

# ANOTHER STEP TOWARDS PEACE AS TRUMP AND KIM MEET AT DMZ

By Donnelly McClelland



South Korea's president on Tuesday [2 July] called a recent US-North Korean summit at the Korean border an end of mutual hostility between the countries, despite scepticism by many experts that it was just a made-for-TV moment that lacked any substance. During their impromptu third summit at the Korean Demilitarised Zone on Sunday [30 June], Mr Trump and Mr Kim reaffirmed their friendship and agreed to resume nuclear talks. Mr Trump's brief stepping across the borderline into North Korea also made him the first sitting US president to set foot in the North's soil. (*Time*)

## ***Another step towards peace***

The historic meeting – the third in just over a year – was reportedly initiated by a tweet from Mr Trump that Mr Kim said took him by surprise. It again displayed a rapport between the two leaders, and a mutual willingness to keep the lines of communication open. The Demilitarised Zone (DMZ) where the meeting took place has for decades represented the hostility between the United States and North Korea, which are technically still at war.

Stu Smallwood (on *Antiwar.com*) highlighted two incidents during the DMZ meeting that indicated how much the situation has improved over the past two years: North and South Korean security guards exchanged warm greetings of recognition from past summits, and all were unarmed as a result of an inter-Korean agreement to finally demilitarise the Joint Security Area of the DMZ.

President Moon Jae-in of South Korea, meanwhile, has invested a tremendous amount of political capital in efforts to bring the two Koreas closer. He may not see a peace deal or a significant renewal of inter-Korean economic cooperation before his term in office ends, but Smallwood maintains that “his efforts will ensure his eventual successor finds it very difficult to resume the military tensions of the past.” Smallwood also credits Mr Trump for his strategic role in forming an amicable relationship with the leader of North Korea, doing more than any other sitting US president, to allow the space for a thaw on the peninsula.

## ***A possible way forward***

According to *Axios*, Steve Biegun (the Trump administration's North Korea negotiator) told reporters in an off-the-record briefing that “the administration wanted a ‘complete freeze’ of North Korea's weapons of mass destruction programme while they are negotiating with the US.” Biegun's remarks seem to signal his willingness to be more flexible with North Korea than some of the hardliners in the Trump administration. During the discussion he did, however, point out that the administration was not ready to lift the sanctions against North Korea if it freezes its weapons programme, but they could offer other concessions, such as humanitarian relief and improved diplomatic ties. Biegun insisted that the administration hasn't abandoned its goal of “complete denuclearisation”, but he reportedly said several times that he was open to some give and take along the way to that goal.

It seems that all senior officials in the Trump administration are agreed on the ultimate goal of “complete denuclearisation” of the Korean peninsula, but opinions seem to differ within the administration on the best way of reaching that goal.

Michael Bosack (a former intergovernmental negotiator writing in *Japan Times*) suggests four ways the Trump administration could improve their North Korean negotiations. One of those is targeting broader interests than simply “final, fully verified denuclearisation” (or FFVD). Bosack maintains: “The myopic focus on FFVD violates two core principles of negotiating: always negotiate interests, not positions, and never expect to get agreement on your opening position.” Bosack believes that the inflexibility of the US position reflects a lack of clarity of its underlying interests. He

concludes that the US has a variety of interests in their dealings with North Korea and that they could be secured through more flexible positions than “denuke or bust”.

### ***Diplomatic obstruction***

Some observers of the US-North Korea negotiations have raised concerns that two crucial advisors within Mr Trump’s inner circle – Secretary of State Mike Pompeo and National Security Advisor John Bolton – have, on more than one occasion, disrupted diplomatic progress. After the aborted Hanoi summit, a top North Korean official said that the “gangster-like” behaviour of Mr Trump’s ‘hawkish’ top officials helped derail the denuclearisation negotiations. The Vice Foreign Minister said the two had “...created an atmosphere of hostility and mistrust”.

Bolton and Pompeo have long espoused “maximum pressure” as the sole means for dealing with “rogue nations”. Both are opposed to any concessions prior to complete North Korean denuclearisation. Pompeo led the highly anticipated follow-up meeting to the Singapore summit, but had nothing to offer and much to demand, mainly asking for “a full declaration of North Korea’s nuclear arsenal [and] a timeline for dismantling the nuclear programme”.

Bolton reportedly had a similarly dampening effect at the Hanoi summit where he is said to have convinced Mr Trump to demand that Mr Kim hand over all of North Korea’s nuclear weapons material prior to any sanctions relief or improved diplomatic ties. Some commentators pointed out that such a demand could have only one outcome: the North Koreans walking away from the negotiation table. It thus appeared that Bolton had achieved his mission, as prior to the summit, he had expressed confidence that “the negotiations ... would collapse on their own.”

However, despite these major setbacks, Mr Trump’s continued efforts to build a harmonious and open relationship with Mr Kim has ensured that the lines of communication between the two nations have remained open, as was demonstrated by the DMZ meeting.

### ***FROM A CHRISTIAN PERSPECTIVE***

Mr Trump and Mr Kim clearly demonstrated their commitment to the peace-building process, ensuring the meeting at the DMZ took place despite very short notice. And while nothing major was decided, it was yet another building block in the peace process. One can imagine that these events could be a major source of encouragement for North Korean believers who have experienced years of isolation.

A peaceful and lasting resolution to the divided Korean peninsula would be a monumental achievement, and Mr Trump clearly has a number of counsellors who have an influence on his decision making. Proverbs 11:14 says: “Where there is no counsel, the people fall; but in the multitude of counsellors there is safety.” It is fortunate that not all of Mr Trump’s counsellors appear to seek confrontation, otherwise negotiations may never have gone beyond the first summit. Mr Trump has repeatedly stated that he is in no rush, and that he wants to do it right. There is much need to pray for him to receive Godly counsel as he continues to negotiate the road ahead.

### **PRAY**

- **For Mr Trump and Mr Kim to continue their efforts towards forging a lasting peace on the peninsula**
- **For the talks to resume and there to be a lasting breakthrough**
- **For North Korean believers to be deeply encouraged**

### **IMAGE SOURCE:**

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