



The Trump-Kim Summit in Hanoi: A Review

Interview with Dr. Peter Roell

March 2019

Summary

In the interview, the author cites two crucial reasons for the summit's failure: the lack of diplomatic preparatory work at working level and adherence to maximum demands by both parties. Light is thrown on the respective objectives of the USA and North Korea, possible concessions by Pyongyang and Washington, as well as the rejection on the part of the USA, reactions by South Korea, Japan and the People's Republic of China.

To resolve the Korean problem, Washington must prepare for protracted negotiations. Responsible ministries, academic and scientific organizations and the private sector should be involved in this strategic planning process. A political rapprochement with North Korea should take place step by step, whereby the lifting of sanctions should be limited in time so as to confirm North Korea's adherence to its commitments.

Advances on the Korean peninsula will only be achievable if the US cooperates with partners. The People's Republic of China will play a crucial role in this process.

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Interview

Thiele: Dr. Roell, firstly, in your interview *Korea at the Crossroads* from August 2018 you predicted that Kim Jong-un would never unilaterally relinquish his nuclear potential. Do you feel confirmed in your analysis following the unsuccessful Summit meeting between American President Donald Trump and North Korean ruler Kim Jong-un, and secondly, for what reasons did the talks in Hanoi fail?

Roell: Quite simply because the interlocutors were not even in a position to jointly define what denuclearization is. Furthermore, I share the CIA's analysis that North Korea will abandon its nuclear weapons programme following the initiation of economic opening. I believe that this will apply for the next fifteen years.

The summit talks failed for two fundamental reasons: Lack of diplomatic preparation at working level and failure to adhere to maximum demands by both sides.

Thiele: With what objectives did America enter into negotiations?

Roell: Washington expected North Korea to abandon its nuclear and ballistic intercontinental missile program, including biological and chemical weapons. In addition, Pyongyang was to agree to a concrete timetable of nuclear disarmament measures: that North Korea join the Nuclear Non-proliferation Treaty (NPT), that it discloses its entire nuclear weapons program, and agree to international inspections as part of this process.

Thiele: And what did Kim Jong-un envisage?

Roell: For his concessions, Kim will expect UN sanctions to be lifted as soon as possible, and in the medium - and long - term a formal declaration of intent to dissolve the ceasefire agreement in place since the cessation of hostilities in Korea and to sign a corresponding peace treaty at a later date. Furthermore, the reduction of American and South Korean forces on the Korean peninsula, the establishment of diplomatic relations with the USA and considerable economic aid are also on his agenda.

Thiele: What kind of concessions would Kim Jong-un have been willing to make?

Roell: As President Trump stated to the press in the wake of the failed summit, North Korea would have been prepared to destroy the nuclear complex in Yongbyon in exchange for the complete revocation of all UN sanctions. When President Trump presented Kim with a detailed list of North Korean arsenals and military facilities and called for US inspections of these facilities - which apparently took Kim by surprise - he was no longer prepared to make any further concessions.

North Korea's Foreign Minister Ri contested Trump's statement by making it clear to the press that his country had not called for all UN sanctions to be lifted, but only five, namely, those which would affect the economy and livelihood of the population.

Thiele: So, as a first step, why didn't the US respond to Kim's offer?

Indeed, the US is very well-informed about North Korean military potential. Yongbyon is not the only facility where the country operates its nuclear and missile program. Pyongyang has about 20 missile launching bases that have never been declared, including Sino-ri, Sabnam-ni, Tongchang-ri, etc. Furthermore, eight nuclear facilities are visible on satellite images. It is interesting, in this context, to note that - as satellite images indicate - North Korea already commenced reactivating the Sohae test facility for rocket propulsion and the launch pad for satellites between 16 February and 2 March 2019. I regard this as a political signal to the Americans that



Pyongyang could start rocket testing again following the failed talks in Hanoi. It also shows how rapidly the North Koreans are in a position to reverse the dismantling measures they have initiated.

Thiele: And how did South Korea, which sees itself as mediator and bridge-builder between the USA and North Korea, react to the summit's disappointing outcome?

Roell: Disenchantment signals the end of enchantment, one might say. It is only natural that South Korea should have suffered a setback after President Moon Jae-in's commitment to substantially improve relations with North Korea. Seoul, however, sought to highlight positive aspects of the Trump-Kim talks. Progress had been made, but unfortunately a breakthrough had not been effected.

In talks with the USA and North Korea, the South Korean government will again try to act as mediator in order to realise economic projects with Pyongyang. These include, for example, cooperation in the Kaesong economic zone in North Korea and the resumption of tourism in the Kumgang mountains.

