

# Press Releases: Press Briefing at the White House

Press Availability  
Mike Pompeo

Secretary of State

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**SANDERS:** Good afternoon. Thanks for being patient with us. Obviously, there's a great deal of interest on the upcoming summit with the North Koreans. We have Secretary Pompeo here, who will make some brief opening remarks and then take questions on that topic. As you know, the President has already done a press conference today, so we'll keep questions limited to that. And we'll be around the rest of the day to answer other news of the day.

Thanks. With that, Mr. Secretary.

**SECRETARY POMPEO:** Thanks, Sarah.

**QUESTION:** Sarah, are you going to take questions after (inaudible)?

**SECRETARY POMPEO:** Yes, I'm going to take a couple questions. (Laughter.) A couple. Good afternoon. It's great to be joining you all here today. Early in his presidency, President Trump made a commitment to address the threat of North Korea, which has been a threat to our nation for far too long.

President Trump has been, and continues to be, committed to ridding the United States and the world of threats posed by North Korea's weapons of mass destruction and ballistic missile programs. These programs threaten our homeland, our allies and partners, and the broader non-proliferation regime. North Korea's past activities also make clear that it is proliferation to other actors that creates a risk, in addition to the primary risks. It has supporting infrastructure that is also of concern.

In early 2017, the Trump administration decided on a policy we have referred to as the "maximum pressure campaign." The campaign enacted the strongest economic and diplomatic sanctions against North Korea in history. The goal was to set the conditions for the DPRK to make a strategic decision to denuclearize as the best means by which it will achieve its own security.

American leadership rallied the international community to send a strong message to Chairman Kim Jong Un and the world that we would not stand for the DPRK's illegal weapons programs. The President's bold decision to meet with Chairman Kim Jong Un grew from this incredibly strong and targeted campaign. The President's policy directly led to the historic summit that will take place on June 12th in Singapore.

Back on March 8th, Chairman Kim Jong Un expressed his desire to meet with President Trump as soon as possible. And then on May 9th, I met with Chairman Kim Jong Un in Pyongyang and explained America's expectations for denuclearization.

At that time, we also secured the release of three Americans: Kim Dong-chul, Tony Kim, and Kim Hak-song. We view this as a sign of goodwill from Chairman Kim Jong Un.

The United States and North Korea have been holding direct talks in preparation for a summit, and North Korea has confirmed to us its willingness to denuclearize. A comprehensive whole-of-government effort in support of President Trump's upcoming summit is under way. White House- and State Department-led advance teams are finalizing logistical preparations and will remain in place in Singapore until the summit begins. The President continues to follow every development closely, and is getting daily briefings from his national security team.

The fact that our two leaders are coming to the table shows that the two sides are very serious. The diplomatic model we've used to date is different from past efforts. Our efforts give us hope that we can find real success where past efforts have fallen short.

President Trump is hopeful, but he's also going into the summit with his eyes

wide open. We've seen how many inadequate agreements have been struck in the past. And you can be sure that President Trump will not stand for a bad deal. The United States has been clear, time and time again, that complete, verifiable, and irreversible denuclearization of the Korean Peninsula is the only outcome that we will find acceptable.

The President recognizes that North Korea has great potential, and he looks forward to a day when sanctions on the DPRK can begin to be removed. However, that cannot happen until the DPRK completely and verifiably eliminates its weapons of mass destruction programs.

President Trump and Chairman Kim will certainly also discuss security assurances for the DPRK, establishing a peace regime, and improving relations between our two countries. Until we achieve our goals, the measures that the world, alongside the United States, has put on the regime will remain. In the event diplomacy does not move in the right direction, these measures will increase. Throughout the entire process, the United States has been unified with Japan and South Korea in response to the threats from North Korea.

I will be traveling with my – excuse me, I will be traveling to meet with my Japanese and South Korean counterparts after the summit to continue to coordinate with them. I will also stop in Beijing following the Singapore summit. I'll provide them with an update and underscore the importance of fully implementing all sanctions that are imposed on North Korea.

President Trump recognizes North Korea's desire for security and is prepared to ensure a DPRK free of its weapons of mass destruction is also a secure North Korea.

President Trump has made it clear that if Kim Jong Un denuclearizes, there is a brighter path for North Korea and its people. We envision a strong, connected, secure, and prosperous North Korea that is integrated into the community of nations. We think that the people of the United States and North Korea can create a future defined by friendship and collaboration, and not by mistrust and fear.

