

# ISSUE BRIEF

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## North Korea Overshadows Trump–Xi Summit

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President Donald Trump predicts a “very difficult” meeting with Chinese President Xi Jinping<sup>1</sup> as the two leaders face off on a broad array of issues in this week’s summit in Palm Beach. Economic issues will be high on the President’s agenda, as will enduring U.S. interest in the freedom of the seas. But the most serious priority for the President must be North Korea. He should follow through on concerns expressed by him and his Administration to press the Chinese as hard as possible to do their part to rein in Korea’s nuclear missile program.

Deputy National Security Advisor K. T. McFarland stated that “there is a real possibility that North Korea will be able to hit the US with a nuclear-armed missile by the end of the first Trump term.”<sup>2</sup> Secretary of Defense James Mattis declared that North Korea was acting in “a very reckless manner [and] has got to be stopped.”<sup>3</sup>

President Trump has made clear that he expects Beijing to increase pressure on its North Korean ally to curtail the regime’s growing nuclear and missile arsenal. In an interview with the *Financial Times*, President Trump commented that “China has great influence over North Korea, and China will either decide to help us on North Korea, or they won’t.”

Trump declared that “if China is not going to solve North Korea, we will.”<sup>4</sup>

The President added that the U.S. can “totally” solve the North Korean nuclear issue without China. When asked about potential U.S. leverage, President Trump replied that “trade is the incentive. It is all about trade.” Last year, candidate Trump asserted that China would either “have to straighten out this North Korea problem or we are not going to be doing so much business with you.”<sup>5</sup>

The Trump Administration reportedly accelerated its North Korea policy review in order to provide fodder for the meeting with Xi.<sup>6</sup> Though not yet publicly disclosed, discussions with Administration officials indicate that the emphasis will be on re-strengthening the U.S. military, augmenting ballistic missile defense, and increasing pressure on North Korea, including secondary sanctions against Chinese entities violating U.S. law.

But it is unclear how far President Trump would go to prevent North Korea from completing its development of an intercontinental ballistic missile. When the President was told that North Korea had claimed it had reached the “final stage of preparations to test-launch an intercontinental ballistic missile,” he declared, “It won’t happen.” Kellyanne Conway, Counselor to the President, explained that President Trump had put Pyongyang “on notice” and that “the president of the United States will stand between them and missile capabilities.”<sup>7</sup>

During his trip to South Korea, Secretary of State Rex Tillerson stated that if the North Koreans “elevate the threat of their weapons program to a level that we believe requires action, that [military] option is on the table.”<sup>8</sup>

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This paper, in its entirety, can be found at  
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## Four Actions for President Trump in Meeting with President Xi

During the meeting between the two leaders, President Trump should:

- 1. Reject China's disingenuous proposal that North Korea halt its nuclear and missile tests in return for an end to allied military exercises in South Korea.** The former is already required under numerous U.N. resolutions while the latter is the legitimate exercising of military forces for the defense of South Korea against North Korean threats and deadly attacks. Instead, Pyongyang should comply with U.N. Security Council resolutions requiring the regime to denuclearize.
- 2. Pressure President Xi to take additional measures against North Korea.** Washington should make clear to Beijing that Pyongyang is a national security threat to the U.S. and its allies and that Chinese inaction or obstructionism on North Korea will impact the bilateral U.S.–China relationship.
- 3. Inform President Xi that if Beijing is unwilling to shut down Chinese violators of U.N. resolutions and U.S. law, the U.S. will do so** by imposing secondary sanctions against Chinese financial institutions and businesses that trade with those on the sanctions list or export prohibited items. Imposing secondary sanctions would have a chilling effect on Chinese econom-

ic engagement with North Korea since the risks would outweigh the economic benefits.

- 4. Affirm that the U.S. will deploy THAAD to defend South Korea.** The Trump Administration should take all necessary measures to protect its ally and U.S. forces stationed on the Korean Peninsula from the North Korean threat. Continued Chinese economic and diplomatic pressure against South Korea will also affect the U.S.–China relationship.

## Conclusion

Amongst the many misconceptions about sanctions is that the U.S. has to rely on Chinese government acquiescence. While Beijing should certainly be implementing required U.N. sanctions, the U.S. can use its laws to influence the behavior of Chinese banks and companies that do business with North Korea.

Even when the Chinese government was resistant to constraining its engagement with North Korea, Washington was able to wean away Chinese entities from dealing with Pyongyang, lest they face unilateral U.S. sanctions themselves. While the U.S. wants Beijing onboard, Washington should not refrain from enforcing its laws. *Not* sanctioning Chinese violators is to give them immunity from U.S. law.

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