

KOREAN CONSENSUS? : ON KIM JONG-UN'S VISIT TO CHINA

Relevant for: International Relations | Topic: Effect of policies and politics of developed & developing countries on India's interests

The [visit to China of North Korean leader Kim Jong-un](#), at the invitation of President Xi Jinping, is significant for two distinct reasons. It is evidence of the continuing calm in the Korean peninsula for nearly a year since the thaw between Pyongyang and Washington that culminated in the Singapore summit in June 2018. The meeting also coincides with the resumption of trade negotiations this week between U.S. and Chinese delegations in Beijing. Expectations are that the dialogue between the regional neighbours could impact the trade dispute between the world's two largest economies. Whereas Mr. Xi is keen on securing sanctions relief for Mr. Kim, U.S. President Donald Trump will be equally eager that his peace deal continues to resonate in the region and beyond, notwithstanding the practical hurdles it has encountered. The Xi-Kim meeting cannot have overlooked the stalled progress on the denuclearisation of the Korean peninsula that Mr. Kim and Mr. Trump agreed on in Singapore. The American and North Korean leaders have in recent days reiterated their willingness to schedule another bilateral summit, a hope they have held out for months. But unlike the ambiguous promises issued in the Singapore declaration, Mr. Kim now wants to talk specifics. This could raise the stakes beyond diplomatic niceties and sound bites. In his New Year address, he emphasised the easing of economic sanctions as a priority, on which Beijing's diplomatic clout could prove critical despite the lack of movement on the nuclear question. In that speech, Mr. Kim also insisted on a permanent end to the annual joint military exercises between the U.S. and South Korea. Another demand was for multilateral negotiations to declare a formal end to the Korean war in place of the truce that has obtained since 1953. The latter issues have acquired greater weight in view of the ongoing rapprochement between Seoul and Pyongyang. This is exemplified by their decision to convert the Demilitarised Zone that separates the two countries into a peace park, and to disarm the joint security area.

Formal negotiations between North Korea and the U.S. have made little headway since the Singapore summit. Access to North Korea's nuclear installations has proved elusive to U.S. officials. The sudden cancellation of Secretary of State Mike Pompeo's visit to Pyongyang last August was an indication of the stalemate. A North Korean test of a new tactical weapon in November was seen as a way to pressure Washington for concessions, if not a return to the hostile posturing of previous years. The uneasy calm that has been sustained on the peninsula for over a year now is no doubt a respite from Pyongyang's successive nuclear tests to rattle the U.S. mainland. But Washington is impatient for information on the North Korean weapons stockpile. Pyongyang is anxious about sanctions relief. Something has to give.

As India takes over operations in the Iranian port, the possibilities and challenges are huge

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