

# Xi Jinping and Kim Jong-un Historic Meeting in Beijing: Make Korea United Again!

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*Kim Jong-un's visit reveals much about the tactics that will be used in the negotiations between the Korean leader and the American president; it also consolidates a historical relationship between Pyongyang and Beijing*

The [recent meeting](#) in Beijing between the two supreme leaders of DPRK and China has captured global attention. The summit remained secret throughout its duration, revealed by the Chinese leader only when the visit had ended and the Korean leader was on his way back home. Rumours of the encounter continued to be [denied](#) by the Chinese foreign minister right up to Tuesday. The denials had a lot to do with the fact that a positive outcome for the meeting, this being the first one, could not be guaranteed. The final statements, the relaxed atmosphere, the many images displaying mutual smiles and acknowledgement reveal that the two leaders of the Chinese and Korean Communist parties are on the same page. Despite [wishful thinking](#) from the US, which interpreted the lack of meetings in previous years as a change in Chinese attitudes towards North Korea, the meeting highlighted positive impressions by Xi Jinping about the developments on the peninsula as well as confirmed the strategic thinking of Kim Jong-un.

Kim Jong-Un's strategy deserves particular attention. The ability to [deter aggression](#) from the United States and South Korea existed well before Pyongyang's development of a nuclear deterrent, thanks to the enormous number of artillery guns it has directed towards Seoul. A possible conflict would have caused millions of deaths, destroyed the American forces on the peninsula (the American bases would have been the first to be eliminated, really only being there to serve as a tripwire), and upset the alliance with Seoul, which would have borne an unacceptable toll. Kim Jong-un and his father had already secured a powerful enough deterrent to ward off aggression against their country. The strategy behind developing nuclear weapons becomes more clear following the just-concluded meeting with Xi Jinping.

Kim Jong-un's willingness to [meet](#) Donald Trump in bilateral talks, and the possibility that Pyongyang will give up its nuclear arsenal, stand out. The meeting with Xi Jinping in all likelihood focused on the demands to be made to Trump: the removal of the North American presence in the south of the country is something on which China and DPRK are in strong agreement. The desired outcome for Beijing and Pyongyang (but also for Moscow) would see Washington remove its forces from South Korea in exchange for opening up North Korea's sites to international inspections. China and Russia would be happy to see the US threat to their nuclear deterrence removed (even if, with the latest hypersonic weapons [revealed](#) by Putin, the problem does not seem to arise). This would also bring great advantages to Seoul, which could embark on a rapprochement with the North, starting with a possible

reunification of the peninsula; and under the economic and energetic aegis of Russia and China, the peninsula could be [included](#) in the One Belt One Road (OBOR), as well as as benefitting from [Moscow's gas](#).

Of course this scenario clashes with the recent appointments of Mike Pompeo and John Bolton to the top of the American administration, confirmed by the threat of dissolving the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA) reached with Iran, undoing a deal reached through the efforts of multiple countries. The consequences would be significant, with the United State coming across as an unreliable state in international relations.

This aspect for Pyongyang, Beijing, Moscow and even Seoul counts up to a certain point. The extraordinary diplomatic message that Kim Jong-un and Xi Jinping have sent to allies and adversaries alike is that to allow for peace and the possibility of reunification for the Korean peninsula, Kim is apparently willing to renounce his nuclear weapons, his most important deterrent. But interestingly, North Korea has always been able to rely on its formidable conventional deterrent to guarantee its security anyway. For the survival of Kim and his circle, thousands upon thousands of artillery pieces aimed at Seoul are enough to keep any potential aggressor at bay. Another obvious consideration is that any use by Kim of his nuclear weapons against the United States or its allies would result in the total annihilation of the DPRK. So the question remains: if North Korea has always guaranteed its survival through its conventional deterrence, why has it developed a nuclear deterrent as well on top of this? The most logical answer is so as to bring the United States to the negotiating table.

