

Donald Trump cancels North Korea nuclear summit - Pyongyang: Will not 'beg'

Thursday 24 May 2018, by [Al Jazeera](#), [BORGER Julian](#), [HAAS Benjamin](#), [LAUGHLAND Oliver](#) (Date first published: 24 May 2018).

In letter to Kim Jong-un, Trump says talks are 'inappropriate ... based on the open hostility displayed in your recent statement'

Contents

- [Trump pulls out of summit with](#)
- [North Korea 'destroys' nuclear](#)
- [North Korea casts doubt \(...\)](#)
- [Trump-Kim summit: North \(...\)](#)
- [North Korea releases three US](#)

Donald Trump has cancelled his planned summit with the North Korean leader, Kim Jong-un, blaming his decision on a threatening statement from the Pyongyang regime, and warning that the US military is "ready if necessary".

The abrupt decision, which came as a surprise to US allies in the region, came after an exchange of menacing statements from US and North Korean officials.

But the Trump administration had also been growing increasingly concerned about a lack of response from Pyongyang in recent days to efforts to set up planning meetings in the run-up to the summit scheduled for 12 June in Singapore.

In a formal letter to Kim released by the White House [1], Trump said he had been "very much looking forward" to meeting the North Korean leader.

But he wrote: "Sadly, based on the tremendous anger and open hostility displayed in your most recent statement, I feel it is inappropriate, at this time, to have this long-planned meeting."

Trump declared that the meeting would not take place "for the good of both parties, but to the detriment of the world".

In remarks to the press after the letter was released, Trump said it was still possible the summit could go ahead, albeit at a later date, but warned Pyongyang that the US and its allies would respond if it carried out "foolish or reckless acts".

Asked if cancellation of the summit increased the risk of war, he replied: "We'll see what happens."

Meanwhile, the president said his campaign of "maximum pressure" would continue, involving the "strongest sanctions ever imposed". However, in the wake of Trump's withdrawal from this summit, soon after abrogating a nuclear deal with Iran that had global support, there are now serious doubts over his ability to galvanise international support for increased sanctions, or even enforce the

existing sanctions regime.

Trump's letter to Kim mixed regretful and conciliatory passages with a reminder of the size of the US nuclear arsenal.

"You talk about your nuclear capabilities, but ours are so massive that I pray to God they will never have to be used," Trump wrote.

The cancellation came two days after a visit to the White House by the South Korean president, Moon Jae-in, who had sounded hopeful about a historic summit that he portrayed as vital to peace on the Korean peninsula.

Moon held an emergency meeting with top officials just before midnight local time on Thursday night. His office appeared surprised by the announcement, with spokesman Kim Eui-kyeom saying: "We are trying to figure out what President Trump's intention is and the exact meaning of it."

Pyongyang also appeared to be taken entirely by surprise.

"There was a real sense of shock amongst the people I was sitting with, the North Korean officials," Will Ripley, a CNN reporter, said shortly after he read Trump's letter to them.

Ripley was part of an international group of journalists invited to North Korea to cover the destruction of a nuclear test site. The detonation of a system of mountain tunnels at Punggye-ri was presented by the regime as a gesture of good faith, although the regime has declared that it has made sufficient advances in its nuclear weapons technology that it no longer needs to conduct tests.

Speaking in Geneva, the UN secretary general, António Guterres, said he was "deeply concerned" about the cancellation of the summit, and appealed for a continued dialogue to "find a path to the peaceful and verifiable denuclearization of the Korean peninsula".

Trump's change of mind appeared to have been sudden and recent. In an interview recorded on Wednesday and broadcast on Thursday morning on Fox News, Trump had offered a concession to North Korea, saying he could accept a phased disarmament, contradicting his own top foreign policy officials.

The about-face followed a strongly worded statement by North Korea's vice-foreign minister Choe Son-hui, which in turn was a response to hardline comments by the US vice-president, Mike Pence.

In her statement, Choe warned that Pyongyang could make the US "taste an appalling tragedy".

If the talks are cancelled, Choe suggested the two countries could engage in a "nuclear-to-nuclear showdown".

