

The Brookings Institution
5 on 45: Lessons from the second Trump-Kim summit
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PITA: You're listening to 5 on 45 from the Brookings Podcast Network, analysis and commentary from Brookings experts on today's news regarding the Trump administration.

PAK: My name is Jung Pak and I'm a senior fellow at the Brookings Institution. After weeks of media buildup President Trump and North Korean leader Kim Jong un met again in Hanoi. Their second summit in just eight months.

Expectations were low. There are major gaps between North Korea and the United States such as on an agreed definition of denuclearization, much less a roadmap or a timeline. Senior Trump administration officials admitted the lack of progress since the first summit in Singapore in June 2018, and even in the days prior to the summit they argued about desired outcomes. President Trump didn't help matters. His statements seemed to undercut the efforts of the working level saying that he was in no rush to get North Korea to denuclearize. If the president was not in a hurry, then why would Kim Jong-un such statements also probably reinforce Kim's view that his direct personal appeal to the president works. In the meantime, Kim was explicit in his stance that North Korea would not agree to quote unilateral disarmament and he avoided working level negotiations on the tricky issues of denuclearization until the focus turned to summit planning.

Ultimately, the Hanoi Summit ended abruptly. Kim and Trump were so overconfident about their ability to get a great deal for themselves that they presented each other with demands that demonstrated a lot of chutzpah. Kim wanted to trade some portion of the aging Yongbyon nuclear research site for the removal of sanctions on North Korea's export industries that included coal iron seafood and textiles which would amount to billions of dollars. This was not a proportionate trade. Given how the North Korean weapons program has metastasized way beyond Yongbyon to include covert facilities its growing stockpile of physical material for bombs and ballistic missiles, President Trump wanted a grand bargain for Kim to relinquish all of his nuclear weapons fissile materials

and all weapons related facilities in exchange for the removal of all sanctions he assumed wrongly that Kim like a New York businessman could be lured into giving away his grandfather's legacy his country's security and his own survival and relevance for a mere financial transaction. It's important to keep the diplomatic process going with North Korea, and both Kim and Trump seem willing to continue to engage. That's a good thing. But as we think about the next steps it's important to keep in mind some lessons from Hanoi.

First, the summit was a reminder of the limits of leader to leader relationship and the importance of process. President Trump after having failed with his grand bargain with Kim must now empower working level negotiations, especially the efforts of special representative Steve Hahn to define denuclearization assess and test what concessions North Korea's willing to offer and what the U.S. is willing to offer in arrive at a roadmap for denuclearization as well as a timetable for those steps.

Second, Kim places a higher priority on sanctions removal than on a peace declaration or liaison office that suggests that sanctions especially the sectoral sanctions are working and that implementation of those sanctions provide the most leverage for Washington and the international community.

Third, President Trumps astonishing defense of the murder of American student Otto Warmbier by Kim's regime was inexcusable Trump said. Kim tells me that he didn't know about it and I will take him at his word and that Kim felt badly about it. Trump was almost certainly trying to preserve his positive relationship with Kim and maintain the momentum of diplomacy. But Kim is likely to perceive such a full-throated defense as another data point that the president is willing to look the other way on Kim's bad behavior. If we're really going to test Kim's sincerity, we should not be afraid to address North Korea's documented practice of gross human rights violations.

Finally, President Trump needs Congress. The president cannot lift sanctions on his own and requires the approval of Congress on any changes to the U.S. sanctions placed

on Pyongyang prior to the Hanoi summit. The three national security committees in the House of Representatives expressed deep concern about the lack of transparency by the Trump administration on its approach to diplomacy with North Korea. They have pointed to the lack of regular senior level briefings and access to classified information regarding North Korea's nuclear and conventional weapons programs. To have any credibility with Kim and ensure that he can follow through on whatever he promises North Korea President Trump must work with Congress.

Without heeding these lessons, we have little reason to be optimistic about future summits between Kim and Trump.

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