

Meeting on Sentosa: “the Island of Death from Behind”. The Kim-Trump Singapore Summit

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Everything about this summit is in the showy warm-up run. “I am on my way to Singapore,” [tweets](#) US President Donald J. Trump, “where we have a chance to achieve a truly wonderful result for North Korea and the World.” Such descriptions from America’s ever hustling television president tend to become child like, whether glowingly or indignantly. On this occasion, he was glowing.

“It will be certainly an exciting day and I know that Kim Jong-un will work very hard to do something that has rarely been done before”.

Detractors and sceptics were fretting in the woodwork. Former US Representative from Florida [David Jolly](#) was one:

“Under scrutiny from loyal allies, Trump chooses to strengthen his alliance with Putin and Kim Jong Un.”

The slip into psychobabble becomes easy:

“Notwithstanding geopolitical consequences, it demonstrates a grown man unable to hold his own among peers, so instead seek affirmation among adversaries willing to provide it.”

Holding the summit on Sentosa Island suggested a deliciously disturbing twist. Now a resort destination drawing some 20 million visitors a year dotted by theme parks, beaches and Singaporean state propaganda, it had been known as Pulau Belakang Mati, “island of death from behind.” During the Second World War, summary executions of members of the Singaporean Chinese population were common on the island, as were instances of brutality towards British and Australian servicemen after their surrender to the Japanese in 1942.

This past did not distract. The two hefty figures approached before their flags. Pressed the flesh. Exchanged remarks. Before them stood two flags displayed with equal relevance (the free world types would have quaked), and a display that preceded an initial discussion between the two leaders. Importantly, that discussion was unencumbered by the machinery that has historically done as much to scupper smooth sailing than anything else. Only the two interpreters accompanying them at the initial stage will ever know.

The horror that this television, social media tart of a figure might pull off a durable peace

venture is not something that is missed by journalists and pundits. The press conference was filled with baffled queries: What about Kim's appalling human rights record? What of the actual details, the sort usually left for the mechanists to worry about after the photo snaps are taken.

This did not bother Trump. He had a show to perform, and accordingly ran it.

"There is no limit to what North Korea can achieve when it gives up its nuclear weapons and embraces commerce and engages with the rest of the world."

For Trump, reminders were important, and praise directed when required: the Chairman "has before him an opportunity like no other to be remembered as the leader who ushered in a glorious new era of security and prosperity for his people."

Then came that other horror: one of legitimacy. Both men, meeting alone, initially unencumbered by their advisors and policy staff; both, shaking hands and standing in front of their respective flags, levelling, legitimising, making those present complicit. This very fact would have made those familiar with the cultic regime padded by its ideological doctrine of [Juche](#) uncomfortable. It also showed the DPRK chairman that he had scored what was, some months ago, the unthinkable, and, more to the point, the unfathomable.

A curious perversion was effectively at play. To have reached this point necessitated a nuclear program that effectively terrified and tormented US strategists with sufficient bite to take Kim seriously. To bargain it away in the absence of various onerous security guarantees supplies the greatest talking point of all. The White House mythology is to see different triggers: crippling sanctions, maximum, pig-headed pressure, the indignation of the "Little Rocket Man" school of rhetoric.

Details of the Sentosa agreement have been sparse; the fastidious bookish types will be left disappointed.

"President Trump committed to provide security guarantees to the DPRK," went the salient part of the [joint statement](#), "and Chairman Kim Jong Un reaffirmed his firm and unwavering commitment to complete denuclearization of the Korean Peninsula."

Much of the previous work done to get the two leaders to Singapore was simply reiterated. The Panmunjom Declaration, signed by South Korea and the DPRK after the April 27 meeting committing both states to the complete denuclearisation of the Korean Peninsula, was reaffirmed.

If words are weapons to be forged, then some were sufficiently sharp to draw some attention. "Mutual confidence-building" measures were deemed essential to promote the goal of denuclearisation. Both states committed "to establish new US-DPRK relations in accordance with the desire of the peoples of the two countries for peace and prosperity." A "lasting and stable peace regime on the Korean Peninsula" would be worked towards. Then, something for the populist metre was also inserted for the voters back home: a commitment to recover US "POW/MIA remains, including the immediate repatriation of those already identified."

No timetable could be ventured on denuclearisation, the word that is keeping the astrological fraternity in international relations teased, but this did not stop Trump from insistent vagueness (“very soon” he hazarded and “as fast as it can mechanically and physically be done”). Sanctions, Trump observed, would “come off when we are sure that the nukes are no longer a factor.”

For one thing, both men insisted that what was signed did not necessarily incorporate what was said. Matters were tagged on, as if in a fit of absentmindedness. At stages during a press conference that resounded of Dada experimentation, Trump would tantalise journalists with remarks about record keeping – or its lack of. “We have notes or something,” he claimed offhandedly about the discussions.

As ever, [Twitter](#), with its brevity and short bursts of attention was a source to return to.

“Great progress was made on the denuclearization of North Korea. Hostages are back home, will be getting the remains of our great heroes back to their families, no missiles shot, no research happening, sites closing”.

The end, perhaps, of a certain beginning, done from behind.

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