She said: "Whether the US will meet us at a meeting room or encounter us at nuclear-to-nuclear showdown is entirely dependent upon the decision ... of the US. We will neither beg the US for dialogue nor take the trouble to persuade them if they do not want to sit together with us."

In his letter, Trump thanked Kim for releasing three US citizens last month. He said: "That was a beautiful gesture and was very much appreciated."

He left the door open to a future meeting if and when the war of words calmed down.

"I felt a wonderful dialogue was building up between you and me, and ultimately, it is only that

dialogue that matters. Some day, I look very much forward to meeting you,” he wrote in a letter that appeared to have been directly dictated by Trump, reflecting his speaking style, without corrections to syntax and grammar.

“If you change your mind having to do with this important summit, please do not hesitate to call me or write. The world, and North Korea in particular, has lost a great opportunity for lasting peace and great prosperity and wealth. This missed opportunity is a truly sad moment in history.”

Mike Pompeo, the US secretary of state, also blamed the summit’s cancellation on North Korean rhetoric “and the fact that we have not been able to conduct the preparation between our two teams that would be necessary to have a chance for successful summit”.

North Korean officials failed to appear at a logistics meeting with their US counterparts. A follow-up meeting in Singapore had been planned for this weekend, but Pompeo said: “We had received no response to our inquiries from them.”

The immediate trigger for the row that erupted between Washington and Pyongyang and derailed the summit was the Trump administration’s repeated references to the “Libyan model”, which was presented by some officials as referring to Muammar Gaddafi’s 2003 agreement to abandon his nuclear weapons programme and surrender related equipment and materials to the US.

Trump and Pence, however, used the phrase to refer to the 2011 toppling of Gaddafi and his subsequent murder at the hands of rebels after a Nato-backed insurrection. On Monday, Pence echoed the president when he said on Monday: “This will only end like the Libyan model ended if Kim Jong-un doesn’t make a deal.”

This triggered Choe’s statement on Thursday, dismissing Pence’s remarks as “stupid” and issuing reciprocal threats.

North Korea analysts said there were deeper problems underlying the proposed summit than heavy-handed use of menacing language.

“Expectations were overblown for the North Korea summit, and there are legitimate reasons to question whether Kim Jong-un is serious about giving up its nuclear weapons, but Trump’s letter is an overreaction and ignores the role that top officials played in provoking this crisis,” Kelsey Davenport, director for non-proliferation policy at the Arms Control Association, said.

Julian Borger in Washington and **Benjamin Haas** in Seoul

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Trump pulls out of summit with North Korea’s Kim Jong-un

Trump cites ‘tremendous anger and open hostility’ from North Korea as reasons for cancelling the landmark meeting.

US President Donald Trump has announced he will not attend a planned meeting with North Korean

leader Kim Jong-un, raising concerns tensions between the two nations will escalate again with the threat of war.

In a letter sent to Kim on Thursday, Trump said the summit - which had been scheduled for June 12 in Singapore - would no longer be possible "based on the tremendous anger and open hostility" shown by Pyongyang in its most recent statements.

"The world and North Korea has lost a tremendous opportunity for lasting peace and great prosperity and wealth," Trump wrote. "This missed opportunity is truly a sad moment in history."

The meeting would have been the first time a sitting US president met a North Korean leader.

The announcement comes two days after Trump hosted his South Korean counterpart Moon Jae-in in Washington, DC, for talks widely seen as a salvage effort to ensure his summit with Kim went ahead.

"You talk about your nuclear capabilities, but ours are so massive and powerful that I pray to God they will never have to be used," said Trump.

There was no immediate response from North Korea.

A statement earlier on Thursday from Pyongyang referred to Vice President Mike Pence as a "political dummy", and said it is just as ready to meet in a nuclear confrontation as at the negotiating table with the United States.

In a later statement at the White House, Trump said the US military is "ready if necessary" to respond to a "foolish or reckless act" by North Korea.

"Our military is the most powerful in the world. We are more ready than we have ever been before," Trump said.