Pyongyang's stroke of diplomatic and strategic genius lies in getting the United States to abandon the Korean peninsula in exchange for North Korea renouncing its nuclear arsenal. This hypothesis puts Kim Jong-un on the positive side of the negotiations, coming across as a reasonable and serious negotiating partner willing to find a way to guarantee peace on the whole peninsula. If Kim Jong-un is willing to give up what apparently, until yesterday, seemed impossible in the interests of reaching an agreement to ensure the survival of the two Koreas, then Pyongyang is presenting itself as Seoul's guarantor of peace. The message Moon Jae-in could receive from the negotiations is that an "enemy" like North Korea is willing to give up its most significant weapon, while the Americans march in with the likes of Bolton and Pompeo, ready to slam their fists on the negotiating table by refusing to make any concessions.

While Kim Jong-un has every intention of placing any blame for a failure of negotiations on the American side, and seems to have all the reasons ready in place to do so, the meeting between Kim Jong-un and Xi Jinping seems aimed at laying the groundwork to break the alliance between Seoul and Washington. We can already imagine the scene, with Pyongyang ready to renounce its nuclear weapons, Seoul ready to enter into dialogue about the reunification of the country, China and Russia happy with the denuclearization of the North, and above all, the elimination of the prospects of a terrible war on the peninsula. In this climate, Washington would be left completely isolated in refusing to entertain any prospect of abandoning the peninsula. Thanks to its less-than-perfect relations with its European allies, and its intention to annul the Iranian JCPOA, Washington would leave itself looking like it is neither able to keep its promises nor willing to pursue any credible diplomatic path.

The reality is that an overall agreement between North Korea and the United States is practically impossible for one fundamental reason: the United States uses the excuse of having to protect South Korea to maintain a permanent presence on the peninsula for the

purposes of containing China and Russia, both through missile defense and by maintaining a military presence near their borders. For this reason, while Moscow and Beijing have multiple reasons for seeking an agreement between Pyongyang and Washington, both are aware that the US has no intentions of abandoning its presence in South Korea. The meeting between Kim Jong-un and Trump is a well-designed trap prepared by Moscow, Beijing and Pyongyang, maybe over many months or even years. The most realistic objectives are to further isolate Washington in the region, to bring Beijing and Seoul closer together, and to drive a wedge between Seoul and Washington. Moscow would use the failure of these negotiations to earn more leverage with its European partners, all eager to see a solution to the Korean crisis. Furthermore, Moscow could increase its opportunity to enter the energy market in South Korea as a result of Seoul diversifying its energy sources. Beijing has every intention of avoiding a war on the peninsula, which would be disastrous in many respects, not only humanitarian but also in the possibility of Washington camping on China's border as a result of destroying the DPRK.

South Korea's Moon Jae-in looks on anxiously, ready to reach an agreement with the North. The mastery of Sino-Korean diplomacy has created a win-win situation for Pyongyang, with Washington's eventual failure in the negotiations having negative reverberations with her allies in region. This is probably the reason why many in the US administration greeted Trump's decision to accept talks with Kim negatively.

Accepting to engage in talks signals a preparedness to negotiate. But as we can anticipate, the unwillingness of the Americans to accede to North Korean demands to abandon the peninsula doom the talks. At the same time, Pyongyang's offer to give up its nuclear weapons will leave Washington bearing responsibility for the failure of the talks if there is no commensurable response. For this reason, Trump has ingeniously decided to bring in two warmongers like [Pompeo](#) and [Bolton](#), intending to scare Kim into a negotiating position more favorable to Washington, a strategy he intends to also pursue in relation to Iran.

The truth is that American diplomacy has no room for [maneuver](#) with Korea; and since war is unthinkable, it is not even a real threat. This leaves Trump with a lot of bluster and a bunch of snarling hawks in tow, but with Pyongyang and Beijing left holding the aces, as will become clear in the coming weeks when all the cards are laid on the negotiating table.

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