Thiele: How does the South Korean population view the ongoing presence of 28,000 American troops within its borders?

Roell: Despite the US President's statement that he could also reduce the US armed forces in South Korea, the majority of Koreans surveyed in January of this year still believe that the USA is a reliable partner. Three out of five respondents also believe that the presence of US troops in the country does not jeopardize the North-South Korean rapprochement process. The US nuclear shield is seen as an effective deterrent against potential North Korean nuclear threats. The presence of U.S. troops in South Korea is also facilitated by recent agreement that foresees an 8.2 percent increase in the cost of stationing U.S. troops in Seoul to US\$924 million by 2019.

In an endeavour not to further strain political relations with North Korea, the defence ministers in Washington and Seoul announced that they would not carry out joint large-scale manoeuvres, but only small-scale exercises.

Thiele: How does the People's Republic of China assess the premature failure of the summit?

According to the leading article of the Global Times dated March 1 of this year, the US is to blame for the failure of the negotiations, seen as being too hasty and inadequately prepared. It is now a question of preventing a reversal to previous conditions. The Daily News wrote that the US should develop a long-term plan for solving the nuclear problem on the Korean peninsula.

Among the general interests of the People's Republic of China is that it attaches fundamental interest in a nuclear weapons-free North Korea in the long term, but not particularly by way of rapid advances. On its way to becoming a world power, Beijing perceives the USA as the greatest challenge - politically, economically, militarily and technologically. In this power struggle, the Chinese leadership continues to hold a trump card with North Korea.

In the lead up to the Trump-Xi summit, scheduled for the end of March in the USA, China will act cautiously on the Korean question.

Thiele: And how has the Japanese government evaluated the summit?

Roell: Japan's Foreign Minister Taro Kono advocated Trump's course of insisting on complete, verifiable and irreversible denuclearization. Prime Minister Shinzo Abe expressed his interest in a meeting with Kim Jong-un,



whereby there would continue to be close coordination with the USA on issues of kidnapped Japanese, and the problems of nuclear missiles and nuclear weapons.

Thiele: What conclusions should the US draw from the Trump-Kim Summit?

One would be well-advised to prepare for follow-up discussions! All responsible ministries, in addition to scientific institutes and private-sector organisations should be included in long-term planning for a solution to the Korea problem. Furthermore, steps should be taken in stages so as to allow for concessions on both sides. UN sanctions could also be lifted temporarily were Kim Jong-un to make concessions on denuclearisation.

On the whole, the USA should prepare itself for long-term negotiations. Even if the US President deems himself best deal-maker of all time, progress on the Korean peninsula is to be achieved only *with* and not *without* partners. The People's Republic of China will play a decisive role in this process.

Remark: The present contribution represents the views of the author.

About the Author of this Issue

Dr Peter Roell has been President of the Institute for Strategic, Political, Security and Economic Consultancy (ISPSW) in Berlin since January 2006. His former post was as Senior Advisor for Foreign and Security Policy at the Permanent Representation of the Federal Republic of Germany to the EU in Brussels. While in Germany, he served the German Government as Director of the Asia-Pacific, Latin America and Africa (Sub-Sahara) Department and at German embassies in the Near and Middle East, and in Asia.

Dr Roell studied sinology and political sciences at the universities of Bonn, Taipei and Heidelberg. He gained his Ph.D. from the Ruprecht-Karls-University, Heidelberg.

Dr Roell is an Ancien of the NATO Defence College in Rome and the Federal Academy for Security Policy (BAKS) in Berlin.



Dr Peter Roell



Interviewer

Ralph Thiele, born in 1953, retired Colonel, held in his 40-year military career in the German Armed Forces key national and international positions. He

- Commanded troops up to the battalion level;
- Developed concepts and capability requirements in the Ministry of Defence;
- Drafted speeches and policy papers for Federal Presidents, Ministers of Defence, Major NATO Commanders and Service Chiefs;
- Drove educational innovation at the German Armed Forces Command and Staff College (Director Faculty) and at the NATO Defense College (Chief of Staff);
- Shaped the Bundeswehr's path towards network enabled capabilities (Commander Bundeswehr Transformation Command).

In his honorary and business functions he advises on Defence Innovation and Cyber issues in times of digital transformation. He has been frequently consulting, publishing and lecturing in Europe, America and Asia.

Ralph D. Thiele is also a member of the ISPSW Speaker Management Team. Further information at ISPSW website: <http://www.ispsw.com/en/speaker-management/>



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