

**WHY DID THE HANOI SUMMIT FAIL
AND WHAT COMES NEXT?
COVERAGE IN FOUR COUNTRIES**

Introduction

The summit on February 27-28 in Hanoi between Donald Trump and Kim Jong-un ended on a sour note, casting doubt on the one-year old diplomatic process that had produced an upbeat summit between the two in Singapore the previous June. Much speculation followed on what had gone wrong, who was to blame, and how diplomacy could be put back on track. Given the importance of the four countries caught between the U.S. and North Korea in setting the course for addressing the North Korean challenge, their media and journal coverage of the state of diplomacy after the Hanoi summit merits close attention, which is provided below.

The following chapters examine how the South Korean, Chinese, Japanese, and Russian media and journal articles have covered the Hanoi summit and its immediate aftermath. They tell us about the hopes and concerns of four countries and point to differences in thinking about the nature of the diplomacy between the U.S. and North Korea and the expectations for what will follow. Coverage ranges from anticipation of the summit in the first two months of 2019 to immediate reporting on what transpired on February 27-28 to interpretations over the next month or longer of the impact of the summit for U.S. and North Korean policy and for the geopolitics of Northeast Asia and, specifically, the foreign policies of each of the four countries.

Each chapter pays special heed to the apprehensions related to the talks or how they could leave one's country in dire straits, and to the range of responses to what is transpiring. Close attention is given to what one's own country should do either if progress is made in diplomacy or if a breakdown occurs. Also of interest is whether coordination with other states is sought.

The views presented in 2019 are rooted in thinking that dates, at the least, to when the crisis over North Korea's nuclear weapons arose in 2002-2003. In the 1990s, there was greater doubt about what was transpiring after the first North Korean breakout from International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) inspections, and the Agreed Framework set a course that generally held but was shrouded in great uncertainty, even as the most relevant states remained unclear about their own strategic priorities and approach. By the early 2000s, the responses of four states had mostly been clarified. Despite supporting denuclearization, China and Russia had chosen to blame the U.S. for taking too hardline a stance in managing the diplomacy. Japan, in turn, urged the U.S. to stay firm and, when it saw wavering, was critical of a lack of steadfastness. South Korea was the most torn over what to do, responding under progressive leaders with encouragement for more U.S. concessions to the North and under conservative leaders with wariness that U.S. steadfastness was in doubt.

In 2018-2019, Seoul's progressive administration has again become a booster of avid engagement, Tokyo's leadership has reasserted its opposition to U.S. flexibility that could be construed by the North as weakness, and Moscow and Beijing have doubled down on blaming the U.S. for being too inflexible despite having supported UN Security Council sanctions resolutions in prior years. Yet the challenge of responding to the new circumstances of Kim Jong-un opting for diplomacy and Donald Trump welcoming him in two summits and with upbeat rhetoric is like nothing seen before. One test of attitudes was after the Singapore summit, when both sides expressed hope, but a more telling test has arrived with the Hanoi summit, when the path ahead is left unclear.

The following ten questions can guide our examination of media responses in the four countries. 1) Who is trustworthy, i.e., who is responsible for past breakdowns in diplomacy and who is reliable in carrying out any new agreement? There is a clear difference in answers to this basic question, as some argue that Pyongyang has reason to be mistrustful and would respond well to confidence-building and reassurances. 2) Why did Kim come to the negotiating table, due to increased confidence from successes in developing and testing weapons or to increased pressure from sanctions that are squeezing his regime? Here too the responses are divided with ramifications for the timing and sequence of lifting sanctions. 3) Does a step-by-step deal that leaves the bulk of denuclearization for a later stage mean gullibility and “buying the same horse” one more time or is it a promising pathway to a “big deal” to resolve the problem that has been with us for more than a quarter century? This is another fundamental question raised often in the course of diplomacy and not new as a consequence of the responses to the Hanoi failure.

