Amateur Hour
Using Historical Lessons to Assess the Trump-Kim Summits

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ABSTRACT

My research examines President Donald J. Trump’s approach to recent summits with North Korean Supreme Leader Kim Jong-un, drawing on historical lessons from five summits since 1955. After President Trump entered office, U.S.-North Korea tensions increased dramatically, with the president threatening to counter North Korean aggression with “fire, fury, and frankly power, the likes of which the world has never seen before.”1 However, the administration soon pursued a diplomatic path, convening a historic summit in Singapore in June 2018. Since then, Trump and Kim have met on two other occasions, though each of these summits has failed to secure North Korea’s denuclearization. My qualitative analysis of five case studies—the 1955 Geneva Summit, the 1961 Vienna Summit, Nixon’s 1972 trip to China, Carter’s 1978 Camp David Summit, and the 1986 Reykjavik Summit—suggests the president is ignoring important historical lessons on summitry and pursuing a flawed approach in his dealings with Kim. However, with proper adjustments, President Trump’s summit negotiations could secure an interim nuclear agreement—an imperfect but preferable outcome—and further the conflict’s resolution.

1 “Trump on North Korean threats: "Fire, Fury and power the likes of which the world has never seen,” YouTube, August 9, 2017. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5BsVbYDmBg
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INTRODUCTION

Since the end of the Second World War, American presidents continuously have turned to summitry to foster understanding between nations and resolve conflict. These direct, personal, face to face meetings between top leaders—coined as summits by Former British Prime Minister Winston Churchill—have since become critical for achieving U.S. foreign policy goals. Summitry, as Churchill saw it, is not simply a vehicle for mitigating tensions, but “a supreme effort to bridge the gulf between the two worlds.” Against the backdrop of the nuclear age, in which leaders possessed weapons of “unusual destructive force,” the ability to resolve disagreement became all the more important. However, even as the Soviet Union collapsed and geopolitical realities shifted, summitry has remained vital to U.S. foreign policy and grown increasingly popular. (See Table 1)

Under President Trump, the landscape of U.S. summitry has changed significantly. In his first two years in office, President Trump has conducted summits with Korean leader Kim Jong-un, Russian President Vladimir Putin, as well as at the Group of Seven (G7), the Group of Twenty (G20), the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO), and many others. Pundits and academics alike have called into question the success of Trump’s summits, claiming that they have “failed to address global problems” and have been little more than shows of macho bluster. Purportedly, Trump’s approach to summits stands in contrast to that of former U.S. presidents both in optics and impact. Reagan’s summits with Gorbachev—in which the two fleshed out the Intermediate-Range Nuclear Forces Treaty (INF)—or Eisenhower’s 1959 Camp David summit with Khrushchev are frequently cited as successful examples, while Kennedy’s 1961 Vienna

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Summit with Khrushchev is often remembered as a failure.\textsuperscript{5} Trump’s summits, critics argue, have fared little better.

My thesis seeks to answer the following research questions:

a. **Main**: In what ways has President Trump transcended or violated the best practices of summitry in the U.S.-North Korea summit negotiations?

b. **Secondary**: Which practices have succeeded in previous U.S. summits? What lessons can President Trump draw from his predecessors to enhance his strategy? What are the implications of President Trump’s diplomatic approach for U.S. foreign policy?

In essence, this thesis assesses the effectiveness of President Trump’s approach to the U.S.-North Korea summit negotiations. Specifically, it identifies the ways in which the president transcends or violates the best practices of summitry in his meetings with Kim. For our purposes, violating these practices is defined as neglecting approaches to summitry yielding lower tensions, substantive policy breakthroughs, and personal chemistry between leaders. Conversely, transcending the best practices of summitry is defined as using practices outside the political norm that prove successful. Despite the high-profile attention summits typically receive, little thoughtful analysis of the president’s current summitry—which is unfolding in live time—has been conducted.

Undoubtedly, certain aspects of Trump’s approach violate best practices and others, perhaps, transcend or surpass them. A surface examination suggests that his efforts—characterized by little preparation, testy attitudes toward foreign leaders, and reliance on personal abilities—are unadvisable. However, I anticipate that the president’s novel approach can be groundbreaking

and successful if applied correctly. To explore this hypothesis, I will conduct a historical analysis of previous U.S. summits, beginning with President Eisenhower’s Geneva Summit in 1955. After examining the approaches of five separate presidential administrations, I will turn to the Trump-Kim summits.

In a broader sense, this thesis aims to offer insight into President Trump’s diplomacy and its implications for American conflict resolution going forward. Given that U.S.-North Korea denuclearization efforts are underway, it is paramount for policymakers to understand how to approach these talks effectively.
CHAPTER 1: LITERATURE REVIEW AND HYPOTHESES

A. Theoretical Review

Compared to research on similar topics in world affairs and other aspects of presidential power, the existing literature on summitry is sparse. Except for a few notable contributions by historians, most of the literature on summitry is provided by political scientists and international relations scholars, many of whom are critics of the practice. Former professional diplomats who resent the intrusion of politicians into diplomacy often portray summitry as led by inept government actors with little familiarity or interest in diplomacy’s intricacies. This has fed the beliefs of some that summitry cheapens diplomacy and should be left to professionals. As such, the current scholarship on summitry is limited both in scope and reliability.

The existing literature on summitry centers on a handful of subjects, the most contested being the definition of the term itself. Early scholars claimed that summitry could only occur between great powers, while more contemporary works define the term more loosely as meetings between heads of state. As this definition evolved, many critics of the practice complained that the term “summit” had become so vague that it was not only useless but misleading. In response, some proposed a more specific definition of summitry but a definition of “summitry” has yet to be universally accepted.

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9 George Ball, Diplomacy for a Crowded World: An American Foreign Policy (Little, Brown, 1976).
Much of the literature focuses on summitry’s political impacts. Summitry allows leaders to meet face-to-face and form personal impressions of one another. It gives leaders diplomatic decision-making power and can catalyze sluggish diplomatic efforts. Further, it generally creates opportunities for positive optics and media coverage. The scholarship on summitry’s impact has centered on summits between great power rivals during or following major wars, and summits involving the United States have generally received great attention. Much has been said of bilateral U.S.-Soviet summits during the Cold War and certain multilateral encounters such as the Paris peace conference in 1919. Comparatively, the impact of bilateral summits with allies such as Britain and France—especially in times of peace—have received far less attention. As a result, this strand of the literature remains largely incomplete.

Other scholars examine the dysfunctional elements of summitry. Summits are seen as dysfunctional when they mismanage diplomatic and bureaucratic resources, saturate presidential agendas, lack proper preparation, and are implemented incorrectly. Apart from these insights, however, there is little thoughtful analysis explaining what well-practiced summitry entails. The connection of this scholarship to the policy realm is limited at best and given the upsurge in American presidents’ reliance on summitry, further research in this domain is needed (see Appendix).

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14 Giauque, “Bilateral Summit Diplomacy in Western European and Transatlantic Relations, 1956–63.”
Little scholarly analysis of President Trump’s approach to summits has been conducted, due to ongoing developments, a lack of clear outcomes, and continued source classification. Most examinations of Trump’s summitry offer broader critiques of his temperament, judgment, and rhetoric.\(^\text{16}\) Thus, thoughtful research on this issue remains to be seen. Given that President Trump’s summitry has been far more public than that of his predecessors and has been covered extensively by the media, significant work is now possible in this domain.

While summitry continues to garner attention from diplomatic historians, the current literature has yet to reach a consensus on what characterizes successful summitry. Moreover, a proper examination of President Trump’s approach to summitry is lacking. Though government declassification will increase the attention summitry receives from academia, researchers need not wait to begin their efforts. As such, this thesis bridges this gap in the literature through historical and contemporary case studies and analysis.

**B. Hypotheses and Observable Implications**

Concerning my historical case studies, I hypothesize that successful summits require proper anticipatory work and preparation, the creation of positive optics for presidential administrations, and entering negotiations from a position of domestic political strength. Finally, I hypothesize that, at their best, summits allow leaders to forge a degree of mutual respect, establish personal chemistry, and transcend ideological or cultural divides. Summits require reasonable compromise and should not confine negotiations to a single issue. If these hypotheses are correct, I am likely to make several observations: de-escalated tensions between parties,

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substantive policy breakthroughs, frameworks for future dialogue, positive domestic media responses, and warmth between leaders. If these elements characterize the best practices of summitry, I am likely to observe the reverse in unsuccessful summits: leaders with hubris, antagonism between parties, a poor domestic reception, few substantive policy results, unadvisable compromises, and greater tensions.

With regard to President Trump’s summits with Kim Jong-un, I hypothesize that the president violates best practices in a few respects: his lack of preparation, demeanor toward foreign leaders, and overreliance on personal abilities. If this hypothesis is correct, I will observe that the three summits at hand—Singapore, Hanoi, and the DMZ—have led to poor outcomes. Conversely, I hypothesize that President Trump has transcended the best practices of summitry by stepping outside the political norm, manipulating media coverage and implementing quick policy changes. If this is true, I should observe the president’s novel approaches producing substantive policy breakthroughs and a viable path towards North Korea’s denuclearization.
CHAPTER 2: METHODOLOGY

A. Research Design

To garner analytical leverage on my research question, my methodology is varied and approaches the research question from many angles. My methods include an examination of the current literature on U.S. summitry, case studies of eight U.S. summits, and analysis of extensive primary and secondary sources.

The literature on U.S. summitry provides a solid framework to understand the issue’s contours and establish a strong argument. My review of this literature answered certain aspects of my research question but not whether President Trump’s summitry is advisable or not. My thesis certainly will take into account professional and academic perspectives from recent decades, but ultimately my work strives to provide the most up to date reasoning about the Trump-Kim summit negotiations, which are unfolding in live time. Since it is widely agreed that President Trump’s approach differs from those of his predecessors, I will build on scholars’ work to identify how his summits deviate from those of his predecessors.

An in-depth look at a selection of U.S. summits since the 1950s may illuminate the best approach to this tactic. Using case studies as my main source of data will reveal which practices have been used, whether they have been successful or not, and what lessons President Trump should heed. While many scholars have made claims about previous summits, analyzing these claims thoroughly will help me explore these judgments. I chose and evaluated these summits based on a number of considerations: their formulation, approach, and results. They were selected because of their potential insights, not to arrive at certain conclusions. With each case study, I will compare each president’s tactics, take note of contradictions with President Trump’s practices, and ultimately establish which practices underpin successful summits.
A wide breadth of documents is necessary to analyze Trump’s tactics. While summits are ultimately conducted at the highest levels of government, factors such as media coverage and bureaucratic pressures could influence the president’s decision-making in substantial ways. For instance, sensationalist coverage of U.S. summits may pressure presidents to deliver breakthroughs, pushing them to accept deals they might have rejected. Similarly, bureaucratic pressures from political officials might constrain the president’s negotiating abilities. Drawing on sources ranging from news articles to government records will elucidate these elements’ influence on President Trump’s summity and its success.

My strategies bring together diverse perspectives, provide a snapshot of what has made summits succeed in the past, and show where the president can improve. While it is tempting to attribute success to a single factor, my basic premise is that diplomacy is complex and multi-faceted in nature. As a result, my methods aim to tackle this complexity and provide valuable takeaways for policymakers.

B. Data Collection and Analysis

My secondary sources are from a variety of journal publications and mediums, namely the Duke University Library. These outlets provide significant background on the contours of summity. However, as noted in my literature review, many elements of my research question remain unaddressed. Should I need to locate further academic literature on this issue, my methods will remain the same: Google Scholar, JSTOR, and other online databases.

The main source of my data is case studies, spanning from 1955 to 2019. Primary source documents—including notes, internal policy memoranda, memoirs, and interviews with former presidents and diplomats—are the main medium for my historical research. Most of these sources are collected from presidential library archives and State Department records,
specifically the Foreign Relations of the United States (FRUS) series. To gain further anecdotal evidence, I use a variety of secondary sources, such as news pieces and scholarly articles. In addition, I incorporate a mix of sources from presidential proponents and opponents as well as sources from the time of the summits and others with hindsight. As noted previously, much of the literature surrounding summitry is provided by critics of the practice. To overcome this bias, I use sources that reflect a diversity of viewpoints on summitry.

Though my analysis of the Trump-Kim summits incorporates an array of sources, it relies heavily on news sources, since other relevant documents are classified. Though I did not complete a full content analysis of news coverage on the president’s summits, I sampled news sources on all three summits to gage coverage. In doing so, I referred to The New York Times, Wall Street Journal, and The Economist among other publications with reputable content as well as domestic and international viewpoints.

I use purely qualitative analysis for my primary and secondary sources. For my case studies, I code for elements expected, according to my hypotheses, in successful summits: proper preparation, entering negotiations with domestic political strength, mutual respect, and personal chemistry between leaders, multi-issue negotiations, reasonable compromise, de-escalation in tensions, substantive policy breakthroughs, positive domestic media response, and continued dialogue. Mainly, I focus on locating points of agreement and disagreement, differing approaches to summitry, what historians have said and are saying about these summits, and how the American public remembers them. Rather than simply aggregating information across my case studies to identify patterns, I analyze each case study chronologically and as a separate piece of data. Ultimately, the data from my case studies helped assess the approaches, results, and perceptions associated with each summit.
After establishing the best practices of summitry, I pivot to the U.S.-DPRK summits, drawing on news sources and other available documents. To test President Trump’s approach against those of his predecessors, I code data from these sources according to key elements identified previously. This systematic approach to my data analysis ensures my diverse source selection addresses my research question effectively.

C. Limitations

During my research on the Trump-Kim summits, I faced the continuous difficulty of source classification. To overcome this impediment, my approach to data collection made use of what is readily available, and I found a remarkable degree of public material. In addition, my analysis of these summit negotiations includes additional data, due to the occurrence of two summits since my research began. Because of time constraints, I incorporate as much relevant data as possible but acknowledge that future work will be needed.
CHAPTER 3: HISTORICAL CASE STUDIES

A. Geneva Summit in 1955: Eisenhower Takes a Stab

For the first time in 10 years, American and Soviet leaders convened in Geneva for an international summit, a prospect that stirred hope for peace. To this end, the talks brought together the “The Big Four:” U.S. President Dwight Eisenhower, Soviet Premier Nikolai Bulganin, British Prime Minister Anthony Eden, and French Prime Minister Edgar Faure. Though the Geneva Summit did not provide significant policy breakthroughs on German unification, European security, and other pressing issues, it remains a memorable episode for its role in improving communication between the United States and the Soviet Union and establishing a set of directives for a follow-up summit in October.

In addition to the Geneva Summit’s importance in global affairs, the meeting combined a unique set of issues: a highly polarized international system, continued European pressures for negotiations, and disputes within the Eisenhower Administration. It came in the wake of Stalin’s death and the Austrian State Treaty of 1955, two events that shook the Cold War. The summit also brought together distinct personalities. Eisenhower, an American hero with an “electric presence,” had a reputation that preceded him.17 Bulganin and Khrushchev were both ruthless political insiders, rising in rank with much to prove. Eden and Faure, though domestically popular, struggled to keep themselves relevant as the United States and the Soviet Union became superpowers. Each of these dynamics shaped the Geneva talks, and in turn, the early Cold War.

Amidst European Pressures, the United States Agrees to a Summit

The road to the Geneva Summit began in March 1953 with Stalin’s death, creating a tectonic shift in world affairs just six weeks after President Eisenhower entered office. Within

weeks, British Prime Minister Winston Churchill wrote to Eisenhower advocating talks, arguing it was a perfect window for an opening with the Soviets.

The president, however, felt they “should not rush things too much.”\textsuperscript{18} To him, a summit would be nothing more than a social gathering, counterproductively inflating expectations.\textsuperscript{19} The West needed to integrate West Germany into the western defense system, a potential bargaining position the United States would lose by negotiating prematurely with the Soviet Union.\textsuperscript{20} Eisenhower’s advisors also had reservations about a summit. Secretary of State John Foster Dulles questioned European eagerness for a summit to produce “some kind of a miracle […] The mere fact of meeting seems of itself to be enough.”\textsuperscript{21} France and Britain’s adamance about a summit only reinforced this diagnosis, but ultimately Churchill reached out directly to Molotov—despite Eisenhower’s protestations—and offered a visit to Moscow to discuss a summit. Clearly, the Geneva Summit’s origins hardly began without disagreement among allies.