'Don't hesitate to call'

Trump did say, however, he would be open to a possible meeting in the future.

"If you change your mind having to do with this most important summit, please do not hesitate to call me or write," he said.

Trump had called on Pyongyang to abandon its nuclear weapons programme and arsenal ahead of the summit.

North Korea, which reportedly demolished its Punggye-ri nuclear test site earlier on Thursday, had threatened to pull out of the Singapore summit if the US continued to demand it gives up its nuclear arsenal unilaterally.

Mark Fitzpatrick from the International Institute for Strategic Studies told Al Jazeera the tone of Trump's letter bodes ill for peace on the Korean Peninsula.

"The way that Trump did this in a letter that threatens North Korea with nuclear annihilation is probably not the right signal to send," said Fitzpatrick.

"I don't think North Korea is going to respond so well to that kind of a threat. North Korea is going to feel betrayed by this, North Korea will react negatively."

US Secretary of State Mike Pompeo told a Senate committee on Thursday the White House had

“tried repeatedly” to connect with North Korea in recent days over plans for the Singapore summit, but received no response.

Will not 'beg'

Earlier this month, Pyongyang said ongoing US-South Korea war games off the peninsula were not conducive to peace talks and demanded the manoeuvres be cancelled. The US balked at that demand.

North Korean Vice Foreign Minister Choe Son-hui said on Thursday her country “will neither beg the US for dialogue, nor take the trouble to persuade them if they do not want to sit together with us”.

“Whether the US will meet us at a meeting room, or encounter us at nuclear-to-nuclear showdown is entirely dependent upon the decision and behavior of the United States,” said Choe.

A spokesperson for Moon’s office said on Thursday that South Korea was trying to understand the reason for Trump’s abrupt cancellation.

“[We] are trying to figure out what President Trump’s intention is and the exact meaning of it,” Cheong Wa-dae told South Korea’s Yonhap news agency.

Moon convened an emergency meeting with top security officials after Trump’s cancellation.

Sliding back to war

Andrei Lankov, an expert at South Korea’s Kookmin University, told Al Jazeera from Seoul that Trump’s announcement was “shocking and highly dangerous”.

“There is now again a looming and reasonably high threat of a major military confrontation in Korea,” Lankov said. “The entire Korean Peninsula is probably sliding back to a war, and if it happens not only Koreans or Americans but all people of the world will pay a price.”

Hazel Smith, a professor at the University of London, said comments by Trump administration officials such as National Security Adviser John Bolton and Pence in recent days about a “Libya model” for North Korea likely made Pyongyang nervous.

Former Libyan leader Muammar Gaddafi gave up his nuclear arsenal in negotiations with the West, but he was later overthrown and killed after a NATO air intervention that supported rebels on the ground.

“For North Korea, this [Libya model] simply means the overthrow of the government as Gaddafi was overthrown,” said Smith.

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<https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2018/05/trump-pulls-summit-north-korea-kim-jong-180524134740695.html>

North Korea 'destroys' nuclear test site as world's media watches

Pyongyang claims to have dismantled its only known nuclear test site, with journalists witnessing the explosions.

North Korea claims to have dismantled its only known nuclear test site, detonating explosives and collapsing its entrances in front of international television crews in a highly symbolic move.

Reporters at the scene described a series of explosions throughout the day, three of them in entry tunnels to the underground facility, followed by explosions that demolished a nearby barracks and other structures.

Tom Cheshire, the Asia correspondent for Sky News and one of the journalists invited to watch the demolition, said: "We hiked up into the mountains and watched the detonation from about 500 metres away. They counted it down: three, two, one.

"There was a huge explosion, you could feel it. Dust came at you, the heat came at you. It was extremely loud."

North Korea did not invite any independent observers from overseas.

The gesture is meant to reinforce the pledge by the North Korean leader, Kim Jong-un, to stop nuclear tests before a summit with Donald Trump on 12 June in Singapore.

Despite North Korea's desire to close the site, a war of words between Pyongyang and Washington this week cast a dark cloud over the summit, with both sides threatening to delay or pull out of the talks.