Questions specific to Hanoi or lingering from the Singapore summit are also being asked. 4) Is the decision by Kim Jong-un to put economic development on a par with military strength a sign of willingness to denuclearize or a way to get both guns and butter (byungjin) with no genuine denuclearization? Even some who doubt Kim’s will to denuclearize anticipate that a promising deal can be reached for other objectives, while skeptics expect trickery with a dire outcome. Five questions are often raised by commentators on the Hanoi summit outcome. 5) How should the results be assessed? 6) Who was to blame for the failure to the extent that it is recognized? 7) What should be done next? 8) What are the prospects for these talks through the remainder of Trump’s current term in office? 9) What spillover of the summit results affects other countries? Finally, 10) how do responses this time indicate what countries consider to be an ideal outcome?

After some initial spin, the prevalent assessment was that the summit was a failure, but for many this was better than if success had been proclaimed on the basis of what they were certain would be a bad deal. In other words, the breakup of the meeting has greater promise for eventual denuclearization or a sustainable outcome than if a deal of the sort being discussed had been reached. There are two clashing takes on this conclusion. In Japan and for conservatives in South Korea, failure means that more pressure can be exerted on Kim Jong-un, raising the chance that he will feel the pain and agree to denuclearization or at least a process that leads close to that outcome. For China and Russia, however, failure brings the U.S. one step closer to agreeing not only to a gradual process of step-by-step mutual concessions but also to the need for a multilateral process either by seeking China’s deeper involvement or by agreeing to something akin to the Six-Party Talks. Only the progressives in Seoul really wanted Hanoi to succeed in a big way. A modest agreement by Trump with little prospect for denuclearization, in the final analysis, could have worked for Chinese and Russian interests in producing an impasse ahead, given their assumptions about both the U.S. and North Korean positions in this process.

As for assigning blame, Trump is faulted for excessive belief in his own power of persuasion and for conducting diplomacy at odds with any expert’s advice, but most of the blame is given to Kim coming to the summit expecting Trump to cave on critical points rather than prepared for give-and-take by the two sides. Trump misjudged Kim’s motives and strategy, simplistically posing a stark choice between prosperity through a decision to denuclearize or isolation without economic improvement from refusing the offer before him. In fact, Kim’s choices are more varied, and his reasoning is more complex than Trump realized.

Kimberly Kim, “South Korean Print Media on Why the Hanoi Summit Failed and What Comes Next”

As the dates approached, a hailstorm of news reports from Seoul hinted at the possibility of a “small deal” to be signed in Hanoi; North Korea would make progress on denuclearization, which would likely involve dismantling its Yongbyon nuclear facility and/or intercontinental ballistic missiles (ICBMs), and, in return, the U.S. would offer economic aid by easing sanctions, probably along with officially ending the Korean War and building liaison offices. At Stanford, U.S. special representative for North Korea Stephen Biegun’s comments hailed the possibility of a deal quite favorable to Kim. News delivered just prior to the summit, that South Korean president Moon Jae-in and Trump shared a positive outlook for the meeting over the phone, hyped the likelihood of a promising result in Hanoi.

As the date for the summit approached, conservative papers in Seoul blasted the potential “small deal” and Moon’s suggestion of seeking economic ties with Pyongyang as the main path to denuclearization. They expressed alarm that Trump, who is under pressure to show tangible progress this time, would have to set the denuclearization bar low so he could keep the concession bar low, and therefore proclaimed that the Hanoi summit was allegedly on course for a “small deal.” As for Moon, they condemned him for promising economic help, not even as a reward for completely abandoning nuclear weapons but as a way of urging Pyongyang to do so, and insisted that easing sanctions before the North completely denuclearizes means giving up on the end goal. The progressive press, echoing the Blue House, argued that if the summit concluded with a small deal, it cannot be rated as a failure since it is a part of a lengthy negotiation process. Unlike conservative editorials, which argued that Yongbyon is no longer Pyongyang’s main nuclear producing facility, progressive papers published stories stressing the significance of dismantling Yongbyon. It would break down the foundation of Pyongyang’s nuclear program and would serve to enable a “big deal.” Likewise, Moon’s assurances that Seoul would bear the costs of economic incentives to the North were approved by the progressive media, as a way to induce Trump to go forward and even acting as a down payment on the costs of unification. As the summit began hopefully, Moon was expecting to give a speech the next day celebrating the 100th anniversary of the March 1 independence movement, based on the denuclearization measures achieved in Hanoi to promote peace on the Korean Peninsula.

