

Super Dunces Trump, Bolton and Pence Suckered by Kim Jong Un

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Trump's Korea Blunder Is Worse Than It Looks

We should note how immediate the meeting between the two Korean leaders occurred after Trump cancelled the summit as well as the price the USA has paid internationally. Acute tactician and clearly shrewd strategist Kim just won the day.

Kim Jong Un appears very smart indeed. China is stronger and U.S. allies now know not to trust Washington.



Three Blind Mice, Pence, Trump and Bolton

Donald Trump thinks he's a great negotiator, a brilliant bluffer whose gut instincts are so stellar that ignorance of history and refusal to deal with substantive complexities are irrelevant.

That's why he bragged he'd win the Nobel Peace Prize for his genius in getting North Korea to give up its nuclear weapons. Except, of course, it didn't. It's good his Singapore summit with Kim Jong Un was canceled. The larger picture in this and other major issues is how the American president is remarkably ill-prepared and uninformed.

Incredibly, he might have been outmatched in the June 12 face-off with the "little Rocket Man," the untested North Korean tyrant. Analysts suggest Kim "has done his homework," according to Jung Pak, a Brookings Institution scholar who was the North Korea expert at the Central Intelligence Agency and then for the director of National Intelligence. "He's apparently well read on the issue and pretty comfortable with the technology," she said.

Pak wasn't surprised when Trump, after canceling the summit, said the next day that it might be back on. South Korean President Moon Jae-in and Kim held a surprise weekend meeting. A subsequent session now seems likely.

But there's little reason to believe a U.S. president who governs by bluster and is interested only in whether he gets credit and looks good would be better prepared for any next round. That's unsettling.

Clearly, the North Koreans played games and were duplicitous; they always do and always are. It's a brutal, corrupt regime.

Trump and his sycophants claim it was his toughness that scared Kim and forced him to consider negotiations; they say the president showed resolve and guts in walking away.

More likely, this has been Kim's long-range plan for several years, as Robert Carlin, a former diplomat and intelligence official who has been to North Korea dozens of times, told the Washington Post's David Ignatius. Kim effectively built up his nuclear arsenal, ignoring threats from Trump and others, and giving himself enough leverage to start to backtrack a bit. The regime supposedly dismantled one its nuclear testing sites last week.

Without question, the economic sanctions, begun under President Barack Obama and toughened by Trump, pressured this economic basket case of a country. And more important than Trump's "fire and fury" rhetoric was a new South Korean administration willing to deal with its seven-decade-old enemy; a war on the peninsula would topple Kim but at a cataclysmic price.

Trump, being Trump, didn't have the decency to give the South Koreans advance notice of his plans to cancel the summit. This is a pattern. He surprised our close ally when he impulsively announced he would meet with Kim, though no preparations had been made.

Trump's hawkish national security adviser John Bolton, eager to sabotage any deal, raised the analogy of Libya, which gave up its nuclear weapons and later, with Western support, was toppled. Vice President Mike Pence weighed in similarly.

"Citing the Libyan example was very counterproductive," notes Charles Armstrong, a Columbia University professor and Korean scholar. Trump's clamor about de-nuclearization was a misnomer. Kim might make important concessions, but he's never going to totally give up his most powerful chip; put yourself in his shoes.

Early last year Trump acknowledged, after China's Xi Jinping had explained it to him, that the Korean situation was more complicated than he had thought. Unfortunately, the president didn't seem to learn much, alternately crediting and blaming China for North Korea's behavior. There is mutual contempt between these two neighbors, but they need each other, a reality reinforced by Trump's bumbling.

History bores Trump - he seems not to know or care much - and he doesn't read briefing books. A few months ago in the New Yorker, top aides to former national security adviser H.R. McMaster attested to the president's shallowness. National security briefings, one former staffer said, had to be boiled down to two or three bullet points, "with the syntactical complexity of 'See Jane run.'"

The great deal maker has yet to make even a decent deal as president; he hasn't negotiated anything on health care, immigration or infrastructure, and the trade negotiations with China may be a bust.

In Korea, here's what his gut instincts, with little knowledge, produced: North Korea is a greater nuclear threat than it was 17 months earlier. Kim Jong Un, depicted then as an irrational roly-poly comic-book figure with weird hair, is seen more as shrewd operative. China's influence on the Korean peninsula and the region has grown. And as American allies, especially South Korea, painfully learned, Washington is not reliable.

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