"Pyongyang wants a spectacle that leaves an impression of good faith," said Mintaro Oba, a former US diplomat who worked on North Korea policy. "But its recent statements affirm the substantive questions of denuclearisation are going to be much tougher."

North Korea has used the site at Punggye-ri for all six of its nuclear tests. The most recent one, in September, which produced a 6.3-magnitude earthquake that was felt across the border in China and Pyongyang, claimed to have successfully tested a hydrogen bomb.

Experts have said while decommissioning the site is an important diplomatic gesture, it will not affect the North's nuclear arsenal.

Earlier on Thursday, North Korea reminded the world it was not shy about verbally brandishing its nuclear weapons, saying the US had to choose whether it wanted to "meet us at a meeting room or encounter us at nuclear-to-nuclear showdown".

The test site consists of four main tunnels beneath mountains in the north-east, according to analysis by the monitoring group 38 North. While there has been some debate about whether the facility is still structurally sound, 38 North said two unused tunnels remained.

That appears to confirm Kim's claim the site was still in good working order, after a group of Chinese geologists said it had collapsed and was beyond repair.

The closing of the tunnels consisted of three explosions, with the first collapsing the entrance to the north tunnel, which was used for five tests beginning in 2009, according to the Associated Press. Journalists were taken to the tunnel entrance and shown explosives before moving to a safe distance,

CNN reported.

“There were neither leakage of radioactive materials nor any adverse impact on the surrounding ecological environment,” North Korea’s Nuclear Weapons Institute said according to the state run Korean Central News Agency.

But no international inspectors were allowed to survey the site. Experts have said that if only the entrances were sealed at the closing ceremony the tunnels could easily be reopened if Pyongyang decides to resume nuclear tests.

Before the closing ceremony, buildings at the complex were razed in preparation for a visit by 30 international journalists. The remote location meant the group had to travel 18 hours by rail and bus, before continuing on foot for roughly the last hour. Radiation monitoring equipment brought by some reporters was confiscated by authorities, according to Sky News.

The site’s location only became known in 2006 when the North conducted its first nuclear test under Kim’s late father, Kim Jong-il. Activities since have been watched closely through satellite imagery.

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North Korea casts doubt on summit and warns US of ‘nuclear showdown’

Vice foreign minister says nation will not ‘beg the US for dialogue’ and threatens America will ‘taste an appalling tragedy’.

North Korea cast further doubt on a planned summit between its leader, Kim Jong-un, and Donald Trump, warning that Pyongyang could make the US “taste an appalling tragedy”.

The fate of the summit is “entirely” up to the US, North Korea’s vice foreign minister Choe Son-hui said in a statement on Thursday. If the talks are cancelled, Choe suggested the two countries could engage in a “nuclear-to-nuclear showdown”.

“Whether the US will meet us at a meeting room or encounter us at nuclear-to-nuclear showdown is entirely dependent upon the decision ... of the US,” she said.

“We will neither beg the US for dialogue nor take the trouble to persuade them if they do not want to sit together with us.”

The comments come after Trump earlier this week said there was a “very substantial chance” the summit could be delayed.

They also follow a week of heated rhetoric in Washington, with some US officials threatening a fate similar to Libya if the North does not relinquish its nuclear weapons program. Libya dictator

Muammar Gaddafi was overthrown and killed in a Nato-backed uprising against his rule.

“In view of the remarks of the US high-ranking politicians who have not yet woken up to this stark reality and compare the DPRK to Libya that met a tragic fate, I come to think that they know too little about us,” Choe said, referring to the North’s official name, the Democratic People’s Republic of Korea. “To borrow their words, we can also make the US taste an appalling tragedy it has neither experienced nor even imagined up to now.”

In an interview on Fox News, US vice president Mike Pence said: “This will only end like the Libyan model ended if Kim Jong-un doesn’t make a deal”. That echoed earlier comments by national security advisor John Bolton that the US was studying Libya’s unilateral disarmament as a blueprint for negotiations with Pyongyang.