Some on the progressive side looked for a villain to blame for Trump’s “cold feet” in Hanoi: the Cohen hearings in D.C., a South Korean conservative party leader visiting Congress with warnings, or perhaps John Bolton’s intercession. Conservatives denounced Kim’s false commitment to denuclearize and the Moon administration’s incompetence. Kim had attempted to exact a complete removal of sanctions at the expense of dismantling a plutonium facility inside Yongbyon, nothing more than an old mass of scrap metal, one paper remarked. Thus, the sanctions regime against North Korea is the only way to corner Kim. Since the gap between the two sides has been confirmed, the prospects of resuming the negotiations remain uncertain. Another criticism was of poor intelligence, blaming the Moon administration for assuming a successful Hanoi summit to be a *fait accompli*. Progressive papers, while acknowledging the challenge, focused on reviving the dormant talks and the importance of Moon’s role as a mediator. They found hope in Washington’s

willingness to keep the momentum going and interpreted the breakdown in Hanoi as only a reminder about how tough it is to solve the issues at stake. They played up Moon's role, reporting that he and Trump discussed follow-up measures and decided to meet each other soon; one paper wrote that Trump asked Moon to actively play the mediating role.

As Moon prepared to meet Trump in Washington, the South Korean media's attention focused on how much Moon would be able to narrow the identified gap between Washington and Pyongyang and revive the negotiations, given his past performances of successfully doing so at every difficult step of the way. Three talking points were discussed at the summit: 1) a "top-down" approach is essential in the denuclearization process; 2) reopening the Kaesong Industrial Complex and resuming Mount Geumgang tours are premature, but giving humanitarian aid is acceptable; and 3) a third U.S.-North Korea summit may happen but will not be rushed. Yet there was scant concealment that Trump hung on to his position of seeking a "big deal" whereas Moon hoped for a "small deal." Conservatives, in particular, blasted Moon, saying that he earned nothing but got ripped off by Trump to purchase more U.S. military equipment and weapons owing to the summit. Conservative papers pointed out that Washington and Seoul could not find common ground and condemned the summit for ending without a joint statement. Meanwhile, they fixated on Kim's blame for Moon, whose middleman diplomacy is at risk, for being a meddling "mediator" and "facilitator," arguing that Seoul should be the responsible party, protecting the interests of the country. On the contrary, progressive papers appreciated what Moon achieved through his meeting with Trump, solidifying the U.S.-South Korea alliance and reconfirming the two presidents' commitment to accomplish denuclearization. One source paid attention to Trump's support for humanitarian aid, such as supplying food to North Korea, and appraised Washington's attitude toward Pyongyang as "neither hot nor cold." It added that Moon should meet with Kim to rekindle the talks.

Gilbert Rozman, "Japanese Media: Why Did the Hanoi Summit Fail and What Comes Next?"

Japanese assessments of what to expect and then what really happened involve interpretations of North Korean intentions, the character of U.S. diplomacy, the role of South Korean diplomacy, the impact of China, and the geopolitical situation in Northeast Asia. The fate of North Korea looms very large for a nation fearful of a missile attack from it, cognizant of the absence of any settlement after 1945 of its claims against Japan's occupational conduct, and nervous about the regional balance of power and U.S. trustworthiness as an ally and nuclear umbrella, when the U.S. itself is quickly coming under threat from the North's nuclear weapons. There was considerable fear of negative outcomes from the summit. After the summit four general responses could be discerned: 1) Trump outfoxed Kim, has a strategy reassuring to Japan, and the outcome in sight is positive; 2) Trump erred in his diplomacy but has been brought to his senses and will now follow a course welcome in Japan, however uncertain the outcome; 3) the situation is growing more dangerous, Trump has no clue what to do, and Japan has to keep its eyes on other players; and 4) Trump will renew diplomacy, keeping Japan off balance in coordinating with the U.S. as Japan struggles with its isolation in this diplomacy.