European pressures for a multilateral summit came as the United States was formulating its strategy toward the Soviet Union. Eisenhower entered office pledging to replace Truman’s “negative, futile, and immoral” strategy of containment with a “policy of boldness,” and many of his military advisers—fearing that negotiation would encourage European wishful thinking and neutralism—felt the United States should pursue rollback.\textsuperscript{22} Negotiations would be untenable unless Soviet behavior changed. NSC 162/2, issued in October 1953, articulates this position. Various peace gestures had cost the Soviets little, there were no convincing signs the Soviets

\textsuperscript{18} Peter Boyle, \textit{The Churchill-Eisenhower Correspondence, 1953-1955} (UNC Press Books, 1990), 47
\textsuperscript{19} Department of State to the Office of the High Commissioner for Germany, January 19, 1955, FRUS, 1955-57, V, 128
would make concessions, and Stalin’s death did not impair the Kremlin’s authority or Communist atomic and conventional capabilities.\textsuperscript{23} Dulles and the Joint Chiefs of Staff felt that disarmament—let alone a summit meeting—would trap the United States and give the Soviets premature concessions. Even as Eisenhower shared these concerns, he learned the Soviets could produce hydrogen bombs, which would be far more devastating than atomic weapons. While he believed the United States needed to appear more forceful, he began to feel that the United States had a moral responsibility to be open to talks—a position many of his advisors opposed.\textsuperscript{24}

By May 1955, the Soviets’ show of goodwill at the conclusion of the Austrian State Treaty made the four-power summit a reality Eisenhower no longer could refuse.\textsuperscript{25} In stunning fashion, the Soviets agreed to withdraw troops from a place they had occupied since World War II in a major break from their previous pledge not give up “an inch of soil.”\textsuperscript{26} At that point, despite his hesitancy, the president suggested some sort of conference would be necessary.\textsuperscript{27}

Domestically, McCarthyism had waned, which gave him more leeway to meet with the Kremlin. Further, given this “Austrian success story,” Eisenhower no longer could resist allied pressures.\textsuperscript{28} He shortly agreed to a summit after the Soviets had settled wars in Korea and Indochina.

**Formulating Strategy**

American policymakers disagreed on how the United States should approach the meeting.

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{23} Foreign Relations of the United States. “NSC 162/2, Statement of Basic National Security Policy,” October 30, 1953.
\item \textsuperscript{24} Many of Eisenhower’s advisors were deeply skeptical of talks with the Soviets, fearing they were not good-faith negotiators and simply hoped to buy time while enhancing Soviet military capabilities. In addition, many believed the use of nuclear weapons was inevitable. See: Memorandum of NSC discussion, October 7, 1953, \textit{FRUS, 1952-54}, II. 529-30
\item \textsuperscript{25} Bischof and Dockrill, \textit{Cold War Respite: The Geneva Summit of 1955}, 149
\item \textsuperscript{26} Jenny Thompson and Sherry Thompson, \textit{The Kremlinologist: Llewellyn E Thompson, America’s Man in Cold War Moscow} (JHU Press, 2018).
\item \textsuperscript{28} Bischof and Dockrill, \textit{Cold War Respite: The Geneva Summit of 1955}, 154
\end{itemize}
How could the Eisenhower Administration both hold the Soviets’ “feet to the fire” and work for an opening? President Eisenhower felt the United States needed to “penetrate the veil of Soviet intentions” and “open a tiny gate in the disarmament fence.” He knew the Soviets wanted to avoid war, so sharpening American deterrent capabilities while achieving interim settlements seemed like a good option. The president believed he could gain a better understanding of Soviet priorities when they were face to face and discern whether they would negotiate in good faith.

Dulles feared his superior would be duped by the Soviets’ false promises. The president, he argued, could be “humanly generous” and act naively, or be wooed into poor agreements by the French and British. Moreover, President Eisenhower faced pressure from Republicans and the Joint Chiefs of Staff fearing “another Yalta,” which they believed had undermined American interests. Because of these fears, the U.S. objective for the summit was to explore Soviet intentions without making any substantive decisions. The powers would “locate areas of tension and disagreement” and assign them to working groups and the United Nations. While Eisenhower agreed the western powers should avoid any concessions, he insisted the United

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31 Bischof and Dockrill, Cold War Respite: The Geneva Summit of 1955, 26
33 The 1945 Yalta Conference became a subject of intense controversy in the aftermath of the Second World War. Critics argue, among other things, that President Roosevelt and Churchill turned their backs on Poland, a wartime ally. See Bischof and Dockrill, Cold War Respite: The Geneva Summit of 1955, 127
States needed to be somewhat elastic in its positions.\textsuperscript{35}

France and Britain hoped to make progress toward German unification. Eden became almost obsessed with the issue, repeatedly bringing it up to Eisenhower’s dismay.\textsuperscript{36} France achieved its primary objective simply by being invited, reaffirming its view of self as a world force. However, France irked Eisenhower on several occasions, especially when the French Minister of Foreign Affairs Antoine Pinay leaked confidential information. This “extreme inexperience in the handling of foreign affairs” made the French, from an American vantage point, more of a hindrance than a help.\textsuperscript{37}

The Soviet Union’s leaders saw the summit as an important source of legitimacy. They were caught between two competing forces: a search for more effective ways to alleviate its problems and the somewhat erratic foreign policy from the Stalin cult and official ideology.\textsuperscript{38} The Soviet Union still mourned the death of Stalin, and misinformation was widespread; many suggested Stalin did not die of natural causes and Malenkov was a temporary premier were common.\textsuperscript{39} At Geneva, the Soviets wanted to prove above all else that they could deal with the Western powers without intimidation. Further, the conference would serve as domestic and international propaganda, sending the message that the Soviets had achieved parity with its rivals.

\textsuperscript{36} Bischof and Dockrill, \textit{Cold War Respite: The Geneva Summit of 1955}, 185
\textsuperscript{39} William Taubman, Sergei Khrushchev, and Abbott Gleason, \textit{Nikita Khrushchev} (Yale University Press, 2000), 178-181
and forced a new status quo in Eastern Europe.\textsuperscript{40}

West Germany did not attend the summit though arguably had the most at stake in Geneva. While German Chancellor Konrad Adenauer wanted to be present, he chose to sit out because East Germany would be included if West Germany participated.\textsuperscript{41} However, he was not enthusiastic about the meeting and worried it would raise the German people’s expectations. In this, Adenauer placed his nation’s fate in the hands of President Eisenhower, who pledged to reject any proposal that would undermine West Germany’s security or interests.

Arrival in Geneva

After the first day in Geneva, Dulles wrote that the Soviets had been friendly, with “fraternization all along the line from Bulganin down to the lowest security officer.”\textsuperscript{42} He noted the difficulties of the French delegation, due to rivalries between Faure and Pinay. In a conversation with Molotov, he noted the United States intended to establish “a directive for a future meeting of the Four Foreign Ministers to find a European security framework which will make German unification possible.”\textsuperscript{43} Apart from this, the summit would fail from the American perspective.

Throughout the summit, American leadership expressed repeated hope and “subsequent deflation of that hope,” shown in conversations between President Eisenhower and his advisors,
and in a series of telegrams sent to the Department of State during the summit.\textsuperscript{44} At times, they questioned whether the Soviets valued the summit’s social success more than discussing German unification. At multiple intervals, the summit became bogged down in disputes about the agenda. The three western powers wanted to discuss German reunification before European security—in concurrence with the Eden proposal—while the Soviets insisted on first tackling a European peace settlement.\textsuperscript{45} Despite long hours of debate, the second and third days of the summit ended inconclusively.

In the wake of these disagreements, President Eisenhower suggested they explore disarmament. To “allay fear of a surprise attack,” he made a novel proposal, dubbed Open Skies.\textsuperscript{46} Though it had been discussed with his advisors at length, he presented it spontaneously, without coordination with the British and French. Under Open Skies, the United States would permit aerial Soviet photography of U.S. territory, provided the Soviets would allow the United States to do the same. Khrushchev’s reaction was “100 percent negative,” suspecting that “Open Skies” was an espionage plot.\textsuperscript{47} The Soviets expected Eisenhower to “pull a rabbit out of the hat” but instead he “pulled a lion out.”\textsuperscript{48} Indeed, Eisenhower later said he never expected the Soviets to accept the plan, but instead hoped to make the Soviets appear intractable on arms control.

As the four powers entered the final plenary session of the conference without a directive

\textsuperscript{46} Rostow and Rostow, \textit{Open Skies: Eisenhower’s Proposal of July 21, 1955}.
for a future meeting, the delegations worried they would leave without anything to show for their time. The western powers insisted German unification needed to be the directive’s first item, while the Soviets saw German unification as tertiary. President Eisenhower personally had reassured Adenauer he would protect West Germany’s interests, so discussing European security first would send the impression that the United States saw the status quo as acceptable and be received poorly by the American public. To the Soviets, security was a global concern, while the German question was a “special problem,” aggravated by the admission of West Germany into the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) and East Germany into the Warsaw Pact.49 Thus, establishing a European security framework would facilitate a solution on Germany. Despite days of deliberation, both sides remained inflexible and refused to compromise.50

In a final plea to the Soviets, President Eisenhower said world leaders could not assemble in Geneva only to terminate the conference without results. They “could not face the people of the world, hungering for peace, with the fact that they had come to such an impasse.”51 In a final gesture, he accepted Soviet demands that European security precedes Germany in the directive’s first paragraph if the two points were combined in the same section. The Soviets accepted this because it did not subordinate European security to German unification, and vice versa for the western powers. The president then explained he reached this conclusion knowing “these directives were words—not deeds” and the true test would come in October at the foreign ministers meeting. He expressed disappointment in aspects of the directive but affirmed his

50 Bischof and Dockrill, Cold War Respite: The Geneva Summit of 1955., 183
commitment to carry it out loyally. The other powers agreed, and shortly after, the meeting ended.  

Geneva’s Aftermath: Mixed Reviews

The Geneva Summit showed the gulf between the United States and the Soviet Union, particularly on German unification. No compromise was possible as long as the West insisted on a NATO-integrated German state or the Soviets refused to cooperate on unification. Though President Eisenhower agreed reluctantly to the summit and did not have high hopes for it, he wished it had accomplished more. The United States did not make breakthroughs on the issue of Soviet encroachment in Eastern Europe, inspections, alone arms control, or disarmament. “Open Skies” had been met with much cynicism. The president did, however, make a strong personal impression on the Soviet delegation. Despite disagreeing with him on many points, Bulganin and Molotov expressed respect for him and regarded him as forceful and sincere. For their part, Britain and France showed unity with the United States on the major issues, even when the Soviets had tried to exploit their differences in opinion. At the very least, the West had managed to present a united front to the Soviets, who hoped to exploit Western divisions.

On the Soviet side, the Geneva Summit boosted its diplomatic efforts despite its lack of substantive progress. In Bulganin’s eyes, the summit was a psychological success because the Soviets presented a cogent foreign policy amid leadership changes while the United States

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addressed them as equals without condescension or intimidation. As Dulles later noted, the “moral barrier between the Soviet bloc and the free world” had been blurred.  

Each of the four powers entered the Geneva Summit with an agenda of its own. The United States and the Soviet Union wanted to show the world they were responsible actors, seeking peace. Of the two, the United States arguably entered from a position of strength, due to its nuclear supremacy and West Germany’s recent inclusion into NATO. However, despite perceptions of weakness, Bulganin felt he entered negotiations from a position of parity with the United States. Above all else, France and Britain hoped to reassert themselves as world powers. In some sense, they feared being “sold out” by the superpowers reaching a condominium at their expense. Given these conditions, all sides had little incentive to shift the status quo. No parties went to Geneva intending to resolve issues at an expense to their national interests. Thus, for all the publicity and symbolism of relaxed tensions the summit generated, few tangible achievements emerged.

While the western powers approached the Soviet Union with unity, the United States would have benefitted from bilateral negotiations with the Soviet Union. Eden’s approach created unnecessary publicity and raised false hopes for German unification, while tensions within the French government made communicating with their delegation more difficult. Churchill had wishful thinking about the West’s ability to deliver peace and increase Britain’s stature. More simply, the United States and the Soviet Union were the superpowers of an increasingly bipolar world, and more parties at the table hamstrung already cumbersome negotiations.

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By Eisenhower’s own account, the “acid test” for Geneva would occur at the foreign ministers’ meeting in October. By this measure, the Geneva Summit disappointed, because the foreign ministers failed to “paper over their fundamental differences,” and the October conference ended in total deadlock. The Soviet negotiators worried about the Soviet bloc’s stability and refused to make significant concessions, a clear violation of the Geneva Summit directive. While the Geneva Summit reduced international tensions, the “spirit of Geneva” was more rhetorical than anything else.

**Lessons from Geneva**

At the time of the Geneva Summit, most North Americans and Europeans viewed nuclear confrontation as all but inevitable. Indeed, the Geneva Summit lowered the odds of such a disaster and provided a brief respite from the Cold War. However, tensions rose again, culminating in the Soviets’ rebuff of another four-power summit in May 1960 after the U-2 spy plane incident. A year later, Nikita Khrushchev ordered the erection of the Berlin Wall. In October 1962, the Cuban Missile Crisis would bring the Cold War to the brink of disaster. Clearly, Geneva eased tensions temporarily.

The Geneva Summit showcases many challenges of summitry: making substantive agreements, avoiding unreasonable expectations, and cultivating mutual trust. As the Eisenhower Administration’s planning for Geneva reveals, summits require remarkable foresight and anticipation. Despite having access to the most current and top-secret intelligence, the president’s closest advisors struggled to pinpoint the Soviet Union’s intentions because internal power

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58 The 1960 summit collapsed after a U.S. spy plane was shot down over Soviet territory while performing unauthorized aerial reconnaissance.
struggles made the Soviets unpredictable. Coordinating with Britain and France was challenging as well.

Despite the summit’s shortcomings, President Eisenhower’s approach offers valuable insight to American policymakers. His resistance to allies’ pressure for an earlier summit shows that proper timing is essential to successful summitry and that multilateral summits complicate matters, no matter how close the nations might be. The impression that President Eisenhower left with Bulganin and other Soviet leaders shows that in-person interaction can help leaders establish credibility. Further, the Eisenhower Administration struck a balance between entering negotiations with clear objectives and giving the president latitude to negotiate. This autonomy, in turn, allowed President Eisenhower to float policy proposals such as “Open Skies.”

To be sure, the Geneva Summit provided a diplomatic breakthrough. The event re-established communication after years of diplomatic isolation between the United States and the Soviet Union. Because of this estrangement, simply bringing these four nations to the table was an admirable feat. In spite of the summit’s limited impact, President Eisenhower should be commended for his risk-taking in pursuit of peace. The occasion could have damaged his credibility and backfired. In the end, the president’s benevolence and judiciousness served him well. As a result, the president showed that summits—if undertaken with proper safeguards and preparation—can be a modest de-escalatory force during intense periods in world affairs.
B. Vienna Summit in 1961: Hubris Takes Its Toll

In June 1961, President John F. Kennedy and Soviet Premier Nikita Khrushchev met for the Vienna Summit, a uniquely dramatic Cold War episode. The talks brought together a newly elected, highly educated leader and a Communist ideologue older by a generation. Following the collapse of the 1960 Paris Summit, President Kennedy sought to re-establish dialogue between the two countries while demonstrating resolve on the Berlin and Laos questions. According to media reports and the president’s closest advisors, President Kennedy departed for Vienna with confidence, expecting a frank exchange of views and a chance to address misconceptions. In this, the summit recalls the distinctive words of his inaugural address: “Let us never negotiate out of fear. But let us never fear to negotiate.”

However noble this objective, the president learned there are reasons to fear to negotiate. In Kennedy’s own words, the experience was “the worst thing in his life.” Khrushchev, who staked much of his prestige on the summit, emerged emboldened and viewing the president as inexperienced and immature. How did the Vienna Summit—a meeting that began with American optimism—so rapidly become a self-defeating move?

The Road to Vienna

Initially, Khrushchev seemed optimistic about forging a working relationship with

Kennedy—a figure he preferred to Eisenhower and Nixon, whom he viewed as self-righteous westerners.\(^\text{64}\) He wrote to Kennedy that there were “no insurmountable obstacles to the preservation and consolidation of peace.”\(^\text{65}\) Shortly after Kennedy took office, Khrushchev released two American pilots shot down in a previous reconnaissance mission. Though Kennedy was suspicious of summits as a senator and presidential candidate, he considered meeting with Khrushchev less than a month after entering office.\(^\text{66}\)

The Soviet leader had put much of his credibility in the Communist world on the line by agreeing to the talks.\(^\text{67}\) If he failed to get positive results in Vienna, Khrushchev’s ideological adversaries would gain ground.\(^\text{68}\) He believed, however, that the meeting could be exploited for his benefit.\(^\text{69}\) After hearing Kennedy’s message to Congress on May 25, Khrushchev became agitated, calling the president a “son of a bitch” and declaring he would make Kennedy concede on Berlin.\(^\text{70}\) At the very least, the summit would provide further propaganda and could even bring a breakthrough on the German question or disarmament. In the weeks before the summit, Soviet propaganda suggested Kennedy had agreed to talks in the wake of public dissatisfaction with his foreign policy.\(^\text{71}\)

This claim had some truth. In the previous months, President Kennedy had suffered political fallout from the botched Bay of Pigs invasion, followed by the Soviets’ victory in

\(^{64}\) Nikita Khrushchev, *Khrushchev Remembers*, vol. 1 (Little, Brown, 1970)., 500
\(^{66}\) Richard Reeves, *President Kennedy: Profile of Power* (Simon and Schuster, 1994)., 158
sending a man to space. After these setbacks, Kennedy sought to reinvigorate his presidency through talks, which Khrushchev would accept in mid-May 1961.

