least suspend certain sanctions. We as an international community. So getting that sequencing right and getting the steps proportionate so the incentives are roughly comparable to the benefits. That's the hard work that lies ahead. I think Pompei is capable of it and I think we've now reset our expectations to realize we're not going to get all the North Korean nuclear weapons shipped out of the country this year. [00:51:05] So I think Pompeo is in a position now to be realistic and take one path forward one step forward at a time. You have to begin with the database that North Korea provides listing all of its nuclear production facilities. We have to have inspectors go see those facilities. The inspectors don't have to be American but they do have to be international of course. The inspectors have to have the right to go investigate suspicious sites that are not on the database then we have to watch the North Koreans shut down and ultimately dismantle that production capability. To me those are the important next steps that will take probably the rest of this presidential term in the United States, and that President Trump could feel very good about if he can accomplish that much even if the North Korean nuclear warheads that are in Kim's possession today, even if those remain in North Korea past 2020 or 2021 it would still be a giant accomplishment to prevent the arsenal from growing further and to eliminate the production capability.

DEWS: And finally here's Jiang Pak again.

PAK: I think the working level officials are going to have a hard time trying to nail down North Korea because what the summit has probably succeeded in doing is given North Korea lots of maneuvering space to delay deflect and detract away from the nuclear weapons program. So far they've yet to satisfy that irreversible component of CVID which is the complete verifiable irreversible dismantlement and that they superficially blew up their Punggye-ri nuclear test site. They have apparently told President Trump that they're

going to dismantle a missile test site. But that said these are small gestures we should take them and see how far we can push Kim. But I'm going to be looking to see how much Trump empowers the Secretary of State and the working level negotiators in pushing Kim and the North Koreans to keep moving that ball forward.

DEWS: For more expert commentary and analysis from Brookings scholars about the US-North Korea summit, about geostrategy and politics on the Korean Peninsula and Northeast Asia more generally, be sure to visit our website.That's all I have today on the summit in Singapore between President Trump and Chairman Kim.

Like any episode of the Brookings Cafeteria podcast, I have a lot of people to thank for making it happen, this one more than most.

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Until next time, I'm Fred Dews.