Prior to the summit, the message from Japanese sources—right and left—was similar: do not be taken in by North Korea’s dialogue offensive. One editorial insisted that until the triad of nuclear weapons, missiles, and abductees was settled, sanctions remain in place. If agreement is reached, then Japan’s Abe Shinzo can look forward to forging an environment leading to a Japan-North Korea summit. It warned against a hasty deal, succumbing to the appeal of “success,” casting doubt on Trump’s trumpeting of test freezes, and pointing to Abe being asked to recommend him for the Nobel Peace Prize. The U.S. should press for accelerated working level talks, pressure should be maintained, and Moon Jae-in’s priority for North-South relations and exceptions to sanctions should not be followed, it advised. There was scant hope that a summit in Vietnam would tilt Kim Jong-un away from the Pakistan model to the Vietnam one, as Trump was proposing. The right asserted that no “political show” is needed, just sustained pressure. The left urged for continuing the talks on denuclearization, asking that Moon prove that this is his focus and that Trump not let election planning for 2020 lead him to rush to claim success.

Whether from the right or the left, coverage strongly doubted that denuclearization is on the table in U.S.-North Korea talks. South Korean critics of Moon’s policies as well as U.S. think tank voices skeptical of Trump’s apparent softness toward Kim Jong-un were numerous. The progressive press was also nervous about Moon’s eagerness to lift sanctions on the North early, warning that it would damage ties to the U.S. Progressives were pleased with the turn to negotiations and eager for a framework for regional peace and stability to ensue, taking seriously Kim’s intention to prioritize the economy, but they doubted Trump’s “political show” and called for improved Japan-South Korea ties despite Moon’s penchant for relaxing sanctions. They too viewed the Hanoi summit with concern that it could lead to Chinese and Russian moves toward North Korea not only undermining further sanctions pressure but altering the geopolitical environment in Northeast Asia.

Abe on February 20 expressed faith in Trump’s approach, equating it to complete, verifiable, irreversible denuclearization (CVID), and indicated his position of backing up Trump, while explaining that Japan has repeatedly called for talks with the North but has received no reply. Others in Japan had warned, however, that Trump has too much faith in himself and expresses satisfaction that there is no testing, as if that means a lot. Uncertain about Trump, all sides sought a firm posture unwilling to rush into a deal. Assuming that Kim had scant interest in shedding his nuclear weapons, Japanese saw Trump’s diplomacy as essentially a stunt for domestic politics, better than Moon’s approach with little regard for denuclearization but likely to prove abortive. There was no hiding concern that a Japan-U.S. gap over how to proceed was widening in the weeks preceding the summit. Nerves were on edge.

The overwhelming response in Japan after the summit was relief. A bad deal was averted. The real gap between the two sides has been exposed, and now, based on reality rather than false hopes, matters could proceed. But how? For *Sankei* readers it was a time to gloat that South Korea had been turned from optimism to despair. Moreover, the North’s “kingdom” has been revealed as never agreeing to denuclearization unless sanctions are greatly tightened. While mainstream coverage lavished praise on Trump for his handling of the summit, some saw a disaster narrowly averted due to Trump deciding to avoid the criticism that would have come raining down had he made the deal before him. Trump-style

diplomacy invited trouble: there was insufficient preparation, Singapore's shaky deal only opened the door to trouble. Putting stress on "deals" as one's foreign policy approach is a pathway to danger, one analyst warned. If the talks are extended, the opinion of Japan can be included; so, the summit ended in a good fashion for Japan. Yet, if a four-party framework evolves and excludes Japan, this would be a concern, readers are told.

Concern was spreading in Japan over Trump's ending of large-scale, joint military exercises with South Korea, weakening preparations in case of an incident on the peninsula. Whether this was due to a desire to encourage the North in negotiations or to cut U.S. expenses in South Korea, as Trump was seeking, the effect was disturbing. It could mean reduced pressure on the North and reduced U.S. commitment to its alliances in East Asia. The left agreed with the right that Trump was prone to hasty concessions, but it did not embrace him once he had drawn the line in Hanoi, preferring another path forward. Japanese media and the government viewed the summit through the eyes of the abductees' families, making coverage unique.

One interpretation is that the summit was a serious failure for Kim Jong-un, who is left at an impasse with nowhere to go, and loss of power in sight. Likewise, Moon has failed as a go-between and spokesperson for the North and transmitter of Trump's intentions to Kim, losing trust from both. His dream of "red reunification" and reunification with nuclear weapons is blown away, the article concludes. Another article blamed the summit failure on Kim's over-optimism and Trump's welcome steadfastness, assessing the breakdown as good for Japan. In contrast to South Korea's approach seeking carrots for the North to persuade Kim to change his ways, the Japanese sought more pressure to make Kim realize that the only path to economic growth is to cut a deal to include the abductee issue. The summit outcome was considered a blow to South Korea and vindication for Japan. Another Japanese outlook on the failure is that both sides made huge miscalculations, and the negotiating process must start again on a different track, not top-down.