Despite these early disappointments, President Kennedy entered Vienna from a position of domestic strength. After reading Ambassador Llewellyn Thompson’s cables on May 24, Kennedy decided to take a tough stance against Khrushchev. He arrived in Austria after a successful trip across Europe, which buttressed his ascending global popularity. He expected Khrushchev to be a “cautious negotiator” interested in common ground. Kennedy felt that if he “could just sit down” with Khrushchev, he would find agreement with him. In the days leading up to Vienna, he repeated the words of American abolitionist William Lloyd Garrison: “I will not equivocate, I will not excuse, I will not retreat a single inch, and I will be heard.” Clearly, Kennedy departed for Vienna with resolve.

Several of the president’s senior advisors did not share Kennedy’s optimism and advised him not to rush into talks. Thompson, though supportive of the meeting, feared Kennedy underestimated Khrushchev, who struck Thompson as more adept and ruthless than anticipated. Many feared another setback so shortly after the Bay of Pigs invasion and questioned whether taking such a gamble was wise. Some even assumed the meeting would be postponed indefinitely after the incident. Others felt the issues could be resolved by lower-level

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77 Thompson and Thompson, *The Kremlinologist: Llewellyn E Thompson, America’s Man in Cold War Moscow*, 248
78 Paul Nitze, Steven L. Rearden, and Ann Martin Smith, *From Hiroshima to Glasnost: At the Center of Decision: A Memoir* (G. Weidenfeld, 1989), 185
diplomats, and Khrushchev gave them little reason to believe he was a good-faith actor. U.S. diplomat and Soviet expert Charles Bohlen feared that Khrushchev remained enamored with the notion of global Communism.79 Given that Khrushchev had quashed the Paris summit at the last minute, it was difficult to predict how he might act in Vienna.80 Dean Rusk, then-Secretary of State, argued that however popular a summit may be with the American public, this support fundamentally is driven “by desperate hope and the fascinations of the spectacular.”81 As a result, it is impossible for the president, who might also be prone to “dangers of illusion,” to manage expectations for the talks.82 A summit not only would divert finite time and energy but also offer ineffective negotiation. Despite these concerns, the president agreed to the talks, hoping to preserve the status quo.83

Ahead of his trip to Vienna, Kennedy met with French President Charles de Gaulle, a decorated French hero eager to project France’s influence. Though de Gaulle had a strong relationship with Kennedy and Eisenhower, this was not a meeting to be relished. De Gaulle could be steely, frugal, and divisive (he survived nearly 30 assassination attempts throughout his life!).84 He advised the president not to bring up the future status of East Germany in Vienna.85 When he left Paris, Kennedy’s chronic back pain was worse. Because of this, he worried about meeting with Khrushchev and was in constant pain.86

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80 Thompson and Thompson, *The Kremlinologist: Llewellyn E Thompson, America’s Man in Cold War Moscow*, 250.
85 Thompson and Thompson, *The Kremlinologist: Llewellyn E Thompson, America’s Man in Cold War Moscow*, 251.
The Soviets Surprise

In Vienna, President Kennedy expected the Soviets to make a large media showing. In the United States, the Vienna Summit had generated an unprecedented amount of media coverage, with the press generally agreeing the talks could yield further progress on important East-West issues.87 Surprisingly, the Soviets had “played it pianissimo,” with few Soviet journalists and no separate briefings or news conferences.88 This approach suggested Khrushchev was hoping to manage expectations for the meeting.

Once the talks began, it took little time for the two to lock swords. In conversations ahead of the summit, Ambassador Thompson warned the president not to debate Khrushchev on ideological issues, which would waste valuable time against an opponent who had years of debate experience.89 However, despite these warnings, Kennedy failed to resist this temptation and Khrushchev responded assertively. He delivered striking rebukes to Kennedy, condemning the United States for intervening in Cuba, Berlin, and Southeast Asia and claiming American actions “proved Communists right.”90 The United States, he claimed, talks of self-determination but frustrates the popular will and supports dictators. The precedent of intervention for American

“strategic interests” could incite larger conflicts.91

Kennedy offered token resistance as Khrushchev went on about the hypocrisy of American foreign policy. Disregarding his advisors’ advice, the president engaged in this ideological debate, feeling it was necessary to maintain his credibility.92 But Khrushchev’s barrage of attacks continued. The United States, Khrushchev concluded, had “delusions of grandeur.” He told the president that he had not read Soviet proposals “with sufficient attention” and the Soviet Union would not be intimidated by American military bases.93 While the delegation told the press Kennedy was performing well, the talks disappointed Kennedy, whose face was pale and strained.94

At one interval, the president tried to switch the subject to the so-called dangers of “miscalculation” that could lead to a larger war. In response, Khrushchev yelled: “Miscalculation! Miscalculation! Miscalculation! All I ever hear from your people and your news correspondents and your friends in Europe and every-place else is that damned word, miscalculation!”95 Khrushchev felt disrespected by the implication that he might miscalculate in his decision-making. This reaction shocked Kennedy, who suggested they break for lunch. He would not bring up the subject again.

In an attempt to recover from these sessions, Kennedy invited Khrushchev for a stroll in the garden, where the Soviet premier could be more amenable apart from other Soviet officials.96 However, the president had no such luck, as Khrushchev claimed U.S. policy turned Castro into

94 Nitze, Rearden, and Smith, From Hiroshima to Glasnost: At the Center of Decision: A Memoir., 186
95 Freedman, Kennedy's Wars: Berlin, Cuba, Laos, and Vietnam., 56.
96 Reportedly, the stroll was hard on Kennedy’s back.
a Communist. He piled on, asking whether six million Cubans were really “a threat to the mighty United States” and promptly left. The episode surprised the president, who naively assumed he would charm the premier and build rapport.

In the following meeting, Khrushchev controlled the conversation yet again, and it was no different as the two discussed Berlin. Khrushchev delivered a new ultimatum to President Kennedy: if the United States and Soviet Union could not reach a peace treaty that made the western powers leave West Berlin, he would end all Soviet postwar commitments. Khrushchev would move forward with a separate peace treaty, granting complete control of East Berlin to East Germany, undermining the West’s ability to control and communicate with West Berlin. If the United States disrespected the German Democratic Republic’s sovereignty, Khrushchev continued, the USSR would regard this “as an act of open aggression.” Kennedy previously had been clear the United States would, under no conditions, agree to leave West Berlin or accept arrangements “inimical to U.S. interests.” But Khrushchev continued to escalate, saying that “if the United States should start a war over Berlin, let it be so.” By the end of the talks, in the words of a British diplomat, the Americans hoped to get Kennedy “out of the bear cage without being too badly mauled.” After Kennedy’s last-ditch attempt to reach agreement on Berlin failed, Khrushchev replied it was “up to the U.S. to decide whether there will be war or

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102 Kempe, Berlin 1961: Kennedy, Khrushchev, and the Most Dangerous Place on Earth., 241
The Soviet Union would sign a peace treaty if the United States refused an interim agreement. Kennedy concluded the summit: “Then, Mr. Chairman, there will be war. It will be a cold winter.”

Kennedy in Retreat

When the Vienna Summit began, President Kennedy was confident as ever. Of course, he recently had suffered from the Bay of Pigs invasion and memories of the U-2 incident lingered. But he was a popular figure, riding with “the full support of the American people” and renewed confidence in western unity. But none of this prevented the summit’s implosion. By all accounts, Khrushchev’s toughness and rigidity shocked Kennedy. In a private meeting with The New York Times reporter James “Scotty” Reston, the president claimed the talks had been “the worst thing in my life […] He just beat the hell out of me.”

The summit even included awkward interpersonal encounters, including Khrushchev jokingly accusing the president of trying to set him on fire with a cigar match and Kennedy almost sitting on Khrushchev’s wife’s lap during festivities. Khrushchev left Vienna exuberant.

President Kennedy and his advisors regarded Vienna as an unequivocal failure. Paul Nitze, then-Assistant Secretary of Defense, labeled the meeting “a disaster.” The president left for Britain “pessimistic on issues across the board,” sullen about his mistakes. One account

104 Reeves, President Kennedy: Profile of Power, 171
107 Reeves, President Kennedy: Profile of Power, 166
108 Khrushchev, Khrushchev Remembers, 500-501
109 Thrall and Wilkins, “Kennedy Talked, Khrushchev Triumphed.”
110 Salinger, With Kennedy, 181-182; David Halberstam, The Best and the Brightest (Modern Library, 2002), 85-86
likened the plane ride to London to one “with the losing baseball team after the World Series.”\textsuperscript{111} Not only did the president fail to establish positive personal chemistry with Khrushchev but he offered concessions in an awkward effort to find agreement. For example, Kennedy indicated that Communism could remain in Poland and Czechoslovakia but could not expand—a shocking acceptance of European spheres of influence.\textsuperscript{112} He failed to challenge Khrushchev on Berlin and repudiate Soviet interventions in East Germany and Hungary, which normalized Khrushchev’s aggression in Europe. American diplomats could not believe the president took so much abuse.\textsuperscript{113}

President Kennedy admitted the summit worsened relations with the Soviet Union and there were “absolutely no new grounds for encouragement.”\textsuperscript{114} To the public, the president voiced this more diplomatically: “No dramatic progress was either achieved or pretended.”\textsuperscript{115} While the summit’s failure cannot be attributed to a single factor, it is clear the president’s hubris drove his unpreparedness. He entered the talks misjudging Khrushchev, thinking he could charm the Soviet and ignore the advice of his national security staff, who understood Khrushchev’s difficult personality and Kennedy’s blind spots. Even more problematic was Kennedy’s inability to adapt to Khrushchev’s aggression. Instead, he overreacted, seeking to reassure the Soviet of his good intentions. As a result, Khrushchev formed an impression of Kennedy as young and inexperienced. They had met “man to man,” and though Khrushchev felt that Kennedy had a better grasp of the issues than his predecessor, he saw the president as amateurish. Now,

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\textsuperscript{111} Clemens Heymann, \textit{A Woman Named Jackie} (Lyle Stuart, 1989), 306.
\textsuperscript{112} Kempe, \textit{Berlin 1961: Kennedy, Khrushchev, and the Most Dangerous Place on Earth}, 266.
\textsuperscript{113} Thrall and Wilkins, “Kennedy Talked, Khrushchev Triumphed.”
\textsuperscript{114} Reston, “Vienna Talks End.”
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Khrushchev was emboldened to place missiles on American borders as a “permanent basis for blackmail.”\textsuperscript{116}

The president’s staffers hold partial responsibility for the summit’s failure. Though Kennedy spent significant time preparing for the summit, he allowed his brother Bobby to handle much of the planning—a chronic issue throughout his presidency—which meant the rest of his team lacked the preparatory knowledge to help him adapt when the talks devolved. Secretary of State Dean Rusk, though qualified as an Asia expert, had more of a background with Chinese affairs than Soviet issues and National Security Advisor McGeorge Bundy lacked the decisiveness to give Kennedy strategic guidance. Ambassador Thompson, for all his effort to brief the president, did not get Kennedy’s attention and his input was ignored.

The meeting showed that the situation in Germany would remain contentious for the foreseeable future. Not only did both sides reaffirm their pre-existing stances on Berlin, but also affirmed their willingness to go to war over the city. While the chances of miscommunication fell, it was clear that the gap between the two sides remained wide.

Thus, the talks were not simply a missed opportunity for the president. They convinced Khrushchev of Kennedy’s impotence, a perception that led the Soviet leader to test Kennedy’s resolve on multiple fronts. A little over two months after Vienna, Khrushchev ordered the construction of the Berlin Wall and the placement of ballistic missiles in Cuba soon after. The very issues the president hoped to put aside intensified. In this, the summit not only failed to produce a breakthrough but aggravated the same tensions the president hoped to reduce. The Vienna Summit did not pacify the Cold War; it escalated it.

\textsuperscript{116} Nitze, Rearden, and Smith, \textit{From Hiroshima to Glasnost: At the Center of Decision: A Memoir.}, 219
A Negative Model

Despite the summit’s failure, Kennedy’s approach to Vienna offers powerful reminders to American policymakers. Successful summitry requires proper expectations and diligent preparation, headed by experienced advisors with the president’s ear. More importantly, it demands the ability to maintain poise and avoid agitation when dealing with pugnacious figures. A president must strike a balance between resolve and openness and must not underestimate his or her opponents.

Most of all, the Vienna Summit teaches that humility among leaders—the humility to know what one does not know—is vital to a summit’s success. Contrary to what President Kennedy believed, policymakers should, at least to some extent, fear to negotiate. The risks of the Vienna Summit were as high as the possibilities, and fallible leaders must reckon with these risks. Indeed, the Vienna Summit underscores that diplomacy is fundamentally a human undertaking. President Kennedy should not be blamed for his blind spots, but he should for refusing to recognize them.
C. Nixon Goes to China: Presidential Statesmanship

Frequently cited as President Richard Nixon’s signature diplomatic achievement, the president’s trip to China in 1972 was a unique event. Not only did it mark the first U.S. presidential visit to the People’s Republic of China, but it also ended a quarter-century of tense coexistence between the two sides. The rapprochement achieved by Nixon, Mao Zedong and Zhou Enlai’s summit reverberated domestically and abroad while shifting the geopolitical landscape for subsequent decades.

The encounter’s success was far from automatic. It required diligent preparation, a series of calculated statements and political boldness. In the midst of the Vietnam War and his upcoming re-election bid, Nixon would do just that. Following the 1971 World Table Tennis Championships, he sent his National Security Advisor Henry Kissinger to a secret rendezvous with Zhou in Beijing. Therein began the road to Nixon’s visit.

Against this backdrop, the summit convened a unique set of personalities. Mao Zedong the chairman of the PRC, was a seasoned Communist with a ruthless streak, and his underling Zhou Enlai was the first premier of the PRC. President Nixon was a gritty political insider with the reputation of a practiced statesman and an ardent anti-Communist. Kissinger, a clever strategist with the president’s utmost confidence, played a pivotal role in the summit’s preparations. Together, these figures shaped the visit and Sino-American relations for years.

Contextualizing the China Opening

Initially, Sino-American rapprochement was a chimera. In 1949, diplomatic relations were severed and the Communist hold on the PRC had continued for over twenty years. With any presidential administration, normalization would have been unlikely.
But with President Nixon, the summit is even more surprising. In many ways, he is the last president one would expect to pursue rapprochement. He held an unquestioned reputation as an anti-Communist who led the Alger Hiss investigation during his Congressional tenure. He repeatedly dismissed talk of a Sino-Soviet split during his 1960 presidential campaign, labeling the notion wishful thinking. Similarly, he disregarded Mao, Zhou, and Khrushchev as “all the same” and characterized the Soviets and Communist China as partners “in all essentials” with “the same major objectives.” Nixon saw the PRC as an American foe.

The 1960s, however, brought new changes to the Cold War landscape that changed the president’s thinking. For one, the United States no longer enjoyed unrivaled nuclear power as the Soviets achieved near strategic parity. China was a great power and developed its own nuclear weapons. Both Bretton Woods and the U.S. relationship with NATO were strained, and the Third World suffered from persistent instability. In Vietnam, the United States remained stuck in a troubling quagmire and domestically, the Johnson Administration struggled to address poverty, race relations, and inflation as violence intensified. Business as usual, Nixon and Kissinger reckoned, was no longer possible. American statecraft needed to anticipate future challenges and respond accordingly.

Part of this “long view” began with U.S.-Sino relations, and Nixon’s rhetoric evolved accordingly. In 1967, he called the PRC to join “the society of nations” and move out of “angry isolation.” He wrote that “the world cannot be safe until China changes,” and that America needed to persuade China to avoid “foreign adventuring.” Ahead of the 1968 election, he continued to hint at warmer relations. Once president, Nixon worked to restore relations with

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China beginning on his first day. After opening communication channels with Beijing, he sent a series of overtures through Kissinger.\(^{119}\) Normalization efforts were underway.

A key turning point in relations emerged a few months later when the PRC invited the U.S. table tennis team to visit after the Nagoya World Table Tennis Championships. The gesture signaled Beijing’s interest in better relations. Subsequently, the press questioned Nixon on his view of China. “I hope, and as a matter of fact, I expect,” he said, “to visit Mainland China in some capacity—I don’t know what capacity. But that indicates what I hope for the long term.”\(^{120}\) However, Nixon privately arranged a diplomatic stunt: Kissinger would secretly fly to Beijing on a two-day visit to lay the groundwork for a presidential visit.

