

THE ART OF THE SUMMIT DEAL

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What is possible at the Trump-Kim summit?

A declaration that commits the DPRK to complete denuclearization in return for a U.S. pledge to end enmity and normalize relations is in the works. That could help to induce the North to suspend production of fissile material and possibly even suspend deployment of intermediate- and intercontinental-range missiles. Remote monitoring may prove of some use but delaying suspension to negotiate detailed verification would allow time for more Pu and HEU to be produced and more missiles to be fielded in the interim. In return, Trading with the Enemy Act sanctions imposed before the nuclear issue arose could be relaxed for yet a third time and energy assistance unilaterally halted by South Korea in 2008 could also be resumed.

Such a standstill agreement would give President Trump the success he wants. If he demands too much, however, he could torpedo the summit, an outcome he would prefer to avoid.

Verification could then begin by having the North declare how much Pu and HEU it produced and how many nuclear weapons it built and reveal the location of its suspect enrichment facility and allow its shutdown to be monitored. In turn, that will require further steps to end enmity, including the start of a peace process in Korea, a commitment to diplomatic recognition starting with an exchange of liaison offices, energy aid, and reciprocal inspections in South Korea.

The chances of persuading North Korea to go beyond another temporary suspension to dismantle its nuclear and missile programs are slim without movement by Washington and Seoul toward political and economic normalization, a peace agreement or treaty for a formal end to the Korean War, and regional security arrangements, among them a nuclear-weapon-free zone that would provide a multilateral legal framework for denuclearization.

The peace process can begin with a peace declaration by the U.S., South and North Korea. To replace the Military Armistice Commission, the U.S., North and South Korea could establish a “peace mechanism,” a joint military committee to negotiate confidence-building measures in the West Sea like a joint fishing area, a shipping lane for North Korean vessels, and mutual reduction of artillery nearby, as well as other measures to avert deadly clashes. The resolution of border disputes and further thinning out of forces along the DMZ could open the way to a formal agreement or treaty under U.N. auspices to end the Korean War. China might be a signatory, as well as Russia and Japan as guarantors.

Whether Kim may be willing to disarm and what he will want in return is mere speculation. Sustained diplomatic give-and-take with concrete proposals for reciprocal steps is the only way to find out.

Dismantling production facilities and disarming will take years. So will convincing steps toward reconciliation. Only then will we learn whether Kim is willing to give up his weapons.

If negotiations fail to stop North Korean arming, the U.S. and its allies can continue to rely on deterrence.