By April 23, when Japan's foreign ministry issued the *Diplomatic Bluebook*, a softened approach to North Korea suggested that Japan was seeking an opening for talks. In place of language on the "grave and imminent threats" from nuclear weapons and missiles and a need for "maximizing pressure on North Korea," there was hope for a positive response on resolving the abductions issue, not "leveraging the international community's pressure on North Korea" to address it. *Sankei* warned against this shift in Japan's position, while blaming Putin for his words in meeting Kim, inflating Russia's presence, threatening the sanctions web, supporting North Korea's notion of stages, and calling for a return to the failed Six-Party Talks. *Sankei* differed from *Asahi*, which called on Abe to use multiple routes to arrange a summit with Kim, in opposing Japan taking a direct role in the diplomacy, and for striving to keep the talks going rather than standing firm. Japanese sources have hesitated to criticize Trump, but they were noticeably relieved with the outcome of the Hanoi summit. There is no sharp conservative-progressive divide. The shared message is that maximum pressure must be sustained until Kim Jong-un makes the decision to denuclearize. Criticism of Moon Jae-in is prevalent. Optimism prevails that pressure is working and will persist, forcing Kim to relent. In this process, Tokyo must find a way to become actively involved. Thus, the notable shift of late to opening the door for an Abe-Kim summit.

Artyom Lukin, “The View from Russia: Why Did the Hanoi Summit Fail and What Comes Next?”

With regard to the Korean Peninsula’s nuclear problem, Russia’s commentariat traditionally splits into three groups. The first includes specialists who are more or less neutral toward North Korea. The second is formed by experts who sympathize more with Pyongyang and tend to blame Washington and American allies for anything that goes wrong on the peninsula. The third school, now almost extinct in Russia, represents liberal and pro-Western pundits who loath the North Korean regime and view it as a major threat to international, and Russian, security. Most of the Russian commentators sounded moderately optimistic prior to the two-day summit, expecting that at least something would come out of it. That the second Kim-Trump rendezvous failed to produce any deliverables came as a somewhat disappointing surprise to most Russian observers. Still, the general mood remained cautiously optimistic even after Hanoi’s apparent failure, with the majority of Korea watchers believing diplomacy between Pyongyang and Washington would continue and might eventually succeed. The Russian commentary on the Vladivostok summit was generally positive, hailing the symbolism of Moscow’s return to the major leagues of Korean Peninsula geopolitics. At the same time, many experts pointed out that, beyond displaying the decorum of the traditional Russia-North Korea friendship, the Kim-Putin summit produced modest outcomes.

Lukin first reviews what he calls neutral commentary. One view is that Kim Jong-un miscalculated by pinning too much hope on his ability to secure major unilateral concessions from Donald Trump during face-to-face talks and having neglected the lower-level negotiations. In much the same vein, despite the lack of preparations at the working level, the U.S. side hoped to achieve a breakthrough at the summit talks. Even so, the Hanoi summit was not a failure, but rather a temporary setback. Both sides are committed to more dialogue, having already managed to make some progress in negotiations, somewhat narrowing the gap that existed in their positions. Until recently Washington had no intention to earnestly negotiate with the North and only waited for the regime to collapse, but the U.S. stance may be changing.

Parsing Kim’s keynote speech to the Supreme People’s Assembly, one analyst finds an encouraging sign that he refrained from making any overt threats to the U.S. If events should take a grim turn, however, the blame could not be put entirely on Pyongyang, as its proposals for the phased and gradual “action for action” approach to denuclearization are quite reasonable, readers are told. Another analyst gives three reasons for failure in Hanoi, all rooted in U.S. domestic politics. Even in the absence of an agreement, the status quo basically suits Trump as long as Kim refrains from nuclear and missile tests and the sanctions regime remains in place. Trump emerged from Hanoi as a firm negotiator who staunchly defends American interests, and was spared a barrage of criticism. Thus, continuation of the dialogue post-Hanoi depends more on Trump than on Kim. Trump could aim for a third summit with Kim when he feels more confident in terms of the domestic political

situation. For a third observer, Pyongyang is extremely keen to continue negotiations with the U.S., but it will put pressure on Trump to do so. Pyongyang's current main aim is negotiations with Trump, rather than ratcheting up tensions. Negotiations should lead not to full denuclearization, but some limitations on the North's nuclear weapons in exchange for political and economic concessions.

