



in the coming days both North Korea and the US will try the best of their diplomacy | Image: Reuters

Donald Trump is finally all set to meet his Korean counterpart Kim Jong-un this week. Potentially one of the most awaited meetings involves the two unpredictable leaders of the nuclear-armed nations who can accomplish what their predecessors failed to do. So, is Kim Jong-un ready to trade away his nuclear programme? Or is it just another set of face-to-face deceptive diplomacy?

Now looking into the present scenario, in the coming days both North Korea and the US will try the best of their diplomacy. However, it is possible that over-expectancy and unfulfilled promises can lead to more frustration among the leaders who have been known for their rhetoric. North Korea, for now, seeks a strong deterrent to one of its most powerful adversaries. In this case, a complete denuclearisation doesn't go hand in hand with regime survival for Kim. It is also unlikely that the US will settle for mutual nuclear vulnerability by agreeing even to a limited nuclear arsenal. Contrary to all this, the recent surprises from both ends still revive the scope of peace. Kim Jong-un's invitation to the South Korean envoy and freeing of US prisoners were certainly good gestures that were taken by the North Korean leader. Remarkable in this course of incidents was dismantling of its three underground nuclear tests tunnel in Punggye-ri. [\[i\]](#)

Varying Goals and Expectations

Although both the stakeholders are keen to hold further negotiation meetings it is important to understand the incongruity between the goals of President Trump and Kim Jong-un. President Trump has presupposed a goal of complete denuclearisation followed by complete verification and irreversible disarmament of the Korean peninsula. However, Kim is unlikely to settle for a complete irreversible denuclearisation given the fact that North Korea is deeply interweaved with the nuclear weapons even in its constitution.[\[ii\]](#) The The north Korean leader won't take any risk of threat to its own survival by maintaining a strong deterrence against both South Korea and the US by agreeing to complete denuclearization. It is also unlikely that the US will settle for mutual nuclear vulnerability by agreeing even to a limited nuclear arsenal. South Korean military and economic superiority have always been

a major concern for Kim Jong-un on account of which he would settle for something more than just sanctions-relief. Kim Jong-un has often mentioned the fall of the Libyan leader Muhammad Gaddafi as a proof that North Korea should not give up its nuclear weapons. Somehow the regime has successfully managed to deter any external intervention on its own land.

It is also important to understand Kim Jong-un's eagerness to hold negotiation talks with the US. Kim has remained concerned about North Korea's economic development. 'Byungjin Policy' or parallel development has been a central focus of his regime.^[iii] This policy advocates the simultaneous development of nuclear weapons and economic growth in North Korea. Given the fact that nuclear weapons have been core to North Korea's constitution, it is highly impossible to expect that Kim Jong-un will give any one of the objectives of 'Byungjin Policy'. For now, North Korea can freeze its nuclear facilities, but a complete denuclearisation is something which looks highly unlikely as of now.

Road Ahead

Despite several breaks in the talks, each of the stakeholders is still willing to hold peace negotiations. Since accepting Kim Jong-un's invitation in the month of March, President Trump raised high hopes. As a matter of fact, the much-anticipated summit in Singapore is expected to be the first meeting between the two head of the states of North Korea and the United States. The series of events that led to the agreement of peace talk was a believed to be major break-through for a conflict frozen zone that has its roots dating back to the end of the Korean War in 1953. The possibility of the complete denuclearisation was never highly likely, but the talks in some sense revived the hope for long-lasting peace in the Korean peninsula. North Korea, since the past few months, has been willing to negotiate with the US. Kim Jong-un is unlikely to lose out the opportunity of carrying out further negotiations after holding surprising meetings with Seoul, Beijing and Washington.

For the next few months, both North Korea and the US will use of their diplomacy to resolve tensions. If the US fails to lift its sanctions and military influence in North Korea, then it is obvious to assume Kim Jong-un backing out from holding further talks. In the short term, North Korea, to gain legitimacy and relief from economic sanctions, could halt its nuclear weapons programme to build its credibility with the assured survivability of its regime. A

proper agreement on various aspects of de-nuclearisation would also stabilise the dynamics of the North-East Asian region. Despite the will both leaders have shown, it is important to be on the same page when it comes to a definitive meaning of 'denuclearisation'. Even if the talks are halted for a while in between, both the leaders have opened the window and have been open for further talks

In sum, a strict review of all stakeholders can effectively put more leverage on their side in promoting and facilitating multilateral negotiations to avert any further escalation. Indeed, a military choice of containing North Korea will escalate tension in the region but a more cautious and strategic negotiation based on incentives, economic engagements and peaceful co-existence can surely help.

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[i]<https://edition.cnn.com/2018/05/24/asia/north-korea-nuclear-test-site-intl/index.html>

[ii]<http://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-2152718/New-constitution-declares-North-Korea-nuclear-armed-nation-indomitable-military-power.html>

[iii]<https://thediplomat.com/2017/07/north-koreas-icbm-test-byungjin-and-the-economic-logic/>

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