**Kissinger’s Secret Negotiations**

While pretending to have a stomachache in Pakistan, Kissinger flew to the PRC where he met Zhou.\(^{121}\) Both sides took an enormous political risk with the scheme; did the press discover the event, it would appear the powers had colluded. Thankfully for the two sides, no leaks emerged.

Kissinger described his visit as the “most searching, sweeping, and significant discussions” he participated in.\(^{122}\) “These 20 hours were the most impressive conversations I have ever had.”\(^{123}\) Kissinger described Zhou as hospitable, avoiding invective but “tough on

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123 “Briefing of the White House Staff on the July 15 Announcement of the President’s Trip to Peking” (National Security Archive, July 19, 1971), [https://nsarchive2.gwu.edu/NSAEBB/NSAEBB66/ch-41.pdf](https://nsarchive2.gwu.edu/NSAEBB/NSAEBB66/ch-41.pdf).
substance and ideological” in his approach. Shortly after Kissinger’s return, President Nixon announced that he would visit the PRC. “The process we have just started,” Kissinger noted, will send enormous shock waves around the world.”

Many American allies—which the United States promised consultation on decisions involving China—were frustrated with the move. Japanese officials worried the PRC was hoping to “split Japan off from the U.S. and ‘neutralize’ it.” The move also perturbed the Kremlin, and Soviet leadership became deeply suspicious of Sino-American relations. Soviet Ambassador Anatoly Dobrynin accused the United States of sharing intelligence on Soviet forces, to which Kissinger retorted he would never act so “amateurish.” Ironically, he had not offered this intelligence to the Chinese but did so shortly afterward.

After the announcement, the administration prepared for the summit. Through the Paris channel, the two sides negotiated Kissinger’s second visit—known as “Polo Two”—where the summit’s topics, dates, media coverage, and security concerns were discussed. On October 5, the two governments released a joint statement that an American delegation led by Kissinger would visit China on October 20.

The national security advisor arrived in China with a warm reception. He made arrangements for Nixon’s visit, including the trip’s date and the size of his entourage. But Kissinger also had other priorities. He hoped to strengthen Zhou’s perception of Soviet antagonism, which would stir interest in reaching agreement with the United States. Kissinger insisted the Soviets wanted to “outmaneuver” China. Zhou, affirming this belief, voiced

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124 Kissinger, “Memorandum from Nixon to Kissinger: ‘My Talks with Chou En-Lai.’”
frustration with Soviets’ “petty negotiating tactics.”

Over 25 hours of meetings, Kissinger and Zhou discussed the Vietnam War, Japan, Taiwan’s future, and Bangladesh. Once disagreements became apparent, Zhou made it clear he had no desire for a pretend peace. Kissinger echoed this view, arguing for the “gradual resolution of the issues.” After this, the two negotiated a preliminary draft of the communiqué that would be released after Nixon’s visit. “We have started a revolution in world affairs,” Kissinger reminded Zhou. The two countries verged a historical moment.

Nixon Reads Up

Back in the United States, the Nixon Administration carefully orchestrated the trip’s media coverage. The summit would be televised to audiences across America. The president dampened expectations for the summit, noting that “some normalization” and “a more normal and constructive relationship” with China” was the likely outcome. He also used Kissinger’s briefing papers to become familiar with his counterparts. “Be candid on our disagreements,” Kissinger said. “Respond firmly, though non-abusively.” Use “genuine (as opposed to feigned) frankness” with Zhou. Nixon studied portraits of Mao and Zhou—figures that couldn’t “be bluffed” and wouldn’t “fall for pretty phrases.” Kissinger described Zhou as “the most impressive statesman” he had met—along with de Gaulle—with “a

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129 Kissinger.
130 Alexander Haig, Kissinger’s deputy, would head a final delegation to briefly visit China to make final logistical arrangements for the president’s visit.
good command of American politics and society.”

Zhou was a tactician, a “master of
details.” His negotiating style required “finesse to counter,” patience, revisiting issues and suggesting new approaches. Though Kissinger had not met Mao, Zhou had made it clear that Mao set China’s direction and “leaves the implementation to his trusted lieutenant,” Zhou. Mao could be “as ruthlessly pragmatic as he is ideologically fanatic,” showing “hard-nosed adaptability as well as philosophic insight.” Kissinger expected Mao to be relatively receptive to Nixon, whom Mao viewed more fondly than previous presidents.

During preparatory meetings, Kissinger was blunt with Nixon. “Now, you have a tendency, if I may say so, Mr. President, to lump them and the Russians. They’re a different phenomenon.” He reminded the president of his objectives. “Over the long term,” Kissinger said, “the intangibles of your China visit will prove more important than the tangible results.” He stressed the need for leaving with a “creditable public outcome” and showing American reliability, which would be essential for future breakthroughs. “If we fail,” he said, the Chinese would become “implacable foes” and “an increasingly thorny adversary.”

This frankness was central to Nixon’s summit preparations.

Both Nixon and Kissinger understood the summit’s risks. But they found the alternative—“continued isolation from one-quarter of the world’s most talented people and a country rich in past achievements and future potential”—to be unacceptable. If the United States

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135 Kissinger, “Memorandum for the President: ‘Your Encounter with the Chinese.’”
showed reliability and finesse with the Mao and Zhou, history would remember the trip as a success rather than a “gallant but stillborn venture.”

**Touchdown in Peiping**

When Nixon and his wife arrived in Beijing on February 21, the president met with Mao, who was in poor health and was hospitalized for several weeks before Nixon’s arrival. This was the president’s only meeting with Mao during the visit. In a move that must have puzzled the Chinese, Nixon excluded Secretary of State William Rogers from the meeting while including Kissinger and his assistant Winston Lord.

Upon meeting Nixon, Mao remarked that “our old friend Chiang Kai-shek would not approve of this.” The two exchanged jokes on the PRC’s relationship with Taiwan and Kissinger’s secret traveling skills. Mao expressed his support for Nixon’s re-election bid: “If all of you are overthrown, we wouldn’t have any more friends left.” Kissinger’s deputy Lord later commented that he had come out of the talk “somewhat disappointed” but impressed with Mao. “The conversation was somewhat episodic and not very full.”

Nixon expressed his interest in discussing Japan, India, Soviet aims, Vietnam, and trade. He told the chairman he antagonized China for a “period of years,” but that the world’s “new situation” changed his thinking. The two expressed their desire to work through differences as

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141 The American delegation was unaware of Mao’s poor health at the time.

142 Throughout the Nixon presidency, Rogers had been eclipsed by Kissinger as the president’s go-to diplomat and confidant. This culminated early in the second Nixon term when Rogers was asked to resign. Lord was later cut out of photographs to avoid embarrassing Rogers.


much as possible. In hindsight, Lord noted that Mao was “much more purposeful and skillful” than the Americans realized at the time.\textsuperscript{145}

Nixon’s meetings with Zhou included frank exchanges. Nixon acknowledged they could not “build a bridge covering 16,000 miles over 22 years in one week.” Further, he insisted that “it does not serve the cause of better relations to put a cosmetic covering over fundamental differences of opinion.” Zhou readily agreed and shared his hope that Nixon would remain in office.\textsuperscript{146} However, they found there was “more common ground” than they anticipated, specifically on the Soviet Union.\textsuperscript{147} The president said the United States had “broken out of the old pattern” of lumping all socialist countries together. “We look at each country in terms of its own conduct.”\textsuperscript{148} Zhou acknowledged his frustrations with the Soviets, noting that at times “the Soviets have hated us to the very core.”

Taiwan became a sticking point in the talks. Zhou insisted he could not accept measures allowing U.S. interference in China’s internal affairs. Nixon explained his predicament: “I must be able to go back to Washington and say that no secret deals have been made.” He pledged to relocate two-thirds of U.S. forces on Taiwan when the Vietnam War finished, and the last third would be removed gradually. As far as the U.S. relationship with Taiwan’s government, Nixon reiterated the U.S. objective of normalization.\textsuperscript{149} Zhou responded he did not want Nixon to remove Chiang Kai-shek, noting that “we will take care of that ourselves.” He said he

\textsuperscript{145} Kennedy.
understood Nixon’s predicament and suggested they agree on some basic principles. After much arduous discussion, the two agreed on “one China” and a few points of agreement: the United States would not hinder Taiwan’s “peaceful liberation” or support a Taiwan Independence Movement and would impede Japanese forces from entering Taiwan. In addition, the two sides would insist neither had “changed [its] principles.”

At the summit’s conclusion, the two parties released the Shanghai Communiqué, a statement of the countries’ foreign policy views that remain the basis of U.S.-PRC relations to this day. In it, both nations pledged to work toward full normalization, reduce the danger of international military conflict and work in the interest of all countries. Both declared opposition to either country’s hegemony in the Asia-Pacific Region and affirmed they would not negotiate for other nations without their consent.

A Positive Reception

President Nixon’s trip to China proved one of the most significant diplomatic breakthroughs of the twentieth century. It ended 25 years of hostility between the two nations, engaged the United States in the Indo-Pacific region in new ways, and shifted the Cold War balance significantly. “For the first time,” The New York Times would report, “a chief executive of the United States had visited the world’s most populous country during his term of office.”

Further, it catalyzed new diplomatic efforts among Nixon’s successors. When President Ford assumed office in August 1974, he wrote to Mao, reaffirming his commitment to rapprochement. Every president since Nixon—with the exception of Jimmy Carter—has visited China, too.

How had President Nixon—a man who built his political career as an anti-Communist—led a visit to the PRC and exchanged jokes and handshakes with its leaders? The Senate Democratic leader at the time, Mike Mansfield, later commented that “only a Republican, perhaps only a Nixon, could have made this break and gotten away with it.”153 Since the visit, historians have referred to “Nixon to China” moments when politicians take actions that normally would draw criticism but instead receive support because of the politician’s reputation. This “timely political masterstroke” combined Nixon’s invulnerable reputation and pragmatism to yield a major diplomatic breakthrough with minimal criticism.154

Domestically, Nixon garnered widespread public acclaim.155 Millions saw the president journey across China on television, with scenes of Beijing, the Great Wall, and Chinese leaders making their way to the United States for the first time in over twenty years. Members of the press witnessed Nixon communicating and sightseeing with Mao and Zhou. Not only was 98 percent of the American public aware of the trip, but over two-thirds of Americans viewed the summit positively.156 Extensive media coverage helped shore public support for the summit and ensured the trip’s legacy. These images framed Nixon as an innovative leader and global statesman. As a result, the president’s approval rating rose to nearly 56 percent.157

The secrecy of the summit’s preparations, while frustrating to some, proved helpful in the lead-up to the trip and showed Nixon’s trust in his staff. Kissinger, fearing unhelpful leaks from outside the White House, even refused to use State Department translators during his preparatory

153 “A Size-Up of President Nixon: Interview with Mike Mansfield, Senate Democratic Leader,” U.S. News and World Report, December 6, 1971
trip. These precautions helped the president make overtures to the PRC without dodging the press and dealing with public pressure. By trusting his advisors’ input and following his own inclinations, Nixon showed a willingness to follow and ignore precedent as necessary.

The president’s visit to China was significant because it took place during the Vietnam War, a conflict from which the president hoped to distract. The summit commanded public attention and shifted the international focus away from Vietnam. It showed that “even in the midst of a debilitating war, the United States was in a position to bring about a design for long-term peace.”158 “The drama and the importance of dealing with the giant,” Kissinger reasoned, would put in perspective “the difficult exit from the Vietnam War.”

The trip also furthered U.S. interests and its broader Cold War objectives. It showed a willingness to shelve old preconceptions and ideological beliefs to transcend Cold War tensions. It widened the wedge between the Soviets and China while opening China to the world economy. The trip played on Soviet fears of a Sino-American alliance without provoking the Kremlin and put the Nixon Administration in a swing position, where the Soviets and Chinese competed for good relations with the United States. In addition, the trip created a platform for Nixon to pressure Hanoi through China to end to the Vietnam War. On Taiwan, the Shanghai Communique developed a framework to table the issue, at least temporarily. Together, these factors led to full normalization between the United States and PRC in 1979.

Learning from Nixon

Upon leaving the PRC, President Nixon dubbed the summit “the week that changed the world.” For a trip that has garnered public acclaim for almost 50 years, this is an apt description. The summit uprooted geopolitics during a period of great political turmoil. “At home,”

Kissinger’s deputy remarked, “you had riots, assassinations, and people being disillusioned with executive power.” The summit successfully steered attention away from these incidents and toward rapprochement between two estranged powers. By no means did the summit turn enemies into friends, but it diminished the likelihood of armed conflict and catalyzed tectonic shifts in global affairs.

The trip underscores the importance of diligent preparation for successful summits. For one, Nixon carefully weighed the risks of diplomatic efforts before beginning. He spent hours reading about Mao and Zhou and tailored his approach to their personalities. He used Kissinger to observe the country, point out his blind spots, and help him overcome cultural obstacles. He also took several practical measures, lowering the public’s expectations, setting clear objectives for himself, and reminding his team of what was at stake. Secrecy, as it turned out, proved vital as well.

The unconventional also furthered the trip’s success. Nixon’s approach was bold, cutting out his Secretary of State at times and confidently searching for new diplomatic breakthroughs. Though Mansfield’s comment that “only a Nixon” could visit China without domestic backlash is not entirely accurate, it underscores Nixon’s resourcefulness. He wielded his reputation as an anti-Communist to seek rapprochement without reproach. He showed creativity in his moves, using ping pong, drink toasts, and sightseeing to cultivate trust. By playing on media coverage, these seemingly trivial measures contributed to the trip’s success and ensured its legacy.

Finally, the summit teaches that small victories should not be ignored. Nixon avoided unnecessary concessions while using confidence-building measures, such as the release of two CIA operatives detained for 20 years. These small actions help each side gauge the other’s commitment and build up to more significant issues. Further, he used the trip for a significant
public relations victory: distracting from the Vietnam War. Though Nixon is most often remembered for Watergate and his shameful resignation, students of diplomacy should recognize his unorthodox but lasting foreign policy contributions.
D. 1978 Camp David Summit: Carter, Begin, and Sadat Break Ground

In September 1978, President Jimmy Carter brought the Israeli-Egyptian peace process to a climax through the Camp David summit. Since Israel’s formation in 1948, Egypt had been its staunchest regional rival. The two went to war in 1948, 1956, 1967, and most recently in 1973. In the wake of the collapse of the Geneva talks—which sought to broker a solution to the Arab-Israeli conflict—President Carter invited Israeli Prime Minister Menachem Begin and Egyptian President Anwar Sadat to Camp David, the president’s country retreat in Maryland. The secret talks that took place there not only would determine the precarious peace process’ fate but also affect superpower interests in the Middle East and shape the region for years to come.

The Camp David Accords are a signature example of how to conduct a successful summit. The negotiations were isolated, well-defined, continuous, and involved the most senior members of government—conditions allowing for robust conclusions. Together, these elements will elucidate clear historical lessons on Carter’s presidency and summits at large.

A Cumbersome Start

During the Nixon years, Secretary of State Henry Kissinger mediated the Geneva talks, negotiations between Egyptian and Israeli military officials in the wake of the 1973 war. However, the talks reached an impasse as Israel became resistant to Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) representation, and Egypt and Syria insisted it was the Palestinians’ “legitimate representative.” Despite these disagreements, Kissinger cultivated a strong relationship with Egypt and used shuttle diplomacy to achieve incremental progress in the peace

159 Shibley Telhami, *Power and Leadership in International Bargaining: The Path to the Camp David Accords* (Columbia University Press, 1990), 7
160 Telhami.
process.\textsuperscript{161}

Not long after, the 1976 election booted the Ford-Kissinger team. To rekindle the peace process, President Carter met with Arab and Israeli leaders in early 1977 and encouraged them to return to Geneva.\textsuperscript{162} At least initially, this comprehensive, multilateral approach seemed promising. However, the 1977 Israeli election reversed this optimism when it unseated the moderate Israeli Labor Party. To Carter’s dismay, the conservative Likud Party, led by new Prime Minister Begin, would be in charge.\textsuperscript{163} Begin doubted the value of an international conference and appeared less willing to compromise. Because of this, prospects for a peace agreement diminished significantly.

Publicly, Begin and Sadat supported the Geneva talks, but Sadat soon became disillusioned with the process, believing it had become more show than substance. Not only did he doubt western powers would hold Israel accountable with an agreement, but Egypt faced disputes with Syria, Libya, and Iraq. Searching for an alternative, Sadat secretly made preparations for a trip to Israel. That November, to the shock of NATO countries oblivious to Sadat’s plan, the Egyptian president became the first Arab leader in modern times to visit Israel. The trip surprised Israelis and Arabs alike, killed the Geneva talks, and sparked bilateral negotiations. However, these talks failed to deliver a substantive breakthrough when Sadat stood by Arab demands.\textsuperscript{164} Though the threat of regional war declined, the possibility of peace did as well.