Also, there is the view that Beijing is the winner. After Hanoi, the U.S.-North Korea negotiations are doomed to drag on without any results, unless Trump asks Xi for assistance and mediation. Beijing would be happy to oblige, but only in exchange for American readiness to accommodate Chinese wishes. The effect of sanctions on North Korea and whether sanctions determined Kim's behavior at Hanoi is a controversial issue with split views, but almost all agree that no amount of economic hardship would force denuclearization.

Pro-North Korea commentary is even more one-sided. It depicts Pyongyang as an existential survivor that needs nuclear weapons for deterrence and self-defense, and it puts the onus on the U.S., seeing Washington, not Pyongyang, as a villain and the main destabilizing force in Northeast Asia. Even though the North Koreans are eager for rapprochement with the Americans, they are unlikely to abandon China, as the U.S. is aiming. The U.S. insistence on a "big deal" at Hanoi is no more than a negotiating tactic. The only realistic path toward denuclearization is an incremental, phased process, one writer insists. One source sees Trump's turn from threatening a military strike against Pyongyang to holding the first summit with the North Korean leader as largely a forced move. Moon Jae-in's perseverance in the cause of inter-Korean détente and the negative international sentiment concerning military actions against North Korea that threatened a nuclear war played their part. U.S. allies were unwilling to become involved in new reckless U.S. escapades in North Korea. In contrast, North Korea is genuinely interested in a détente with the U.S. In Hanoi, Pyongyang had the right to expect that stopping nuclear tests and eliminating the Punggye-ri nuclear test site would result in the lifting of at least some of the sanctions. Washington, however, continued to insist on keeping all sanctions in place until North Korea's complete nuclear disarmament.

The solution is a return to the format of the Six-Party Talks based on a stage-by-stage approach. Guarantees of non-proliferation by the North of its missile and nuclear technologies and putting a freeze on its missile program could be discussed, but not total denuclearization. The U.S. is mostly concerned with North Korea's ICBMs. Pyongyang could stop developing ICBMs, freeze production of nuclear materials, and open its nuclear facilities for international inspections. In exchange, Washington should officially recognize North Korea, establish diplomatic relations, exchange embassies, curtail military activities close to its borders, scale back and ultimately lift the sanctions, and provide economic and energy aid to the North. Lukin next turns to what he labels "anti-DPRK commentary." He singles out one author who openly criticizes North Korea as an inhumane, totalitarian regime which cannot be trusted and sees an irreconcilable gap, making failure in diplomacy inevitable. A deal would be fundamentally detrimental to the nuclear non-proliferation regime and would harm the interests of Russia as one of its main guarantors and beneficiaries.

The Vladivostok summit was inevitable since Russia is an important and generally friendly neighbor as well as a great power with a veto at the UN Security Council. Post-Hanoi, when the diplomatic process with Washington—and Seoul—stalled, Kim’s calculations, and schedule, changed. There were few major world leaders with whom Kim could have meaningful meetings. He had already been to China four times and another visit there would underscore Pyongyang’s excessive reliance on Beijing. So, Russia looked like the most logical choice. He could expect a warm reception that would boost his international and domestic prestige and demonstrate that Pyongyang had close friends beyond China and Cuba. For Putin the aim was to symbolically re-affirm Russia’s traditional great-power role as a major player on the Korean Peninsula, whose influence on Korean affairs might be smaller than that of the U.S. and China but bigger than that of Japan. Kim’s stakes in this summit were higher, given that the prospects for ending the U.S.-led economic isolation of North Korea significantly dimmed after Hanoi. It seems few, if any, concrete agreements or decisions were made. Putin sounded non-committal regarding any new political, diplomatic, and economic support for North Korea. Kim apparently failed to get Putin to commit to any substantial aid to the North. Moscow was unwilling to unilaterally relax the sanctions. One indirect indication that Kim was not entirely happy with the summit’s outcome was his decision to cut short his visit to Vladivostok and depart earlier than initially planned.