We believe that Chairman Kim Jong Un shares this positive vision for the future, and we are committed to finding a path forward. And we assume and hope that that belief is sincere.

We're looking forward to being in Singapore in just a few days.

**SANDERS:** As a reminder, we'll take just a few questions before the Secretary has to depart.

Roberta.

**QUESTION:** Thank you. What progress have you made in narrowing the gap in your understanding of denuclearization and North Korea's definition of denuclearization? Has there been progress in bringing that definition closer together?

**SECRETARY POMPEO:** Yes.

**QUESTION:** Can you describe that a little bit?

**SECRETARY POMPEO:** No.

(Laughter.)

**SANDERS:** That was quick. Jon Decker.

**QUESTION:** Thank you, Sarah. Thank you, Secretary Pompeo. As you mentioned in your remarks, North Korea, in the past, has reneged on prior agreements that it's made with the U.S. government. So I have two questions for you. The first question has to do with your experience meeting with Kim Jong Un. Do you trust him? And my second question has to do with the negotiations that are upcoming with North Korea. Who, in your opinion, has the upper hand in the negotiations, and why?

**SECRETARY POMPEO:** So with respect to your first question, I've had the chance to meet with Chairman Kim Jong Un twice now. I can tell you he is very capable of articulating the things that he is prepared to do, present clearly the challenges that we all have to overcome. It's why the two leaders are meeting. It's the opportunity to lay those out clearly between the two leaders so that we can see if we can find a path forward together that achieves the outcomes that both countries want.

And your second question?

**QUESTION:** Who has the upper hand in the negotiations?

**SECRETARY POMPEO:** Yeah. We don't think about it in terms of who has the upper hand. We know this has been a long, intractable challenge. It's gone on for decades. The President has said repeatedly: Previous administrations weren't prepared to do what we've done already. It's not about who has the upper hand. It's about trying to find a way where the two sides can come to an understanding, where we can get concrete steps, not just words, that resolve this challenge.

Pamela.

**QUESTION:** Mr. Secretary, first of all, the President said that he doesn't believe he needs to prepare very much ahead of this summit. Do you think that's a prudent approach?

And also, I want to get your reaction to Rudy Giuliani's comments that "Kim Jong Un got back on his hands and knees and begged" for the summit to go back on – whether you think he should be weighing in on these international affairs and whether you agree with that assessment.

**SECRETARY POMPEO:** So back to your second question. I took him as it being a small room and not being serious about the comments. I think it was a bit in jest, and –

**QUESTION:** Do you think it could jeopardize the summit or –

**SECRETARY POMPEO:** We're moving forward. We're focused on the important things. I know Rudy. Rudy doesn't speak for the administration when it comes to this negotiation and this set of issues.

With respect to your first question, you know, progress – we're making progress, inch by inch. And we're going to travel there. This is different. The approach that President Trump is taking is fundamentally different. In the past, there have been months and months of detailed negotiations, and it got nowhere. This has already driven us to a place we've not been able to achieve before.

**SANDERS:** Dave Boyer.

**QUESTION:** Thank you, Mr. Secretary. The President said today that if the Singapore meeting goes well, he'd like to bring Kim Jong Un to Washington, possibly, for further meetings. Has Kim Jong Un invited the President to come to North Korea?

**SECRETARY POMPEO:** So I don't want to talk to you about the conversations that have been had between the North Korean side and the United States. I'll leave that for the President to talk to.

But I do want to get to – and this comes back to the other question that you asked about the President's preparation. So in my previous role – and I've said this before; you can look it up – there were few days that I left the Oval Office after having briefed the President that we didn't talk about North Korea. So over months and months, days and days, President Trump has been receiving briefings on this issue about the military aspects of it; the commercial, economic aspects of it; the history of the relationship. And in the past few months, there have been near-daily briefings, including today, where we have been providing the President all the information that he needs. And I am very confident that the President will be fully prepared when he meets with his North Korean counterpart.

**QUESTION:** Just having met the man twice now, what can you tell us about what opinions you've formed of Kim Jong Un as a person?

**SECRETARY POMPEO:** Yeah. So I haven't spent that much time with him. What I have said publicly is he has indicated to me, personally, that he is prepared to denuclearize; that he understands that the current model doesn't work, that he's prepared to denuclearize.