\textsuperscript{161} Shuttle diplomacy refers to a third party acting as an intermediary between two disputing parties who do not interact directly. For Kissinger, this entailed extensive, successive trips between the two sides.
\textsuperscript{164} Telhami, \textit{Power and Leadership in International Bargaining: The Path to the Camp David Accords.}, 8
After the bilateral talks failed in December 1977, President Carter sought a more prominent role in the peace negotiations. However, the sides quickly reached another impasse as Egypt demanded Israeli withdrawal to the 1967 borders, which Israel flatly rejected for the West Bank and Gaza. On July 20, 1978, Carter discussed a summit with his advisors, and within a few weeks, Secretary of State Cyrus Vance invited Sadat and Begin to Camp David, an invitation they quickly accepted. “It is time,” Carter wrote to Begin, “for a renewed effort at the highest level.”

Setting Priorities

In preparing for the summit, Vance noted that “there were scant precedents to guide us.” For the meeting to be a success, the United States would need clear objectives and careful planning for each eventuality.

While Carter’s initial focus was the Arab-Israeli conflict, this evolved into a search for a bilateral agreement between Israel and Egypt. However, the American team did not hope “to achieve a detailed agreement,” but rather to arrive at three ends: Egypt’s recognition of Israel’s right to exist in peace, Israel’s withdrawal from occupied territories gained in the Six-Day War, and an undivided Jerusalem. “I want to insist to the Middle East leaders that we resolve as many problems as possible at Camp David,” Carter said, “not just come out with a declaration of

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169 Cyrus Vance, Hard Choices: Four Critical Years in Managing America’s Foreign Policy (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1983)., 218
principles leading to future negotiations."\(^{170}\) In his own words, he would “use every influence” to make the summit successful.\(^{171}\) The United States also had other concerns: minimizing Soviet influence in the Middle East and securing oil flow to the West. The not-so-distant memory of the Arab oil embargo in 1973 furthered Carter’s desire for an agreement.\(^{172}\)

To fulfill these objectives, the United States needed concessions from both sides. National Security Advisor Zbigniew Brzezinski noted “the absolute minimum” Carter needed from Sadat was the following: acceptance of a long-term Israeli security presence in the West Bank and Gaza, a five-year interim regime for the West Bank and Gaza, no independent Palestinian state, a commitment to peaceful resolution of differences, and flexibility on negotiations for Israeli withdrawal from the Sinai Peninsula.\(^{173}\) From Begin, Carter would need an acceptance of the principles of United Nations Resolution 242, modifications in the “self-rule” proposal for Palestinians and their self-government, a moratorium on settlement building, a commitment to the principle of withdrawal, and an end to the military occupation.\(^{174}\)

“Compromises will be mandatory,” Carter said before leaving for Camp David. “Without them, no progress can be expected.”\(^{175}\)

Begin and Sadat’s personalities would be complicating factors, and Carter studied them vigorously. The State Department and National Security Council collaborated on strategy memos and briefing papers offering psychological analyses of Sadat, Begin, and other members of the two delegations.\(^{176}\) Both regarded as “master manipulators,” Sadat was described as “a man with


\(^{172}\) Shibley Telhami, *Power and leadership in international bargaining*, p. 14


\(^{176}\) William B. Quandt, *Camp David: Peacemaking and Politics* (Brookings Institution Press, 2015), 212
strong political convictions” who “kept his eye on the main objective.” He had “no ideological base,” making him “politically inconsistent” and impulsive.\textsuperscript{177} He “resorts to generalities as a defense against decisions” and is “often imprecise with words,” with little patience for “precision and real negotiating.”\textsuperscript{178} He viewed himself as a spokesman for all Arabs. Begin, by contrast, “has a tendency toward literalism and an obsession with detail.” He uses “legalistic pedantry” and is inclined to “take refuge in procedural dodges.”\textsuperscript{179} Misunderstanding and “feelings of betrayal and recrimination,” advisors warned, would be hard to avoid.\textsuperscript{180}

Carter’s team worked intently to discern Israel and Egypt’s objectives. Israel, Carter’s advisors said, needed to maintain its relationship with the United States, while undercutting U.S.-Egyptian ties.\textsuperscript{181} Indeed, Begin worried he would be caught between Sadat and Carter, who would partner at his expense.\textsuperscript{182} Israel also needed to prevent collective Arab action, which meant “decoupling Egypt from the rest of the Arab world.” To be successful at Camp David, Israel had to be flexible enough to keep the talks going while conceding as little as possible. Begin would benefit from talented advisors, including ministers Moshe Dayan and Ezer Weizman. Because Carter faced domestic pressure to succeed, the Israelis might test his position. Sadat needed to protect his image in the Arab world while securing the Sinai Peninsula. He hoped to strengthen the U.S.-Egypt relationship and supported an active U.S. negotiating role at Camp David. He would try to get Carter to side with Egypt’s position and undercut his relationship with Begin.\textsuperscript{183} Getting the United States to side with him, Vance suggested, may be

\begin{thebibliography}{99}
\bibitem{177} Kenneth W. Stein, \textit{Heroic Diplomacy: Sadat, Kissinger, Carter, Begin and the Quest for Arab-Israeli Peace} (Routledge, 2002), 7
\bibitem{178} William B. Quandt, \textit{Camp David: Peacemaking and Politics}, 218-220
\bibitem{180} William B. Quandt, \textit{Camp David: Peacemaking and Politics}, 216
\bibitem{182} Vance, \textit{Hard Choices: Four Critical Years in Managing America’s Foreign Policy.}, 217
\end{thebibliography}
“more important than the substance” from Sadat’s perspective. Sadat could not afford a failure, Carter’s advisors reasoned, and might be more willing to compromise than Begin.

Brzezinski reminded the president his most important meetings would be with Begin and Sadat individually, where they would display more flexibility. Knowing the unlikelihood of agreement, NSC members advised Carter to lower expectations for the summit. The president knew there was intense pressure to succeed and that his objectives were lofty, but he insisted on these ambitions. He felt a deep sense of urgency to achieve lasting peace and honor the confidence Begin and Sadat placed in him.

Carter gave particular thought to the summit’s location and opted for one isolated from the press and without outside contact. “The last thing we wanted was several hundred reporters roaming around the area,” because this could damage the prospects of compromise, Press Secretary Jody Powell recalled. Camp David fit this mold perfectly. “It’s so beautiful here,” Carter said. “I don’t believe anybody could stay in this place, close to nature, peaceful and isolated from the world, and still carry a grudge.” The American team used other strategies to lighten the atmosphere, inviting the leaders’ wives and recommending casual attire. They made efforts to make Begin and Sadat feel like equals, knowing that “a couple of inches off one of the red carpets” could “be fatal to peace.”

Tripartite Talks

186 Telhami, Power and Leadership in International Bargaining: The Path to the Camp David Accords., 130
187 Jody Powell, The Other Side of the Story (William Morrow & Company, 1984), 60
188 Michael Giorgione, Inside Camp David: The Private World of the Presidential Retreat (Little, Brown, 2017), 132
189 W. Dale Nelson, The President Is at Camp David (Syracuse University Press, 1995), 114
190 Ezer Weizman, The Battle for Peace (Bantam Books, 1981), 342
After delivering remarks before his departure on September 4, President Carter arrived at Camp David to prepare for negotiations.\textsuperscript{191} “We'll do the best we can,” he aptly concluded.\textsuperscript{192} He confided in his team: “My re-election is not nearly as important to me as the resolution of the Middle East issue.”\textsuperscript{193} In Carter’s eyes, the summit would be a defining moment of his presidency.

Days one and two of the summit were primarily explanatory, centered on the summit’s purpose and each side’s proposals. Carter hoped to build chemistry with Sadat and Begin during their first meetings and underscore the common objective of peace. Sadat, for his part, seemed eager to partner with Carter, while Begin showed concern for the summit’s logistics.\textsuperscript{194} After the first night, the American camp was optimistic.

On the second day, the parties talked substance. Sadat read his initial proposal aloud and Begin listened without reacting. As Sadat continued, Carter and Begin quickly realized that Sadat had reiterated old Egyptian stances that had no hope of being accepted.\textsuperscript{195} Carter assessed the move: Sadat “feels Begin is hopeless” and is looking “for a propaganda victory,” hoping that Begin’s successor would accept these positions.\textsuperscript{196} Egypt was using “her newfound international stature” to make a strong impression on other Arab nations.\textsuperscript{197} Anticipating Begin’s response to the proposal, Carter shook his head in disappointment.

Talks on the third day were the most heated they had been. Begin, who had not responded to Sadat’s proposal, began a forceful, point-by-point rebuttal reiterating old Israeli stances and

\textsuperscript{192} “President Carter’s Remarks on Departure from the White House,” September 4, 1978.
\textsuperscript{194} Carter, \textit{White House Diary}, 217
\textsuperscript{195} Nelson, \textit{The President Is at Camp David}, 118
\textsuperscript{196} Carter, \textit{White House Diary}, 220
\textsuperscript{197} Weizman, \textit{The Battle for Peace}, 353
retaliating against Sadat’s demands.\textsuperscript{198} The meeting then devolved into a tense back-and-forth between Sadat and Begin, with Sadat suggesting that Begin wanted land more than peace. “Security yes! Land no!” he retorted.\textsuperscript{199} Then, Sadat misinterpreted one of Begin’s remarks as an accusation of Egypt as a “defeated nation.” “A defeated nation? We were—but after October 1973, we are defeated no longer!”\textsuperscript{200} Even as Carter assured Sadat that Begin was not implying this, he remained upset. “All restraint was gone,” Carter noted. “Their faces were flushed, and the niceties of diplomatic language and protocol were stripped away. They had almost forgotten I was there.”\textsuperscript{201} As the two sides hardened their positions, Carter became discouraged, feeling that Begin had reacted like a “psycho.”\textsuperscript{202} The Egyptians began preparing public statements blaming the summit’s failure on Israeli intransigence.\textsuperscript{203}

**Carter’s Shuttle Diplomacy**

By the fourth day, Carter recognized that trilateral meetings would be fruitless. “The atmosphere between the two of you is not conducive to any agreement,” Carter told them.\textsuperscript{204} He decided to work with each of them individually, presenting proposal drafts, hearing their feedback, redrafting, and then shuttling between the two teams. Further, the American delegation decided to use a proposal of its own to close the gap between the two sides. But when Carter pitched the draft to Begin, he criticized it because it called for an Israel military withdrawal from the West Bank. After discussions dragged for hours into the night, Begin did not change his position: no withdrawal from the West Bank, no evacuation from settlements in the Sinai

\textsuperscript{198} William B. Quandt, *Camp David: Peacemaking and Politics*, 230
\textsuperscript{199} “Camp David Accords: Thirteen Days After Twenty-Five Years” (Jimmy Carter Presidential Library, n.d.), https://www.jimmycarterlibrary.gov/research/thirteen_days_after_twenty_five_years.
\textsuperscript{200} Weizman, *The Battle for Peace*, 356
\textsuperscript{201} Giorgione, *Inside Camp David: The Private World of the Presidential Retreat.*, 134
\textsuperscript{203} Weizman, *The Battle for Peace*, p. 341
\textsuperscript{204} “Camp David Accords: Thirteen Days After Twenty-Five Years.”
Peninsula, and rejection of the U.N. Security Council resolution on the “nonacquisition of territory by force.” Sadat continued to see Begin as “a hopeless case” but pledged to negotiate as long as success was possible. Admittedly, Carter had doubts about Begin’s commitment to a peace agreement. Reminding both leaders of the consequences of failure, he planned a trip to the Gettysburg Civil War battlefield for the seventh day. After this excursion, Begin and Sadat would not see or speak to each other at all until the summit concluded.

By the eighth day, all three delegations felt dejected. In over a week, little substantive progress was achieved, and claustrophobia set in. “It was beginning to feel like a concentration camp,” Began later noted. The American team drafted a proposal titled “Framework for a Settlement in the Sinai,” again met with Begin’s frustration. “If I sign it—may my right hand lose its cunning! I won’t sign!” Even Begin’s advisors indicated an openness to the idea, but Begin refused to compromise. Sensing pressure to cave, Begin asked his advisors: “Are there any among us who are faint of heart?” Carter pressed Begin, explaining that “you must agree to evacuate the Sinai settlements to achieve a peace treaty.” After he convinced Begin that Sadat simply would not move forward unless he agreed, Begin, in a fit of protest, decided to submit the question to the Knesset.

Day nine almost brought the summit to a premature end after Israeli Defense Minister Moshe Dayan shared this news with Sadat. While Carter saw this concession as a breakthrough, Sadat mistakenly believed Begin could not negotiate anything without Knesset approval. He

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205 Weizman, *The Battle for Peace*, 366
206 Carter, *White House Diary*, 226
208 Vance, *Hard Choices: Four Critical Years in Managing America’s Foreign Policy*, 226
209 Weizman, *The Battle for Peace*, 368
210 Weizman.
packed his bags and asked for a helicopter to leave.211 Upon hearing the news, Carter told Vance and Brzezinski not to supply the helicopter and called Sadat to meet. When Carter arrived at Sadat’s cabin, he explained that ending negotiations would have serious consequences, and irreparably damage Egypt’s relationship with the United States. Not only would Sadat be breaking his word, but it also would damage Sadat’s image with his people, the Arab world and the international community. Shaken by Carter’s stern remarks, Sadat agreed to stay. “For peace, I agree.”212

After ten days of negotiations, the talks reached another impasse. Sadat would not allow Israel to leave settlements and airfields in the Sinai Peninsula; Begin would not agree to remove them. Without compromise, there was no way to proceed. Sullen, Carter asked the three teams to offer their “most constructive recommendations” in anticipation of a joint statement on the summit, emphasizing its breakthroughs and downplaying its failure.213

But September 16, the twelfth day of negotiations, brought the breakthrough Carter had awaited. After persuading Sadat to omit the “nonacquisition” principle from the agreement, he pressured Begin to compromise again, warning that the talks’ failure would be “catastrophic” for U.S.-Israeli relations.214 After intense dialogues, Begin made several concessions: not only would Begin agree to submit the decision on the Sinai Peninsula settlements to the Knesset, but he also would recognize “the legitimate rights of the Palestinian people” in the framework agreement.215

Agreement Against All Odds

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211 Carter later said that Sadat’s decision to leave was one of the worst moments of his life.
212 Vance, Hard Choices: Four Critical Years in Managing America’s Foreign Policy, 224
213 “Camp David Accords: Thirteen Days After Twenty-Five Years.”
214 Weizman, The Battle for Peace, 372
215 Weizman.
On the last day, the U.S. delegation redrafted final versions of the agreement, shuttling back and forth between Sadat and Begin and incorporating their comments. Significantly, Carter omitted the paragraph on Jerusalem from the final framework because Begin and Sadat could not reach an agreement on it. As a result, Carter prepared a letter that would be released along with the framework outlining the U.S. position on Jerusalem. However, upon reading the letter, Begin strongly objected to it and threatened to rebuff the agreement. Begin claimed the United States viewed East Jerusalem as occupied territory and non-integral to Israel. Fearing the peace talks could collapse, Carter changed the letter to refer to past statements made by American U.N. ambassadors. After Carter handed Begin signed photographs of the three leaders for his grandchildren—a personal gesture that brought Begin to tears—the Israeli could no longer resist. “I will accept the letter you have drafted on Jerusalem,” he promised. Later that day, Vance asked Carter if he should prepare a message announcing success. “I was almost afraid to ask,” Carter replied, “but yes, I think we have an agreement.”

That Sunday evening, Carter, Sadat, and Begin rode to the White House, where they signed the two accords. In a sign of trouble to come, some Egyptian foreign ministry officials ditched the signing to avoid being photographed. But regardless, an agreement had been reached. Carter acknowledged the summit had been “thirteen intense and discouraging days, with success in prospect only during the final hours.” Carter addressed Congress in a joint session the following day, and ten days later, the Knesset approved the Camp David Accords by a wide

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217 Carter, Keeping Faith: Memoirs of a President., 408
218 Vance, Hard Choices: Four Critical Years in Managing America’s Foreign Policy., 226
220 Nelson, The President Is at Camp David., 124
221 Nelson., 116

The Camp David Accords marked a significant moment in U.S. diplomacy and Arab-Israeli relations. Not only did they end a thirty-year state of war between Egypt and Israel, but they also delivered a psychological breakthrough, showing Arab states that negotiations with Israel were possible. The accords all but guaranteed there would be no major Arab-Israeli conflict, given that Egypt, the strongest Arab nation, would not participate. In addition, the accords provided a process for resolving future issues and brought attention to the Palestinian issue.

