

HANOI HICCUP: ON KIM-TRUMP SUMMIT

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

The [abrupt end of talks](#) between U.S. President Donald Trump and North Korean leader Kim Jong-un in Hanoi is clearly a setback to attempts to find a peaceful solution to the Korean nuclear crisis. Both sides cut short a two-day summit on the second day on Thursday without even signing a joint communiqué. They also gave conflicting versions on why the talks collapsed. Mr. Trump said Mr. Kim insisted on a full withdrawal of American sanctions in return for the closure of only one nuclear facility. However, North Korean Foreign Minister Ri Yong-ho later said Pyongyang had sought only partial sanctions relief in return for dismantling the Yongbyon nuclear site, the North's main facility. Whatever the actual reason, one thing is clear: the bonhomie between the two leaders after last year's Singapore summit was missing in Hanoi. After the Singapore meet, both sides had agreed to have "new U.S.-DPRK [North Korea] relations" and establish a "lasting and stable peace regime" on the Korean peninsula. Pyongyang had also promised to work toward "complete denuclearisation". No such comments about the future course of the peace process were issued this time. The North Koreans have ruled out any immediate plans for a future meeting between the two sides.

A part of the problem was the failure of both Washington and Pyongyang in following up on commitments made in Singapore. A few weeks ahead of that summit in June, North Korea had announced a complete freeze on nuclear and missile tests as a reconciliatory gesture. It had asked the U.S. to reciprocate — its main demand was a formal declaration of an end to the 1950-53 Korean War, but the Trump administration refused to do so. Lack of confidence-building measures too blunted the momentum created in Singapore. When U.S. Secretary of State Mike Pompeo first visited Pyongyang, Mr. Kim refused to meet him. Later, the American intelligence community reported that North Korea continued its ballistic missile programme after the first Trump-Kim summit. With these problems still in place, the second summit between the leaders was announced. Any hopes of clinching a big agreement in Hanoi fell as both sides stuck to their respective demands. However, the setback need not necessarily bring the peace process to a halt. Mr. Trump himself has said denuclearisation is a long process. The freeze on nuclear and missile tests that Mr. Kim announced is still in place. The Korean peninsula has been calm, while inter-Korean relations have markedly improved. Before the Hanoi summit, there were reports that the U.S. would declare an end to the Korean war and that both countries would open liaison offices in each other's capitals as part of normalisation of ties. They should go ahead with such measures and build confidence and mutual trust while also taking a phased approach to dealing with more contentious issues such as denuclearisation.

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