And that, too, he understands that we can't do it the way we've done it before – that this has to be big and bold, and we have to agree to making major changes. We can't step through this over years, but rather need to acknowledge it will take some amount of time, that this doesn't happen instantaneously. But that the model for succeeding – security assurance; and political normalization; and denuclearization completely, verifiably, and irreversibly – for that to take place, we've got to make bold decisions.

And I'm hopeful that Chairman Kim Jong Un is prepared to make that decision for his country. A big shift in his strategic understanding of his security.

**SANDERS:** Ayesha.

**QUESTION:** Thank you. So you said that you – that the President is prepared to talk about security guarantees for North Korea. We have seen in this administration that you can – that when new administrations come in, they can undo things that prior administrations have done. How can President Trump guarantee long-term security for North Korea and for Kim, in particular?

**SECRETARY POMPEO:** Well, look, we're going to have to do things that convince Chairman Kim that that's the case. All right? That's what we'll have to do.

So let me give you an example. We are hopeful that we will put ourselves in a position where we can do something the previous administration didn't do. Right? They signed a flimsy piece of paper, and we're hoping to submit a document that Congress would also have a say in – that would give currency and strength and elongation to the process, so that when administrations do change, as they inevitably do, and this one will – six and half years from now – when that takes place, that Chairman Kim will have comfort that American policy will continue down the same path, on the course that we hope we're able to set in Singapore.

**SANDERS:** We'll take one last question. Zeke.

**QUESTION:** Thank you, Mr. Secretary. At the top of your remarks – first, to follow up briefly on your comments just about Asia. When you say a “document” that Congress would sign off on, are you referring to a treaty?

Then second, at the top of your remarks, you said that there's also this threat to the United States and its allies from the North Koreans' WMDs, as well as ballistic missiles. Is that a condition for the President in any negotiation agreement with Chairman Kim, that its ballistic missile program and chemical weapons also be part of that?

And third, finally, can you discuss the format of the meeting between the President and Chairman Kim? What will it look like? Who will be there?

**SECRETARY POMPEO:** So I'll leave it to the White House to talk about the format of the meetings when the time is right.

With respect to proliferation risk, it's very real. There is a history of that, with respect to North Korea and some of our other difficult challenges in the world today. They are connected. The reason you want complete, verifiable, and irreversible is precisely that. To the extent there remain stockpiles, knowledge bases, warehouses, systems, infrastructure, fissile material production facilities – I could go on – to the extent those remain, the risk of proliferation continues. And it's our aim, through the CVID process and providing the security assurances that Chairman Kim will want, that we can greatly reduce the risk that proliferation ever happens as a result of North Korean actions.

**SANDERS:** Thanks so much –

**QUESTION:** One more please, Sarah.

**QUESTION:** Mr. Secretary, can you explain the President's shift – when he's gone from talking about defining success for this meeting as denuclearization of the Peninsula, to now talking about the need for more meetings? Can you explain what happened there and why this shift? And can you also describe your disagreements over North Korea internally with the national security advisor?

**SECRETARY POMPEO:** Yeah, with respect to the second one, I've read a little bit about this. And I love good fiction as next as – as much as the next person, but it is without foundation, so much so that – I'll be polite, since I'm a diplomat now. Suffice to say, those articles are unfounded and a complete joke.

**QUESTION:** Surely, there had to be – must have been some –

**SECRETARY POMPEO:** Oh, sure. Ambassador Bolton and I will disagree with great, great consistency over time, I'm confident. Right? We're two individuals. We're each going to present our views. I'm confident that will happen on issues from how long this press conference ought to go – (laughs) – to issues that really matter to the world.

So it's absolutely the case that Ambassador Bolton and I won't always agree, and I think the President demands that we each give him our own views.

**QUESTION:** (Inaudible.)

**SECRETARY POMPEO:** Yeah. So you had a first – your first question, I'll try to answer. I'll try to answer your first question, too. I don't see the shift as disjunctive as you do. The President has always understood that this was a process. It's been very clear that there would – that it would always take a great deal of work to do this.

So I think your – you can interpret it how you will, but I think your characterization of that also doesn't reflect the President's understanding. I think his understanding about this process has been pretty consistent since I've been working with him now, almost a year and a half ago.

**SANDERS:** Thanks so much, guys.

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