While the Camp David summit itself did not produce a peace agreement, it provided two frameworks that served as the basis for an eventual peace treaty. The provisions of the first framework, which centered on peace in the Middle East, brought many substantive changes. The final status of the West Bank and Gaza would be decided in a five-year transitional period. The rights of the Palestinian people would be recognized, and Israeli military government over certain areas would be withdrawn and replaced with elected representatives in the West Bank and Gaza, which would participate in future negotiations. These measures respected Arab hopes and U.N. resolutions and provided a process to protect Israel’s security interests.\footnote{223 Jimmy Carter, Muhammad Anwar el-Sadat, and Menachem Begin, “Camp David Accords: The Framework for Peace in the Middle East” (Jimmy Carter Presidential Library, September 17, 1978), https://www.jimmycarterlibrary.gov/research/framework_for_peace_in_the_middle_east.}

The second framework, “A Framework for the Conclusion of a Peace Treaty between Egypt and Israel,” was largely symbolic, and Sadat and Begin received the 1978 Nobel Peace Prize for this document. In it, Egypt fully pledged to recognize Israel diplomatically at the time of its withdrawal from the Sinai Peninsula. It returned the Sinai Peninsula to Egypt, created
security zones for both sides, and provided two airfields constructed by the United States inside Israel to replace those relinquished.\textsuperscript{224} The peace treaty would be negotiated and signed within three months. These results reflect how the negotiations unfolded: Israel pressured Egypt more than Egypt pressed Israel. Sadat by no means wanted to make significant concessions, but he could not afford the summit’s failure.\textsuperscript{225} Ultimately, this meant the agreement conformed to more Israeli than Egyptian preferences.

Nevertheless, these documents had significant shortcomings. The first framework, when signed, was invalid because it required the Knesset’s ratification of the decision to remove Israel’s Sinai settlements and the approval of Egypt’s parliament. Difficulties arose after the signing ceremony when Israel continued settlement building in areas with future Palestinian self-government despite Carter and Sadat’s understanding that stopping this was a prerequisite to a peace treaty. The American delegation noticed the vague formulation in question on the last day of negotiations but chose to overlook it. “You cannot imagine how difficult, how agonizing, it was to deal with Begin […] We were all so exhausted, yet so thrilled we finally had an agreement.”\textsuperscript{226} Because of this, Begin was able to continue this activity.

In addition, many other issues remained unresolved. Because the parties found no agreement on Jerusalem, discussion on the issue would be postponed for several years, after autonomy in the West Bank had been established. “It would take a lot more than Camp David,” Dayan noted, “to prevent us from preserving Jerusalem as the capital of Israel.”\textsuperscript{227} The argument over “abrogation” versus “withdrawal” of the Israeli military government would wait. Further,

\textsuperscript{225} Weizman, The Battle for Peace, 362
\textsuperscript{227} Moshe Dayan, Breakthrough: A Personal Account of the Egypt-Israel Peace Negotiations (Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 1981).
although Begin accepted the “legitimate rights of the Palestinian people,” this formulation did not imply that Israel accepted the Palestinians’ rights to establish an independent state within Israel’s territory. As such, the Camp David summit left many issues for future discussions.

The Camp David Accords shifted Israel and Egypt’s relations with regional allies and adversaries as well. Though Sadat’s advisors tried to harden his positions to appeal to Arab nations, Sadat favored agreement with Israel due to regional changes that shifted economic and military power.\(^{228}\) As a result, Egypt’s perception within the Arab world grew negative, and the Arab League suspended it in 1979. Not long after, an assassination attempt claimed Sadat’s life in 1981 at a victory parade. For Israel, the summit prompted the disintegration of united Arab opposition to Israel, a welcomed departure from the pre-Camp David status quo. Domestically, the Camp David summit increased President Carter’s approval rating, which jumped 13 percentage points from June 1978 to 51 percent, according to a CBS Poll at the time.\(^{229}\)

However, the United States faced challenges of its own. For the next few months, Vance, Brzezinski, and Secretary of Defense Harold Brown met with Arab leaders—including King Hussein of Jordan and Prince Fahd of Saudi Arabia—to explain the accords and address their frustrations. Retaining the possibility of Jordanian participation in the autonomy talks and maintaining Saudi support for Sadat would be, from an American vantage point, essential to the peace process.\(^{230}\)

Despite the frameworks reached at the summit, a formal peace treaty proved elusive. During the controversy over Israel’s continued settlement building, the Carter Administration

\(^{228}\) Telhami, *Power and Leadership in International Bargaining: The Path to the Camp David Accords.*, 106


\(^{230}\) Vance, *Hard Choices: Four Critical Years in Managing America’s Foreign Policy.*
was unable to win support from Jordan or Saudi Arabia for the peace talks. Because of this, Egypt would not proceed. In addition, Israel had concerns over the timing of its withdrawal, effectively ending the October talks in Washington.\textsuperscript{231} It would not be until March 1979 that compromise would be achieved, thanks to another series of interventions by Carter, who was hopeful but “tempered by realism” by that point.\textsuperscript{232} The sides agreed to a treaty text on March 13 and formally signed it on March 26.\textsuperscript{233}

**Explaining Carter’s Success**

All told, the summit at Camp David exceeded American expectations, providing a remarkable breakthrough in Israeli-Egyptian relations. It broke the psychological barrier between Israel and the Arab world after a full 14 months of diplomatic efforts under Carter, who had pledged two entire weeks of his schedule to one issue.

President Carter’s statesmanship proved particularly decisive. Not only did Carter jeopardize his already low political standing, but he also invested enormous time and energy on the summit. He proved “indefatigable,” even surprising his aides with his negotiating abilities, knowledge of the issues, and ability to deal with small details.\textsuperscript{234} At multiple intervals, both Begin and Sadat threatened to leave or give up, only for Carter to convince them to persevere. He used his stature as U.S. president to bring them together and then to mediate, working tirelessly to solve differences and find solutions. While pretending that the summit would end on the thirteenth day with or without an agreement, Carter told his team they would stay as long as necessary. At the accords’ signing, Begin joked that “The Camp David conference should be

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\textsuperscript{232} “South Lawn Departure Statement for the Middle East,” March 6, 1979
\textsuperscript{234} Weizman, The Battle for Peace, 372
renamed. It was the Jimmy Carter conference.”\textsuperscript{235} The simple power of Carter’s persistence spurred the summit on and prevented the talks from getting derailed.

The American delegation’s preparation, foresight, and flexibility were also vital. Carter benefited from a group of advisors with “a high degree of unanimity,” “freewheeling” discussions, and consistent efficiency.\textsuperscript{236} Vice President Walter Mondale, Vance, and Brzezinski all offered advice to Carter, and the team’s preparations seemed to inspire a certain confidence. They adapted their strategy as needed, acting first as mediators and then as negotiators. Even when Sadat vowed to reject any agreement that omitted an Israeli withdrawal from the West Bank and Gaza, Carter looked past this assertion, knowing that Sadat could not afford a failure. Carter’s advisors also anticipated the dynamics of the Israeli and Egyptian delegations: Begin would start inflexibly and grow accommodating as his advisors pressed him, while Sadat would be more compromising initially but be pressured to take stronger stances by his team. Carter’s awareness of these realities gave his team a competitive edge and allowed him to operate with greater tactical effectiveness.

Carter’s integrity proved critical as well. The president operated with goodwill, refusing to wiretap Israeli and Egyptian quarters and applying his moral beliefs to the negotiations, even when this seemed to disadvantage him. He used personal appeals to establish a rapport with Sadat and Begin, reminding Sadat of their friendship when he threatened to leave and offering autographed pictures for Begin’s grandchildren when the two discussed Jerusalem. Even though Begin believed Carter had “warmer” relations with Sadat, both leaders ratified the agreement because they trusted Carter and his character, not simply because of substantive agreement.

\textsuperscript{235} “Exchange of Remarks between the President, President Sadat, and Prime Minister Begin at the Signing of the Camp David Agreements,” September 17, 1978.
\textsuperscript{236} Weizman, The Battle for Peace, 363
The summit underscores a major temptation in similar negotiating settings: to address differences by omitting them or using deliberately vague phrases that each side can interpret as they will. Though Carter felt this was necessary to keep both sides at the table, it left many issues—namely the future of Jerusalem—unresolved.

A Positive Model for Summity

Ahead of the summit, the risks of failure were high. The likely scenario was not only an end to the peace process, but an enfeebled Carter Administration, a new rift in U.S.-Israeli relations, and discontent with Sadat in the Arab world. It is surprising that President Carter orchestrated the talks given the unlikelihood of success. He gave up two full weeks of his time and the opportunity cost of working toward another objective. But he also knew that peace negotiations, if they would succeed, needed American mediation. Apart from this, he said, there was “no possibility of progress.”

Carter’s work at Camp David holds many insights for policymakers. It shows that summits require resolve and grit, especially in the face of demoralizing moments. “We fought to the limit of our capacity,” one of Begin’s advisors remarked. Reaching agreement requires stamina, patience, and flexibility. It means enduring intense, sometimes unpleasant negotiations, dealing with difficult personalities, and making unwanted concessions. It requires a certain proactivity, similar to Carter’s shuttle diplomacy at Camp David. Successful summits seize political windows, as Carter did with the collapse of the Geneva talks and Sadat’s trip to Jerusalem. Further, the Camp David Accords underscore the importance of setting. If the media had greater access to the negotiations, Begin and Sadat might not have made the same compromises. In addition, seemingly insignificant personal gestures or symbolic acts can shape

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237 Telhami, *Power and Leadership in International Bargaining: The Path to the Camp David Accords.*, 149
238 Dayan, *Breakthrough: A Personal Account of the Egypt-Israel Peace Negotiations.*, 190
negotiations for better or for worse, and personality can further or derail summits. Most of all, the Camp David Accords show that character—not just policy—delivers success.

If anything, the Camp David meeting shows that summits are by no means formulaic. The negotiations occurred over 13 days, in the middle of the woods, with two sides not speaking to the other for days at a time. This boldness served Carter well. Rather than forcing personal chemistry between Sadat and Begin, he fought desperately to keep them apart. He pulled out all the stops, including a personal tour of Gettysburg and signed pictures for grandchildren. His efforts may have been unconventional, but they worked nonetheless. Though peace in the Middle East remains elusive, Carter’s success at Camp David shows that with proper American statecraft, the situation is far from hopeless.
E. Reykjavik Summit in 1986: A Temporary Setback

In October 1986, President Ronald Reagan and Soviet General Secretary Mikhail Gorbachev convened in Reykjavik, Iceland for a secluded two-day summit. Gorbachev, having proposed the “preliminary summit” just weeks earlier, hoped to break the stalemate ahead of the upcoming Washington Summit. When President Reagan arrived in Iceland, however, it became clear that Gorbachev had far more elaborate hopes. Though President Reagan did not expect to hash out an agreement, the two parties spent most of their time trying to do just that and even considered the elimination of all nuclear weapons. Though the summit ended without a deal, it brought together a unique pair of Cold War-era characters in what remains a mystifying episode of the Reagan presidency.

Though historians remember the meeting as a fiasco, a closer look at the summit’s aftermath shows that despite its apparent shortcomings, it placed the United States in an advantageous bargaining position ahead of the 1987 Washington Summit and preceded the Intermediate-Range Nuclear Forces Treaty (INF Treaty). President Reagan left Iceland empty-handed, but his efforts turned the tide on the nuclear issue and place Reykjavik among the most successful U.S.-Soviet summits.

Summit Emerges Amid Flaring Tensions

After the 1985 Geneva Summit—the first Reagan-Gorbachev meeting—the two leaders built personal chemistry. Despite their staunch ideological disagreements and cynicism, both sides believed living under a perpetual nuclear threat was untenable. To this end, they sought to prevent potential conflict.239

These efforts stalled in the months preceding Reykjavik. Gorbachev suggested banning all ballistic missiles, while President Reagan hoped to continue his beloved Strategic Defense Initiative (SDI). For many years, Reagan opposed the existence of nuclear weapons, feeling they cut against his personal and religious beliefs. Shared missile defense, in his belief, would lead to their abolition.  

But the Soviets remained suspicious of SDI, thinking Reagan would only undertake this defensive buildup if he believed in the possibility of nuclear war. As a result, the relationship between the two countries remained strained.  

This intensified in August 1986 with the arrest of Gennadi Zakharov on espionage charges during an FBI sting operation. The KGB promptly retaliated with the arrest of U.S. News correspondent Nicholas Daniloff over trumped-up charges. Against this backdrop, Gorbachev proposed a summit “in the very near future and setting aside all other matters […] let us say in Iceland or in London, maybe for just one day, to engage in a strictly confidential, private, and frank discussion.”  

Reagan immediately agreed.

To everyone, the meeting had come about quite suddenly. “There was a unique sense of uncertainty in the air,” Secretary of State George Shultz later said. “Nothing seemed predictable […] The atmosphere was one of hectic pace, divided opinion on important issues of foreign policy, and challenge to the political preeminence of the president.”

U.S. Expectations for Iceland

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240 Paul Lettow, Ronald Reagan and His Quest to Abolish Nuclear Weapons (Random House, 2005), 118  
244 Gaddis, The United States and the End of the Cold War: Implications, reconsiderations, provocations, p. 128  
Ahead of the summit, Reagan directed his advisors to formulate a strategy. While he hoped for constructive discussions, Reagan in no way expected to sign an agreement in Reykjavik. The meeting—not even supposed to be called a summit—was intended to be a precursor for the Washington summit that he and Gorbachev already discussed, working with the premise that “a nuclear war cannot be won and must never be fought.” Reagan believed he could handle the Soviet leader and would not do anything to surprise the public. However, to be sure, he knew the leaders would be “engaging on the hard questions face-to-face without the script available beforehand.” Meanwhile, many in the press continued to doubt the summit, claiming it had been scheduled rashly.

Reagan’s advisors gave him several pieces of advice for the meeting. Shultz told Reagan they would enter from a position of strength and suggested limiting the size of his entourage when meeting with Gorbachev. “We should take a positive, self-confident, and commanding approach to this meeting,” riding the success of the recent Geneva Summit and the fresh start it offered. Jack F. Matlock Jr., who worked on the National Security Council, told Reagan not to worry and to focus on engaging Gorbachev on a human level. “Gorbachev and the Soviet people as a whole respect you as a real leader” who “does not need to be propped up by a lot of ‘advisors.’” Kissinger, for his part, cautioned Reagan that Gorbachev would be nothing new

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247 Shultz, Turmoil and Triumph: My Years as Secretary of State., 752
248 Shultz, Turmoil and Triumph: My Years as Secretary of State., 754
for Soviet foreign policy. “He was a protégée of Yuri Andropov, then-head of the KGB, and Mikhail Suslov, then-chief party ideologue. Neither of these men was likely to have been a closet dove.”251 The National Security Council sought to predict how Gorbachev would behave at the summit. However, they acknowledged they had “very little knowledge” of Gorbachev’s intent.252 Stephen Sestanovich, senior director for policy development at the NSC, suggested Gorbachev might open the summit with “a bold stroke” or “toy with the question until then end.”253 In other words, predictions for Reykjavik were pure conjecture.

Meanwhile, Gorbachev made preparations of his own. He discussed the benefits of boldness and simplicity with his advisors and ordered the Soviet media to dampen hopes for the summit while covering it extensively.254 To Gorbachev, the Reykjavik Summit was an expedient political move: it had lower risks and costs than a visit to the United States. However, the meeting offered the chance to appeal to Reagan personally and rekindle arms control talks.255

In the midst of these preparations, the House of Representatives held contentious negotiations that almost gave the Soviets significant advantages going into Reykjavik. These measures would have mandated American observance of the SALT II Treaty despite it being unratified and imposed a moratorium on nuclear tests. However, Reagan persuaded Speaker of the House Tip O’Neill to withdraw the proposals from House votes. “It was a great relief to get that problem behind us, at least for a time,” Shultz later remarked.256

Reagan’s team did not want any surprises in Reykjavik, and their preparations mirrored this desire. They choreographed as much as possible, reaching agreement in advance where

251 Henry Kissinger, “Danger at the Summit,” Newsweek, October 13, 1986
253 Sestanovich.
254 Service, The End of the Cold War, 206; Shultz, Turmoil and Triumph: My Years as Secretary of State, 756
255 Garthoff, The Great Transition: American-Soviet relations and the End of the Cold War, 286
256 Shultz, Turmoil and Triumph: My Years as Secretary of State, 757
possible, and tried to leave little room for innovation by the leaders.”257 Reagan and Gorbachev would be free from distractions at the secluded Hofdi House.258 There would be no social events and a strict news blackout would be put on the media. These measures would emphasize progress without “permitting the impression that Reykjavik itself was a summit.”259

The Delegations Arrive

The first meeting began on October 11 as President Reagan greeted Gorbachev that morning. Early that day, the president was informed that Gorbachev was facing backlash from the Soviet army, whose commanders considered assassinating the General Secretary.260 Success in Reykjavik, as such, would be important to Gorbachev. With this in mind, Reagan visited the Soviet leader for an hour, discussing the importance of verification in a new treaty. Thus far, the summit had begun well.