“As a person involved in the US affairs, I cannot suppress my surprise at such ignorant and stupid remarks gushing out from the mouth of the US vice-president,” Choe said.

She said Pence had made “unbridled and impudent remarks that north Korea might end like Libya”.

Earlier on Wednesday, US secretary of state Mike Pompeo had said he was “very hopeful” the summit would go ahead but it was “ultimately up to Chairman Kim.”

The comments come as North Korea prepares to close its only known nuclear test site, a symbolic gesture that ultimately will not affect the country’s nuclear arsenal.

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Trump-Kim summit: North Korea threatens to walk away

Pyongyang threatens to walk away from Trump-Kim summit after US vice president’s comments on denuclearisation.

North Korea has threatened to walk away from the proposed summit with US President Donald Trump, if Washington continues to do what it described as “unlawful and outrageous acts” that could damage Pyongyang’s “goodwill”.

North Korean Vice Foreign Minister Choe Son-hui said on Thursday that her country “will neither beg the US for dialogue, nor take the trouble to persuade them if they do not want to sit together with us”, according to the Korean Central News Agency.

“Whether the US will meet us at a meeting room, or encounter us at nuclear-to-nuclear showdown is entirely dependent upon the decision and behavior of the United States.”

Choe issued the warning as she denounced as “ignorant and stupid” the remarks made by US Vice President Mike Pence that North Korea might end up like Libya, if it refuses to adhere to the

American demand of denuclearisation.

In 2004, Libya also entered into negotiations with the US to ship out nuclear components out of the country. But six years later, the US supported the ouster of Libyan leader, Muammar Gaddafi, who was later killed by rebel fighters.

“In view of the remarks of the US high-ranking politicians who have not yet woken up to this stark reality and compare the DPRK to Libya that met a tragic fate, I come to think that they know too little about us,” Choe said, using the acronym for North Korea’s official name.

“To borrow their words, we can also make the US taste an appalling tragedy it has neither experienced nor even imagined up to now.”

The North Korean comments came after the US Secretary of State Mike Pompeo said America will walk away from the summit, if Pyongyang doesn’t agree to its terms.

Pyongyang has been ramping up its criticism of the US for its “unilateral” demand of denuclearisation.

‘Now is the time’

Doubts have also been raised about the planned meeting between Trump and North Korean leader Kim Jong-un in Singapore on June 12.

During his meeting with South Korean leader Moon Jae-in on Tuesday, Trump said “there’s a very substantial chance it won’t work out”.

On Wednesday, Trump told reporters that he will know by “next week” if the talks will proceed or not.

Visiting Washington, DC, China’s Foreign Minister Wang Yi told Secretary of State Pompeo that “now is the time” for the US and North Korea to hold the summit, if the US wants peace with Pyongyang. China is North Korea’s closest ally.

Wang said China hopes the Trump-Kim summit will take place as scheduled.

Meanwhile, Lee Chun-geun, a senior research fellow at South Korea’s Science and Technology Policy Institute, told South China Morning Post that North Korea must blow up its nuclear site in Punggye-ri, instead of merely shutting it down, to prove that it is sincere in getting rid of nuclear weapons.

“If only the entrance is blown up, it would be classified as a closure and the site may be used again later if Pyongyang decides to proceed with additional nuclear tests,” Lee told the Hong Kong-based news organisation.

“If the explosions are inside - especially in the unused western and southern tunnels - you can then call this a dismantlement as North Korea won’t be able to reuse the venue again even if they change their minds in future.”

On Wednesday, North Korea allowed journalists to witness the dismantling of the Punggye-ri nuclear test site.

But sceptics said that it could just be a repeat of the 2008 destruction of a nuclear cooling tower. North Korea resumed its nuclear weapons programme soon after that.

“If they change their mind, they can basically construct another site, and it will not take much time and will not cost much money,” Andrei Lankov, an expert at South Korea’s Kookmin University, told Al Jazeera.

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<https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2018/05/trump-kim-summit-north-korea-threatens-walk-180524052723410.html>

North Korea releases three US citizens in run-up to Trump summit

US secretary of state Mike Pompeo secures release of men during visit to Pyongyang.