There were few signs that the Kremlin sought to be a spoiler on North Korea. Meeting with Kim, Putin was hardly interested in antagonizing Trump. Russia is invested in preserving the global non-proliferation regime, no less so than the U.S. Yet, Russia is quite realistic that North Korea’s full denuclearization is nearly impossible in the foreseeable future, which Putin stressed in Vladivostok. Leaving quickly for Beijing, Putin showed that his North Korea policy is subordinated to Moscow’s quasi-alliance with China. Moscow seems to have tacitly recognized that most of East Asia, including the peninsula, is China’s sphere of influence. In recent years, Russia’s policies with respect to the North have been closely coordinated, and aligned, with China’s, and Moscow has generally been playing second fiddle. Thus, the Putin—Kim rendezvous was a side-show in the continuing saga between Pyongyang and Washington. Russia seeks to score diplomatic points by demonstrating its relevance, while North Korea tries to do the same by showing it has options. Russia could, however, be an indispensable partner in a broader conversation on security mechanisms in Northeast Asia, including offensive weapons and missile defense systems, although the current lack of this broader conversation makes a solution to the North Korean nuclear issue nigh impossible.

Danielle Cohen, “Chinese Media: Why Did the Hanoi Summit Fail and What Comes Next?”

Chinese media sources reflect a widespread propensity in 2019 to reassure the U.S. while not compromising vital national interests on the Korean Peninsula. The Kim Jong-un turn to diplomacy has been heartily welcomed. Trump’s embrace of Kim has been heartily endorsed. Moon Jae-in’s bold moves to straddle the two sides and find a way to build momentum is strongly approved. After praising the Singapore summit’s accomplishments, Chinese faced the uncomfortable reality of failure in Hanoi with calls for redoubling efforts to put diplomacy back on track, repeating idealistic assertions about how the differences could be bridged while mostly leaving implicit the true objectives of a deal that Pyongyang

was expected to be willing to accept and China would consider suitable for satisfying, after several stages, its geopolitical aspirations. Chinese optimism is premised on notions about limits to North Korean demands, on North Korean willingness to denuclearize in return for conditions that are left vague, and on often unstated assumptions about how the peninsula would evolve during the process of denuclearization and how the U.S. military presence would change.

Chinese sources give the clear impression that the Hanoi summit was not a failure despite its abrupt ending, and furthermore that the diplomatic process is moving in a direction that is not unfavorable to China even as the status quo is rather tolerable. Compared to 2017 when war was on the horizon with China having little say, and the first half of 2018 when trilateral diplomacy appeared unpredictable with China again on the sidelines, the impasse after the Singapore summit and especially after the Hanoi summit suggests to Chinese observers that there will be no way to bypass China. With frequent Sino-North Korea exchanges now occurring and scant likelihood that Washington and Pyongyang will realize a “big deal,” China anticipates a long, convoluted process in which its voice will be important. Yet, Chinese sources have little to say about the details of the process since another major theme is that China seeks to remain a secondary actor in round one, which is centered on denuclearization and sanctions relief. China can wait as North Korea sends delegations to examine economic reforms or restructuring, as they prefer to say, and the U.S. eventually appreciates that it must work through China. What is not said in Chinese sources suggests a hidden strategy more than doubt about what to do. It also indicates a kind of G2 approach, letting Seoul and Pyongyang wrestle with challenges they are unlikely to resolve and waiting for the U.S. approach to recognize the futility of a bilateral or trilateral approach with Seoul as the complexities of lesser deals with some sanctions relief lead Washington to seek more coordination with Beijing. Eventually, China will assert its hegemonic leadership over North Korea, readers can assume, but this will come after a Sino-U.S. arrangement in the region is reached, for which this crisis offers an opportunity. In this reasoning, Seoul has played a positive, facilitating role, but it is not very consequential. Waiting—real strategic patience—is required. In the meantime, Chinese publications urge both Washington and Pyongyang to do more to keep diplomacy alive, while China will not relax sanctions to give the latter a way out or provoke the former when a trade agreement is its most immediate priority.