

# TRUMP IN NORTH KOREA

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

U.S. President Donald Trump made history on Sunday when he stepped on to North Korean soil from the demilitarised zone (DMZ) that separates the two Koreas. He is the only American President to have visited North Korea, the isolated, nuclear-armed dictatorship that is historically seen as an enemy in Washington's policy establishment. The President's surprise announcement, via Twitter, that he was ready to visit the DMZ to meet with North Korean leader Kim Jong-un was typical of Mr. Trump, who enjoys conducting off-the-cuff personal diplomacy. North Korea seized the opportunity, and both leaders met at the DMZ, held talks for nearly an hour and decided to resume parleys that have stalled since the two leaders' failed summit in Hanoi. Mr. Trump deserves credit for infusing fresh life into the nuclear negotiations. His intervention came at a time when North Koreans were growing impatient over lack of progress in the matter of ties. In recent weeks, they had personally attacked U.S. Secretary of State Mike Pompeo and targeted the South Korean leadership over the sanctions and the logjam in talks. Now that both Mr. Trump and Mr. Kim have met and decided to set up teams on both sides to hold negotiations, the impasse is broken. But key challenges remain.

Mr. Trump appears to be committed to diplomacy in addressing the North Korean issue. Pyongyang, though often cryptic in its responses, has also shown interest in staying engaged with the U.S. Mr. Kim has, in principle, agreed to denuclearise the peninsula, which is the goal of the U.S. as well. But the critical question is when and how it should be done. The Hanoi summit collapsed chiefly as the U.S. considered the compromise that North Korea offered insufficient to warrant reciprocation with sanctions relief. North Korea had agreed to close down the Yongbyon facility, its main nuclear fuel production site, but the U.S. rejected the offer, saying the North's nuclear capability is now much more diversified and goes beyond that one plant. When they resume talks, the question of how much the North should compromise to get at least a partial reprieve from sanctions will be back. If the U.S. sticks to its maximalist demands such as complete denuclearisation, the talks are likely to run into trouble again. For Pyongyang, nuclear weapons are its insurance against potential external aggression, and it would accede to total denuclearisation only if its security concerns are ensured and sanctions are fully withdrawn. Both sides should learn from their failure in Hanoi. They can take small steps towards the final goal. The U.S. could demand a total freeze on North Korea's nuclear activities, besides shutting down Yongbyon, which the North has already agreed to, in return for providing partial reprieve from sanctions. Constructive and reciprocal confidence-building measures would mean that Mr. Trump's personal diplomatic outreach and the momentum it created won't be in vain.

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