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## *The Assad-Kim Summit with Iran in the Background*



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Foreign leaders who discern little logic or consistency in Trump's foreign policies conclude politely that he is "pragmatic," or that his actions simply fulfill his campaign promises and are designed to appeal to his base.

All who have met him seem to have been briefed by their intelligence services about his narcissistic personality and know the best way to deal with him is to praise him. Kim Jung

Un has applauded his “courage” in agreeing to the summit. He knows he can deliver Trump a diplomatic triumph if the summit simply establishes a schedule for denuclearization along with gradual sanctions lifting and diplomatic relations. Trump can already boast that his threats against North Korea forced the historic meeting between North and South that resulted in the historic announcement of the end of the state of war between them on April 27.

Neither side minds if the U.S. president wants to take credit; he freaked them both out with his talk of annihilation such that they realized they would need to act preemptively and approach Trump, as it were, as a team, extending the North Korean leader’s proposal for a summit via South Korean representatives (a stroke of genius). It appears much good will has developed between Kim and Trump as the summit approaches. Democrats in Congress fearing a political success for Trump are preparing to demand any deal make denuclearization “permanent” and imposing other conditions for Congressional approval.

If through the cunning or reason, Trump stumbles on a way towards peaceful Korean reunification, he may be stumbling towards disaster in Iran. The Iranian leaders are not praising Trump. They have read the U.S. list of 12 “basic requirements” for an Iran deal better than the JCPOA agreement that the U.S. has unilaterally abandoned, to the dismay of practically everyone but the Israelis and Saudis. Rouhani, if authorized by the Supreme Leader, could offer some compromise, just to satisfy Trump’s desire to show how bullying gets results. But there’s no way Tehran will meet the U.S. demands.

Meanwhile, both the Israelis and Saudis prepare for strikes on Iran, and the Saudi pressure on Qatar may augur a general Arab-Iranian war in the future. It is now well known that Israel and Saudi Arabia have held talks on cooperation against Iran.

Trump did not run promising to bomb Iran (as John McCain once had) but rather urging the avoidance of Middle East wars. But his national security advisor is the arch-neocon John Bolton who has long advocated the bombing of Iran’s nuclear facilities. Netanyahu has had enough clout on Trump as to occasion the moving of the U.S. embassy to Jerusalem, again to the dismay of all but the Israelis; he threatens to bomb Iran and has pleaded with the U.S. to do it.

The announced visit of the Syrian president (and key Iran ally) Bashar al-Assad to Pyongyang links these two crisis areas. It shows that Assad feels confident after his victories over his opponents in Syria, just as it shows that Kim feels newly comfortable in his status as recognized international leader.

U.S. media pundits and former state department officials are aghast that Kim will host a “war criminal” but what’s really happening is both saying to Trump: neither of us is isolated, we both have strong allies including Russia, China, and Iran; we are in control of our countries and willing to make deals with you on the basis of mutual respect.

It will be a meeting of Bolton targets, strategizing about how to defend themselves and the world against the hawks surrounding Trump. Kim having met Trump will describe him to the Syrian president, and then maybe Assad will send a letter to Trump with some content about Iranian and Hizbollah forces in Syria, some thoughts about restoring U.S.-Syrian relations suspended in 2011, some thoughts about Syrian assistance in back-channel contacts with Iran, etc. Stranger things have happened.