

## North Korea: No summit for the moment

Following fears in 2017 of an escalation of the North Korean crisis, an unexpected detente has come in early 2018. North Korean athletes took part in the Winter Olympics in South Korea, and Pyongyang undertook a charm offensive followed by a successful historic inter-Korean summit in late April, which may prompt long-awaited peace talks. A summit between US President Trump and North Korean Leader Kim Jong-un had been scheduled for 12 June in Singapore, but Trump called it off on 24 May. The main issue is the extent to which Pyongyang's leadership is ready to agree on denuclearisation on the Korean Peninsula.

### An unexpected detente

The events of 2017 triggered fears around the world that the [North Korean crisis](#) could develop into a larger-scale conflict. Instead, in his [New Year speech](#), Kim, though not renouncing his bellicose language towards the USA, held out an [olive branch to Seoul](#), calling for peace on the Korean peninsula and offering talks on sending a delegation to the February 2018 Winter Olympics in Pyeongchang (South Korea). The USA and South Korea announced the [postponement](#) of their annual Foal Eagle military exercises. On 17 January 2018, the two Koreas reached an agreement: North Korea would participate in the Olympics, the athletes of both sides would march together under the blue [Korean Reunification Flag](#) and form a joint women's ice hockey team. Kim's younger sister Kim Yo-jong was a member of the North Korean delegation and her [handshake](#) with South Korea's President Moon Jae-in during the opening ceremony, together with an all-female North Korean squad of cheerleaders, upstaged the Olympic athletes. Kim Yo-jong delivered her brother's invitation to President Moon to visit Pyongyang. On 5 March in Pyongyang, Kim met a delegation of South Korean officials for the first time. On 6 March, Seoul [announced](#) that the two Koreas had agreed to hold a summit at the end of April at the truce village of Panmunjeom. This was followed by the 9 March [announcement](#) that US President Trump had accepted Kim's proposal for a bilateral summit. Kim then made a secret [trip to China](#) to meet Xi Jinping, his first trip abroad since becoming leader. On 21 April, North Korea reaffirmed that it would [suspend nuclear](#) and missile tests immediately and dismantle its nuclear site in Punggye-ri, where Pyongyang's six nuclear tests had taken place. On 28 April, Seoul officials [said](#) that the dismantlement would be done in the presence of experts and media representatives.

### The inter-Korean summit

On 27 April, Kim Jong-un and Moon Jae-in met at the Peace House in the truce village of Panmunjeom, in the Korean demilitarised zone. This was the first inter-Korean summit to take place outside North Korea (the previous two in 2000 and 2007 were held in Pyongyang) and the first visit by a Northern leader to Southern territory. Many elements of this highly mediated summit were expressly designed to be [symbolic](#).

The two leaders issued the [Panmunjeom Declaration](#). They agreed to pursue trilateral or quadrilateral meetings in the course of 2018 — involving the two Koreas and the USA, and/or China too — to declare the end of the Korean War and to sign a peace treaty. They 'confirmed the common goal of realising, through complete denuclearisation, a nuclear-free Korean Peninsula'. They agreed to carry out disarmament in a phased manner and to transform the demilitarised zone into a 'peace zone' and to cease all hostile acts against each other, such as for instance broadcasting through loudspeakers and distributing leaflets. The Northern Limit Line in the West Sea (also known as the Yellow Sea) would be turned into a maritime peace zone. The two countries have already re-established a hotline and will hold dialogues, negotiations and establish a joint liaison office with representatives of both sides. Cross-border railways and roads are to be built, as agreed in 2007. Reunion programmes for separated families are to be planned for 15 August, National Liberation Day, the two countries' only common public holiday, and there will be joint participation in the [2018 Asian Games](#). Later Pyongyang [reset its time zone](#) to match Seoul's time, moving back from its 2015 decision. Whereas only one year ago, South Korea appeared side-lined in the context of the North Korean crisis, Moon Jae-in, elected on a programme to [engage with North Korea](#), is now reaping the benefits of his work on diplomatic rapprochement between Pyongyang, Seoul and Washington. Not

only is he enjoying [record support](#), but he has also convinced a previously reluctant [South Korean public](#) of the merits of [engaging with Pyongyang](#). Moon has also underlined that the issue of the US armed forces presence in South Korea (28 500 personnel) is [unrelated](#) to the peace agreement — although some allege that Washington may consider [downsizing](#) or even [removing](#) them.