After this, Shultz and Eduard Shevanrdnadze—the Soviet Minister of Foreign Affairs—joined the discussion, and Gorbachev and Reagan offered specific proposals. Gorbachev called for a 50 percent reduction of strategic nuclear weapons stockpiles, including land-based and sea-based missiles, heavy intercontinental ballistic missiles (ICBM), and bombers. He proposed the total elimination of intermediate-range missiles in Europe and guarantees to honor the Anti-Ballistic Missile (ABM) Treaty. The Soviet Union would permit research and testing confined to laboratories on anti-ballistic defense initiatives for outer space.261

Immediately, Reagan and Shultz recognized these suggestions as sweeping. But despite the impression these concessions made on them, Reagan pressed Gorbachev, noting the proposal

257 Shultz, Turmoil and Triumph: My Years as Secretary of State, 751
258 Service, The End of the Cold War, 206
260 Shultz, Turmoil and Triumph: My Years as Secretary of State, 757
was “encouraging, although some points of difference remain.” For one, the Soviets could exploit this proposal to move Asia-based intermediate-range missiles westward to target western Europe. Second, the ABM Treaty needed to be interpreted as broadly as possible. Third, the president reiterated his pledge to share SDI once completed. In his mind, the strategic defense system only would be deployed once both sides eliminated ballistic missiles; as such, the Soviets did not need to fear a first-strike attack. “We can’t guarantee in the future that someone—a madman like Hitler, for example—might not try to build nuclear weapons.” Reagan welcomed further constructive dialogue but wanted to make clear the U.S. position. Reagan’s “pleasant but argumentative reaction” to Gorbachev’s proposals took aback the Soviet, who replied he hoped these were “preliminary remarks.” Though he remained unpersuaded on the SDI issue, he expressed his willingness to revisit the issue.

During the lunch recess, the American team discussed the morning’s session. “Excitement was in the air,” Shultz noted. The delegation felt they reached a breakthrough. Paul Nitze, then special advisor to the President and Secretary of State on arms control, dubbed Gorbachev’s suggestions “the best Soviet proposal we have received in twenty-five years.” Gorbachev’s initiatives showed promise; he “was laying gifts at [their] feet […] concession after concession.”

When the parties reconvened, however, it became clear each of the Soviet proposals had one stipulation: limitations on SDI research to laboratories. Again, Reagan explained why the United States saw this as untenable. Eventually, SDI would allow for the elimination of all

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262 Reagan and Gorbachev.
263 Reagan and Gorbachev.
264 Reagan and Gorbachev.
265 Shultz, Turmoil and Triumph: My Years as Secretary of State, 760; Reagan and Gorbachev, “U.S. Memorandum of Conversation, First Meeting.”
266 Shultz, Turmoil and Triumph: My Years as Secretary of State, 760
267 Shultz.
nuclear ballistic missiles, and the United States would share SDI if it succeeded. But for the time being, the United States would move forward with space research; an agreement on SDI could be negotiated at a later date. Gorbachev did not take kindly to this presentation, disbelieving the Americans would share SDI with him. The United States would not even share oil drilling equipment, automatic machinery, even milk factories, let alone SDI successes. While discussions on SDI discouraged both sides, they found constructive conversation on human rights and regional issues, as both Reagan and Gorbachev agreed to delegate some discussion to their experts’ groups. “We arm because we don’t trust each other, so we must get at the human rights problems and regional disputes that are the sources of distrust,” Reagan said. Though Gorbachev pointed to crime, unemployment, and discrimination in the United States, he seemed willing to discuss these issues—on a bilateral basis—to a greater degree than his predecessors.

At the end of the first day, the American delegation had performed well. Shultz felt it had been a sensational day; Reagan did not make any concessions while securing more concessions from Gorbachev than anyone had anticipated. While many had not taken the ideas of abolishing nuclear weapons and ballistic missiles seriously, Reagan and Gorbachev showed they were serious. Significant progress seemed possible.

Working groups continued negotiations into the early hours of the morning, trying to find agreement on SDI and the issue of Soviet missiles in Asia. By the morning, the groups had reached agreement on START. Each side would deliver big reductions in heavy ballistic missiles and retain 6,000 warheads and 1,600 delivery vehicles. Strategic bombers would be counted as a single bomber, a further Soviet concession. “Damn good!” Shultz said that morning. These

269 Shultz, Turmoil and Triumph: My Years as Secretary of State, 762
270 Shultz, 764
concessions paved the way for further progress toward a START agreement.\textsuperscript{271} By this point, the whole nature of the Reykjavik summit had changed. The parties were not simply preparing for the Washington summit; negotiations had commenced.

Despite what seemed to be great progress, Reagan and Gorbachev expressed disappointment with the working groups’ conclusions. While they had found common ground on START, there had been little movement on the ABM Treaty and SDI. This reaction surprised Shultz. “I thought, here are stunning breakthroughs in Soviet-U.S. arms control negotiations—they both know that—and they are both disappointed!”\textsuperscript{272} He concluded Reagan wanted to maintain pressure on Gorbachev for more concessions. Gorbachev, for his part, claimed that while he made “real concessions,” the United States was “trying to drag things backward.”\textsuperscript{273} The Soviet Union did not need to reduce arms more than the United States; here, Gorbachev felt he was extending an offer he might not extend again.\textsuperscript{274} When would the U.S. make concessions of its own?

The Soviet leader asked that Reagan commit to respect the ABM Treaty for an additional ten years. However, the president remained unconvinced. The United States had no intention of violating the treaty, Reagan said. Further, the treaty would become redundant thanks to SDI, which would make nuclear warfare implausible in the first place. He pledged to the American people that SDI would contribute to the peace effort—a promise he could not neglect. Per Shultz’s recollection, the conversation went “round and round.”\textsuperscript{275} After a brief back and forth, Gorbachev told the president “it was time for the American side to make a move in the Soviet

\textsuperscript{271} Lettow, Ronald Reagan and His Quest to Abolish Nuclear Weapons, 221
\textsuperscript{272} Shultz, Turmoil and Triumph: My Years as Secretary of State, 765
\textsuperscript{274} Reagan and Gorbachev.
\textsuperscript{275} Shultz, Turmoil and Triumph: My Years as Secretary of State, 765
direction on the ABM Treaty and [the Comprehensive Test Ban].” He recalled an American expression: “It takes two to tango.” 276 Would the president dance?

The discussion grew more heated as Reagan said the two nations could be “friendly competitors” despite their mistrust. When he voiced his appreciation that Gorbachev did not speak of world Communism as his predecessors, the Soviet leader claimed Reagan still believed the Soviet Union was an evil empire and tensions flared. Quickly, Shultz redirected the conversation to a joint statement on intermediate-range and strategic missiles. But the damage was done. Gorbachev apparently noted, “We’ve accomplished nothing. Let’s go home.” After this testy exchange, the parties agreed to add one final session. 277

Ahead of the final meeting, Shultz and Shevardnadze tried to find consensus on SDI, but failed to bridge their views. They knew only a change in stance by either leader would bring agreement. Gorbachev offered a new proposal: both nations would have their strategic offensive weapons over five years and all research and testing activities would take place within the ABM Treaty framework for the same time frame. Reagan, however, held firm to SDI; he wanted to ensure the United States could deploy it in the future. 278 They then argued repeatedly about their differences: Reagan could not understand why Gorbachev objected to a defensive system’s deployment, while Gorbachev could not understand Reagan’s obsession with SDI if nuclear weapons would be eliminated. The conversation rose to a crescendo. “We are so close!” Reagan said.

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276 Ronald Reagan and Mikhail Gorbachev, “U.S. Memorandum of Conversation, Third Meeting”
277 Shultz, Turmoil and Triumph: My Years as Secretary of State, 767; Lettow, Ronald Reagan and His Quest to Abolish Nuclear Weapons, 223
In a last effort, Gorbachev pleaded with Reagan to relinquish SDI. He told Reagan he
would become a great president if he signed and that failure would be scolded by future
generations. But Reagan retorted he could not go against his promise to American voters and
would not give up the right to test SDI outside laboratories. He asked Gorbachev to concede on
“this one thing.” “It is a question of one word,” Reagan beseeched Gorbachev. “This should not
be turned down over a word.” But Gorbachev responded that it was not just a question of one
word, but a “question of principle.” 279 He would be ridiculed in Moscow if he allowed the United
States to test weapons in outer space. With resignation, he said he offered everything he could.
“My conscience is clear before the president and his people. What depended on me I have
done.” 280

The meeting adjourned and the leaders promptly departed. Reagan expressed his
disappointment on the way out. “We were so close […] I think you didn’t want to achieve an
agreement anyway. I’m very sorry.” “I wanted an agreement and did everything I could, if not
more,” Gorbachev replied. As they went down the steps, Reagan, in a last-ditch effort, told the
Soviet leader “I still feel we can find a deal.” But Gorbachev had given up hope. “I don’t think
you want a deal. I don’t know what more I could have done.” 281 With despondency, the leaders
parted ways. Reagan went straight to Air Force One without talking to the press. Disappointed
and exhausted, he comforted himself in his journal. “Well, the ball is in his court and I’m
convinced that he’ll come around when he sees how the world is reacting.” 282

A Nonevent?

279 Shultz, Turmoil and Triumph: My Years as Secretary of State, 772
280 Ronald Reagan and Mikhail Gorbachev, “U.S. Memorandum of Conversation, Final Meeting”
281 Shultz, Turmoil and Triumph: My Years as Secretary of State, 773-774
The Reykjavik Summit ended in mutual disappointment and acrimony. Gorbachev told the media that Reagan had shown “extraordinary primitivism, troglodytic profile and intellectual incapacity.” The American delegation, he found, had full of people “without conscience, without morality.” He became more unsure of whether progress could be achieved with the Reagan Administration. “We are dealing with political scum,” he told the Politburo upon returning to the Soviet Union. Reagan, for his part, was “madder than hell” at Gorbachev for his insistence on stopping SDI. The president wrote in his memoirs that “hopes for a nuclear-free world soared briefly, then fell.” He dubbed October 12, 1986 “one of the longest, most disappointing—and ultimately angriest—days” of his presidency. “I’d just never seen Ronald Reagan that way before,” assistant to the president James Kuhn later recalled. Reagan doubted his insistence on retaining SDI had been the right action.

Though the summit ended without an agreement, Reagan and Gorbachev made significant progress toward eliminating nuclear weapons and garnered new knowledge of the concessions the opposing delegations would make. However, clearly Reykjavik ended with disappointment. Gorbachev was wary of letting SDI continue and wanted to impose a restrictive interpretation of the ABM Treaty. Reagan rejected each of these positions. SDI gave him necessary leverage with the Soviets in future negotiations and would be necessary if a bad actor developed nuclear missiles in the future. Reagan never “took sole credit for anything,” they said. “The exception was SDI.”

283 Lou Cannon, President Reagan: The Role of a Lifetime (Hachette UK, 2008), 768-70
284 Service, The End of the Cold War, 225
285 David Hoffman, The Dead Hand: The Untold Story of the Cold War Arms Race and Its Dangerous Legacy (Anchor, 2009), 274
287 Mann, The Rebellion of Ronald Reagan: A History of the End of the Cold War, 45
288 Cannon, President Reagan: The Role of a Lifetime, 274
weapons, Reagan argued. Americans viewed the Soviet stance on the ABM Treaty as unacceptable as well. The inability to reconcile these beliefs meant agreement was unreachable.

U.S. allies showed frustration with the talks. British Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher disbelieved that Reagan considered the elimination of nuclear weapons. In discussion with French President François Mitterand, she exclaimed that everything about Reykjavik had been a disaster. Not only had Reagan offered up Britain’s independent nuclear force, but he had done so without its knowledge or concurrence.289 Thatcher, German Chancellor Helmut Kohl, and Mitterand all felt neglected by Reagan’s actions and voiced concerns about the removal of U.S. missiles from the European continent. Thatcher made it clear to the president he could not take U.S. allies for granted.290

For all its failures, the Reykjavik Summit made some clear headway. For the first time, human rights had been an open and productive part of talks with the Soviets.291 The Soviets had conceded to on-site inspections, a step that had not been included in previous treaties or pacts from the 1960s and 1970s.292 At least in principle, Reagan and Gorbachev agreed on a plan to reduce long-range and intermediate-range nuclear weapons. From the president’s vantage point, the United States worked through significant disagreements on the INF and START without losing sight of its original objectives.

Within the United States, the response varied. While Shultz and the State Department supported Reagan’s approach to the summit, members of the Pentagon and the NSC showed more dissatisfaction.293 The Joint Chiefs of Staff worried that eliminating missiles would demand

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289 Garthoff, The Great Transition: American-Soviet relations and the End of the Cold War, 555
290 Garthoff, The great transition: American-Soviet relations and the end of the Cold War, 252-259
291 Shultz, Turmoil and Triumph: My Years as Secretary of State, 767
293 James Wilson, The Triumph of Improvisation: Gorbachev’s Adaptability, Reagan’s Engagement, and the End of the Cold War (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2014), 114
vast increases in military spending for conventional weapons. "Reykjavik scared everyone," recalled Nelson Ledsky, a staff aide to the NSC. "It was seen as a scary proof that Ronald Reagan might do something terribly reckless." The national security bureaucracy became skeptical of Reagan after the summit, and many became uneasy that a White House messenger, Suzanne Massie—suspected of being a KGB agent—made Reagan "soft" on Communists. 

Nixon and Kissinger criticized Reagan’s diplomatic efforts with Gorbachev vocally. Despite this pushback, Reagan did not let go of his ambition to eliminate ballistic missiles and directed the Pentagon to draft plans for this objective. However, the government did not move toward realistic planning.

In the coming months, American strategists sought to secure additional Soviet concessions to “keep the Russians well behind” but “not so far behind that they become desperate and dangerous.” Many Reagan Administration officials worried the Soviets wanted “breathing space” to enhance its military and economic might, and as such, the United States would need to use both carrots and sticks to encourage gradual reforms and avoid erratic actions.

Reagan also knew he would need to reaffirm his reputation as an anti-Communist while maintaining his relationship with Gorbachev. After Reykjavik, it became clear the Gorbachev-Reagan relationship had worsened, and Gorbachev hoped to appeal to staunch Communists in the Politburo. As Reagan entered negotiations in early 1987 for summits in Washington and

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295 Ronald Powaski, American Presidential Statecraft: During the Cold War and After (Springer, 2017), 198
299 Joshua Shifrinson, Rising Titans, Falling Giants: How Great Powers Exploit Power Shifts (Cornell University Press, 2018), 127-128
Moscow, he worked to achieve these clashing objectives, calling for Soviet reform in his Berlin Wall speech while recognizing the strides Gorbachev had made. By doing so, the president cemented his anti-Communist bona fides while pursuing diplomatic engagement.

Reassessing Reykjavik

At least in the short run, the summit failed by any objective measure. In retrospect, the Reagan Administration surmised that Gorbachev had arranged the talks to end SDI—an end for which he was willing to reduce his nuclear arms. Reagan saw this as untenable, believing the restrictions Gorbachev suggested would inhibit research. The intransigence of both leaders on this issue prevented an agreement. Further, the parties arranged the talks hastily and showed improvisation rather than cautious deliberation. Indeed, Reagan and Gorbachev showed themselves vulnerable to the other’s quixotic ambitions of a nuclear-free world, with each trying to one-up the other again and again. It took stunned advisors from each delegation to keep their leaders from giving in to this mirage. What many saw as Reagan’s naïve approach to nuclear weapons took the American delegation aback.

Reagan’s approach to the summit, however, was not completely ineffective. He did not rely too much on negotiations, making sure to build military strength and diplomacy simultaneously as carrots and sticks. He would “doveryi no proveryai,” a Soviet phrase meaning “trust but verify” he repeated multiple times through his time in Iceland. Moreover, in Reykjavik, he got Gorbachev to show his hand and thus had seen the limits of the Soviet position. The Soviet delegation had made multiple concessions while the United States had made relatively few. In this, Reagan’s approach to summitry created new hope for arms control and

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300 Some, including Reagan staff Jack Matlock Jr., suggested that these restrictions would not have had much of an effect on SDI research. See Jack F. Matlock Jr., *Reagan and Gorbachev: How the Cold War Ended* (New York: Random House, 2004)
gave the United States an advantage for future negotiations. Though the president did not always think in grand strategic terms, he proved a skillful politician who wielded these setbacks to his advantage in the 1987 Washington Summit, where the Intermediate-Range Nuclear Force Treaty (INF Treaty) was signed. Perhaps the world was not ready for Reagan’s boldness in 1986.