North Korea has released three US citizens, in a move that continues the apparent thawing of its relations with the United States ahead of a planned meeting between Kim Jong-un and Donald Trump.

The release of the three men, all US citizens of Korean heritage, marks a major diplomatic victory for the Trump administration and was secured during a visit to North Korea by Mike Pompeo, the US secretary of state.

Trump announced on Twitter that the former detainees were headed back to the US on the same flight as Pompeo. The president was scheduled to meet them at Joint Base Andrews, an air force base near Washington DC, on Wednesday night.

“They seem to be in good health,” Trump tweeted, adding that a date and location for his summit with the North Korean leader had been set, without revealing further details.

Speaking to reporters later on Wednesday morning, Trump said he would announce a site for the summit within three days but confirmed it would not be held at the demilitarised zone along the border between the two Koreas.

“President Trump appreciates leader Kim Jong-un’s action to release these American citizens, and views this as a positive gesture of goodwill,” the White House said in a statement on the prisoner release. The three men were able to walk “without assistance” to the plane.

Pompeo’s trip came amid a frenzy of diplomacy. Kim made a surprise trip to China on Monday for a two-day summit with the Chinese president, Xi Jinping. The visit came less than two weeks after a historic meeting between the North Korean leader and the South Korean president, Moon Jae-in.

“North Korea recognises that not releasing the detainees will call its sincerity about progress into question,” said Mintaro Oba, a former US diplomat who worked on North Korea policy. “By releasing them, it gets to look like it is the driver of progress, putting pressure on the United States to reciprocate, or at least do nothing to disrupt the good atmosphere.”

But the release will do little to bridge the chasm that remains between Washington and Pyongyang over the North’s nuclear programme, Oba said.

After Kim returned to Pyongyang from China, Trump and Xi spoke by phone and the two “agreed on the importance of continued implementation of sanctions on North Korea until it permanently dismantles its nuclear and missile programmes”, according to a summary of the call released by the White House.

Negotiations for the release of the three Americans reportedly began two months ago when North Korea’s foreign minister floated the idea during a visit to Sweden.

Tony Kim and Kim Hak-song were arrested last year just months after Trump took office and were accused of committing “hostile acts” against North Korea. Both men worked for the Pyongyang University of Science and Technology, a school founded by evangelical Christians in 2010 that mostly teaches children of the political elite.

The other detained American, Kim Dong-chul, was arrested in 2015 and later sentenced to 10 years hard labour for spying. The businessman who once ran a hotel in the North said he had tried to steal military secrets for South Korea during a staged press conference in 2016.

All three men are unrelated. The US has previously accused North Korea of arresting its citizens for use as “pawns for a political agenda”.

Otto Warmbier, an American student, was released last year after 17 months in detention, only to die several days after returning to the US. There are also six South Korean citizens, including three pastors, being held by the North, and Seoul has pledged to push for their release.

“Our government has worked to resolve the detainee issue through inter-Korean talks and cooperation with the international community,” Baik Tae-hyun, spokesman for the South’s unification ministry, said according to Yonhap news agency. “It will continue to make active efforts to bring back those detainees as soon as possible.”

The move comes as China, Japan and South Korea have agreed to work together to encourage North Korea to give up its nuclear weapons and on three-way and regional free trade agreements.

The agreements came on Wednesday at a meeting in Tokyo with the Japanese prime minister, Shinzō Abe, the Chinese premier, Li Keqiang, and South Korea’s President Moon. It was the first such trilateral summit since November 2015.

Moon called on China and Japan to play an active role in ridding the Korean peninsula of nuclear weapons.

Abe reiterated Japan’s position that it would normalise ties with North Korea only if the latter took concrete steps toward abandoning its nuclear and missile programmes and resolved the issue of Japanese citizens abducted by North Korean agents.

Benjamin Haas in Seoul and **Oliver Laughland** in New York

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Footnotes

[1] <https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2018/may/24/trump-north-korea-letter-kim-jong-un-cancel-summit>