### A US-North Korea summit would be on denuclearisation, not on human rights

A US-North Korea summit had been announced as taking place in [Singapore on 12 June 2018](#). It would have been the first ever meeting between a sitting US president and a North Korean leader. Washington has claimed that its intransigent policy — which led it to walk away from the 2015 [Iran nuclear deal](#), despite [EU](#) and [UN opposition](#) — is paying off. Internationally backed [UN sanctions](#) may have convinced Pyongyang's regime to come to terms, especially after [Beijing, frustrated](#) by its lack of leverage to prevent North Korea from escalating regional tensions, began adopting a [tougher line](#). This is a critical issue for Pyongyang as trade with China is crucial to its survival. This also explains why Kim has met Xi Jinping twice in two months — a [second surprise summit](#) took place on 7 and 8 May. In turn, China is concerned about being outflanked by Washington in peace talks (as is [Japan](#), owing to the security implications) and is [successfully reasserting its influence](#). Kim Jong-un, meanwhile, has gained confidence since completing the development of nuclear weapons and ballistic missiles able to strike the US mainland: he may feel able to negotiate from a position of strength. His focus now has shifted towards [economic development](#): on 21 April, Kim proclaimed that the ruling Workers' Party's 'new strategic line' should be [socialist economic construction](#).

On 17 April, it was [revealed](#) that, while he still was CIA director — shortly after being nominated (but before being confirmed) as secretary of state — [Mike Pompeo](#) had travelled to North Korea to meet with Kim Jong-un. Pompeo said that [Kim is 'serious' about denuclearisation](#). The parties may look at the issue in [different ways](#) however. [Washington's position](#) can be summed up in the acronym CVID: complete, verifiable, irreversible dismantlement of the North Korean facilities, carried out under the inspection of independent observers. Only once these conditions have been met, would US policy towards Pyongyang be ready to change. Pyongyang may however advocate denuclearisation of the whole Korean Peninsula in a wider sense, that would include the US military presence — despite Moon's recent reassurances — and in an incremental approach under which concessions would be synchronised. North Korea threatened to pull out of the Singapore summit following US National Security Adviser, [John Bolton](#)'s, and Vice-President, [Mike Pence](#)'s, references to the Libyan model, and [insulted](#) the latter. This prompted Trump to [cancel](#) the summit on 24 May, citing 'tremendous anger and open hostility in North Korea's most recent statement.

UN Secretary-General António Guterres is [optimistic](#) that the negotiations on denuclearisation would be meaningful. A [compromise](#) between the two positions will however need to be found if a deal is to be achieved. Should a summit take place, its agenda — as was the case for the inter-Korean summit — may not include [North Korean human rights abuses](#), despite the 'egregious human rights violations' ascertained in the [2017 Country Reports on Human Rights Practices](#) published on 20 April by the US Department of State. However, following a second surprise visit by Pompeo to Pyongyang on 9 May, [three US citizens](#) imprisoned in North Korea since 2015 and 2017, were released — a goodwill gesture from Kim.

### EU and European Parliament on recent North Korean crisis developments

On 9 March, High Representative/Vice-President (HR/VP) Federica Mogherini [welcomed](#) the announcement of the two summits. She reaffirmed that the EU supports 'the objective of the complete, verifiable and irreversible denuclearisation of the Korean Peninsula'. On 13 March, during a debate at the European Parliament in Strasbourg, she [praised](#) President Moon's efforts and underlined the power of multilateral diplomacy and the unity of the international community. A delegation from Parliament's Committee on Foreign Affairs visited South Korea, including the demilitarised zone near the North Korean border, on 5 and 6 April. The delegation [advocated](#) a new boost to peace talks and the denuclearisation of the Korean Peninsula, urging that pressure on North Korea should be maintained, until it delivers in a concrete manner. On 6 April, the EU Council aligned its [restrictive measures](#) with the latest UN sanctions against North Korea, and on 19 April it [added](#) four people involved in financing the nuclear programme to the sanctions list. On 21 April, the HR/VP [welcomed](#) Kim's announcement that nuclear tests and missiles launches were being halted and the nuclear test site closed. She offered to share the EU's experience of negotiations on denuclearisation, while maintaining its policy of [critical engagement](#).