Despite the Reykjavik Summit’s failure, it marked a clear inflection point in the Cold War. It helped turn the tide on the nuclear standoff and achieved more than any previous U.S.-Soviet summits. It brought the leaders closer together and showed they could overcome disagreements at future encounters. Upon returning to Washington, Reagan noted the summit was significant because they had gotten as close as they did, an achievement in it of itself. However the president would remember Reykjavik, though, the perception that the summit had been a “near disaster” would harden in the coming years.

Lessons from Reagan’s Approach

In Iceland, Reagan and Gorbachev almost eliminated the nuclear threat—a threat that had menaced the world for nearly 50 years. However close they were to an agreement, the summit ended as a “historic near miss.” As Reagan recalled in his diary, “the price was high but I wouldn’t sell and that’s how the day ended.” An end to the nuclear threat, it seemed, would have to wait.

For students of diplomacy, the Reykjavik Summit illustrates what underpins a summit’s

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301 Indeed, the Soviet position would reemerge in 1987, a boon to proponents of President Reagan’s approach
302 Gaddis, The Cold War: A New History., 217
success or failure. Most glaringly, it shows the fallibility of intelligence and the importance of flexibility. Indeed, the U.S. delegation had “no accurate help from the intelligence community” and the CIA told the president’s team the opposite of what occurred.\textsuperscript{306} Because of this, the American delegation’s readiness to shift the agenda proved vital.

The talks showed that big thinking, while valuable at points, brings new risks. Ambition helps navigate contentious points and can bring benefits that offset concessions that either side makes. In addition, big thinking at summits frees issues from bureaucratic inefficiencies and can propel quick change. However, ambitious agreements also can hamper negotiations by creating pushback and luring leaders into imprudent deals. A successful approach to summits must balance the overtures that lofty negotiations require—which make one liable to domestic criticism—with shows of resolve that undermine this criticism. Reykjavik shows that visionary leaders, in particular, should be wary of this temptation.

The summit also underscores the value of informality. The talks took place in a secluded location, with small teams, low expectations, and under short notice. Contrary to popular belief, the short notice did not hurt the preparations of Reagan’s team.\textsuperscript{307} Further, skirting media spotlight and theatrics allowed Reagan and Gorbachev to focus exclusively on the negotiations without the incessant pressures of public opinion. However, as Reykjavik showed, attempts to moderate expectations by dubbing summits mere “preparatory meetings” and non-summits are ineffective. Informality under the banner of a summit can help moderate expectations without being disingenuous.

Diplomatic engagement, despite the summit’s failure, proved valuable. Reykjavik showed that even as disagreement arises, these differences do not disappear when tabled.

\textsuperscript{306} Shultz, \textit{Turmoil and Triumph: My Years as Secretary of State}, 780.
\textsuperscript{307} Shultz, 752.
Further, even when summits fail, they have a humanizing effect. Diplomacy is the only tactic that offers personal relationships as a basis for cooperation between nations. Policymakers, as such, should enter summits with hope but prudence, knowing that failed summits are not necessarily the final word, and that temporary setbacks can contribute to future gains.
CHAPTER 4: ESTABLISHING BEST PRACTICES

Each of these five case studies—spanning five presidencies and over thirty years—offers insight into how and when summits are best utilized. As such, before examining the three Trump-Kim summits, I will articulate, in plain terms, what underpins a successful summit.

My research shows, above all else, that summits are best understood as a tactic—not a strategy—and are best used in concert with other efforts. Leaders should pursue short-term objectives while keeping long-term strategic goals in mind. Fundamental to this is an understanding that summits do not end tensions or prevent conflict; rather, they can help mitigate them. Leaders should approach these meetings, as Eisenhower did, with healthy hesitation, especially with multilateral summits. They should be preceded by proper preparation and a degree of latitude for leaders to negotiate as the situation demands. Leaders should avoid over-reliance on intelligence briefs, which often are fallible. In addition, they should pursue certain fundamental objectives: de-escalating tensions and reducing the likelihood of conflict, building rapport and credibility with counterparts, and catalyzing future talks. In addition, policymakers should anticipate certain difficulties: generating substantive agreements, lowering expectations, clearing distrust, and knowing the other side’s intentions. They should use their reputations to their advantage to avoid domestic criticism and garner public support for their efforts. When successful, these summits often divert public attention from domestic issues and seize political windows.

Policymakers should bear in mind the role of personality in summits and tailor their approaches accordingly. Almost unavoidably, summits have a humanizing effect on the other party. Forceful personalities such as Khrushchev and Begin can be unpredictable or entrenched in their views and derail summits. Trust and credibility are, my research suggests, particularly
important in these situations. Further, policymakers should pay special attention to the summit’s setting. Informality and isolation from the media can remove unnecessary distractions and help leaders focus on substance.

When ambitious proposals are pursued at summits, the risks of failure appear higher. However, this should not necessarily deter leaders from using summits to resolve major issues. President Carter achieved the most unlikely of peace treaties as a result of his statecraft at Camp David. However, presidents should be aware that the risks of failure rise as proposals become more sweeping. In these situations, it can be tempting to make poor compromises for the sake of agreement. Leaders should thus be aware that at times, a failed summit may be the most favorable outcome.

Following these best practices is no guarantor of success. However, if summits are to succeed, presidents must remember that diplomacy is a human endeavor and carry themselves with a degree of humility. Hubris, an inflated view of personal abilities, and poor preparation can each have disastrous effects on a summit’s outcome. Presidents should carefully consider the stakes of meeting, be open to input from trusted advisors, and avoid underestimating counterparts. In addition, when meeting during summits, leaders should operate with poise, avoiding perceptions of impotence and agitating difficult figures. Grit, stamina, and patience are all vital to a summit’s success. Finally, leaders should keep in mind that summitry is not and should not be formulaic in its approach. By using novel, unconventional methods—rather than seeking to replicate history—presidents can approach each set of leaders and issues with the proper objectives, preparatory work, and expectations.
CHAPTER 5: U.S.-NORTH KOREA SUMMITS

A. Singapore: A First-Order Blunder

In June 2018, President Trump and Kim Jong-un convened in Singapore for a historic summit. It brought a sitting U.S. president in the same room as a DPRK leader for the first time in history. Most surprisingly, the thaw in relations occurred against a backdrop of tensions that had escalated for months. During a working vacation at his New Jersey golf club in August 2017, Trump warned that North Korean threats would “be met with fire, fury, and frankly power, the likes of which the world has never seen before.”308 In the coming months, the president dubbed Kim “Rocket Man” and decried his “suicide mission.”309 Kim spoke in kind, accusing Trump of “mentally deranged behavior” and labeling him a “lunatic” and “loser.”310 From there, Trump’s brinksmanship gave way to diplomacy.

Situating Trump’s North Korea Policy

Under the Obama Administration, the United States adopted a policy of “strategic patience” with North Korea. Further attention, the president reasoned, would only reward provocations. Instead, the United States would respond by holding joint military efforts with South Korea and Japan, placing sanctions, and withholding political envoys.311 These efforts, the

308 “Trump on North Korean threats: “Fire, Fury and power the likes of which the world has never seen,” YouTube, August 9, 2017. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5BSvYDdmBg
administration hoped, would contain the DPRK’s nuclear program and proliferation efforts.\textsuperscript{312} However, “strategic patience” failed to quell North Korea’s nuclear threat and the situation worsened during Obama’s second term. After the 2010 bombardment of Yeonpyeong—an artillery engagement that escalated tensions on the Korean Peninsula—Jim Jong-il died in late 2011 and Kim Jong-un promptly became the state’s leader. Under Kim, the DPRK’s nuclear program advanced even more quickly.\textsuperscript{313}

Americans grew weary of these nuclear proliferation efforts, and support for U.S. defense of South Korea swelled.\textsuperscript{314} Concurrently, North Korea became an important issue in the 2016 Republican Party presidential primaries. In 2015, then-candidate Trump spoke on the subject: “Nobody ever mentions North Korea where you have this maniac sitting there and he actually has nuclear weapons and somebody better start thinking about North Korea.”\textsuperscript{315} He scorned “strategic patience,” advocating a tougher tact while also signaling openness to dialogue.\textsuperscript{316}

After entering office, U.S.-North Korea antipathy rose as the administration discovered that Kim’s nuclear program had advanced even more quickly than expected. As the fear of nuclear conflict grew, President Trump launched a comprehensive, two-month review of his North Korea policy. The administration would launch a “maximum pressure” campaign, using sanctions and other diplomatic options to impede Kim’s nuclear efforts.\textsuperscript{317} For the time being, it

\begin{flushleft}
\textsuperscript{312} Spetalnick and Yukhananov.


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would table regime change, which hawkish advisors such as John Bolton had pushed. Instead, the United States would pursue engagement if the DPRK altered its behavior.

**Fire and Fury**

In July, just two months later, the situation grew more perilous as North Korea successfully tested the Hwasong-14, its first ICBM. The missile had a maximum range of 4,160 miles—a range that encompassed Alaska’s entirety. Kim, mocking the “arrogant Americans,” had ordered the test on July 4 as a “gift package” to the Trump Administration and to hit the United States “on the nose.” In the wake of this move, President Trump rebuked Kim as the administration considered its response. “North Korea best not make any more threats to the United States.” Any attack would be “met with fire, fury, and frankly power, the likes of which the world has never seen before.” He noted that “military solutions are now fully in place, locked and loaded, should North Korea act unwisely” in an August 11 tweet. Kim, infuriated with these comments, responded by announcing the DPRK would possibly conduct a missile test near Guam.

In early September, North Korea received swift international condemnation for testing what appeared to be a hydrogen bomb. The State Department placed North Korea back on the State Sponsors of Terrorism list and further economic sanctions were introduced. In a subsequent address to the U.N. General Assembly, Trump reminded other members that “no

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319 Sang-Hun.
320 “Trump on North Korean threats: “Fire, Fury and power the likes of which the world has never seen,” YouTube, August 9, 2017. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5BsvYDm7Bg
nation on earth has an interest in seeing this band of criminals arm itself with nuclear weapons and missiles,” calling Kim “Rocket Man.” Kim responded by calling Trump a “dotard” who is “hard of hearing,” and calling for further action on his own side. The president, in turn, expressed concern over North Korea at a rally later that month. “Maybe something gets worked out and maybe it doesn’t. Personally, I’m not sure that it will.”

By late November, North Korea had launched the Hwasong-15, capable of hitting any U.S. city according to analysts. While the UN added additional sanctions, Kim celebrated this achievement, saying that North Korea had finally achieved this “great historical cause.” He reiterated this message in his New Year’s address, where he proposed fielding a delegation for the upcoming Winter Olympics in South Korea, where DPRK and ROK athletes would march together in the opening ceremony as a joint women’s ice hockey team. Notably, Vice President Pence, who attended the ceremony, refused to stand for the delegation and later snubbed the North Korean delegate.

In the meantime, Trump and Kim continued to spat over twitter. In January, Trump wrote: “North Korean Leader Kim Jong Un just stated that the ‘Nuclear Button is on his desk at all times.’ Will someone from his depleted and food starved regime please inform him that I too have a Nuclear Button, but it is a much bigger & more powerful one than his, and my Button

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323 Trump, “Remarks by President Trump to the 72nd Session of the United Nations General Assembly.”
Kim replied to these comments by calling Trump a “lunatic” and a “loser.”

The coming weeks showed the beginnings of a U.S.-North Korea thaw. On March 6, Trump noted “possible progress.” “For the first time in many years, a serious effort is being made by all parties concerned. The World is watching and waiting! May be false hope, but the U.S. is ready to go hard in either direction!”

As South Korean officials came to the United States to update the president on the upcoming inter-Korean summit, they delivered an invitation from Kim for a U.S.-DPRK summit—an invitation Trump was ready to accept within an hour.

The public stance from the White House had not changed: the United States would need verifiable steps toward denuclearization for a meeting to occur. However, later that day, a White House official confirmed that President Trump had accepted Kim’s invitation.

**A Summit in the Works**

Later that month, then-CIA director Mike Pompeo traveled to Pyongyang, where he met with Kim and laid the summit’s groundwork. After this trip, the North Korean government presented five conditions for the removal of their new ICBMs: First, the United States and ROK would not place nuclear weapons assets on the Korean Peninsula; second, the two countries would halt the development and operation of these nuclear assets during combined military exercises; third, the United States would not attack the DPRK with conventional or nuclear

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328 Donald Trump (@realDonaldTrump), “North Korean Leader Kim Jong Un just stated that the “Nuclear Button is on his desk at all times.” Twitter Message, January 2, 2018, https://twitter.com/realDonaldTrump/status/948355557022420992
329 Noack, “North Korea Calls Trump a ‘Lunatic’ and a ‘Loser’ in Response to Nuclear Button Tweet.”
weapons; fourth, the 1953 Armistice Agreement would be converted to a peace treaty; and fifth, U.S.-North Korea diplomatic relations would be established.

In May, North Korea agreed to release three detained Americans—a breakthrough that removed an obstacle to negotiations. With Pompeo by their side, Kim Dong-chul, Kim Sang-duk, and Kim Hak-song left North Korea and President Trump and the first lady greeted them at Joint Base Andrews in Maryland. However, these preparations took a turn for the worse when Pence compared North Korea’s situation to that of Libya. “This will only end up like the Libyan model ended if Kim Jong-un doesn’t make a deal,” he reckoned, implying that Kim could be killed like Muammar Gaddafi in 2011. North Korean officials decried this comment, arguing that Gaddafi had ended its nuclear weapons program in 2003 voluntarily and had been assassinated anyway. If this is the American view, perhaps a “nuclear-to-nuclear showdown” would be the path forward.

In the wake of these comments, Trump canceled the summit in late May. “Based on the tremendous anger and open hostility displayed in your most recent statement,” Trump said in a letter to Kim, “I feel it is inappropriate, at this time, to have this long-planned meeting.” He reiterated that U.S. nuclear capabilities “are so massive and powerful that I pray to God they will never have to be used.” However, he left the door open for Kim: “If you change your mind having to do with this most important summit, please do not hesitate to call me or write.”

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North Korea’s vice foreign minister then responded that the DPRK would “sit down face-to-face with the US and resolve issues anytime and in any format,” and claimed that North Korea had demolished a nuclear test site that day.\(^{336}\)

After receiving a “very nice statement” from the DPRK, Trump announced the next day the summit would resume.\(^{337}\) He would send a pre-advance team to Singapore to make preparations for the summit with North Korean officials. In addition, Pompeo would meet with DPRK General Kim Yong-chol in New York City.\(^{338}\)

As the June summit approached, the United States did not convene a Cabinet-level NSC meeting to deliberate the meeting, and reports emerged that the president snubbed typical pre-summit briefings. However, White House aide Kellyanne Conway maintained that the preparation process had been “intense,” and that both the president and Pompeo were receiving “near-daily briefings.” These claims came in contrast with the assertions of Trump, who dismissed these questions. “I don’t think I have to prepare very much […] this isn’t a question of preparation, it’s a question of whether or not people want it to happen, and we’ll know that very quickly.”\(^{339}\) In the days leading up to the summit, he argued that personal chemistry between him and Kim would be crucial, and called Kim to seize this perhaps one-time opportunity for an agreement.\(^{340}\)

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Departing early from the G7 Summit in Quebec, Trump arrived in Singapore, where he met with Singapore’s Prime Minister and joined Pompeo for a visit to the U.S. embassy. He then spoke with South Korean President Moon Kae-in, underscoring his hope for “bold decisions” while Moon replied that South Korea would pray for the president to “create a miraculous result.” Trump would be well-positioned—or at the very least better than his predecessors—to take aim at North Korea’s nuclear activities. After this, Trump spoke with Japan’s Prime Minister Shinzō Abe. Meanwhile, Pompeo revealed in a press briefing that the United States would extend security guarantees to North Korea in exchange for denuclearization, though current sanctions would remain in place until they reached an agreement.

Singapore Talks

The summit began on June 12 at the Capella Hotel in Sentosa, Singapore, where Trump and Kim met for the first time. After shaking hands, they held a private one-on-one meeting only accompanied by interpreters. Kim noted that some would think they were in a fantasy “from a science-fiction movie.” As they adjourned this meeting, Trump described it as “very, very good” to a reporter before they entered an expanded bilateral meeting. Pompeo joined Trump along with Chief of Staff John Kelly and National Security Advisor John Bolton while Kim’s deputies filed in as well. After lunch, Trump and Kim took a short walk together before viewing the

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Conference at G7 Summit in Charlevoix, Quebec, Canada,” June 9, 2018. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rFygaQHX7P4


interior of the presidential state car.

That afternoon, Trump and Kim released and signed an agreement titled “Joint Statement of President Donald J. Trump of the United States of America and Chairman Kim Jong-un of the Democratic People's Republic of Korea at the Singapore Summit,” which the president dubbed “comprehensive” and “very important.” Both sides agreed to establish new relations “in accordance with the desire of the peoples of the two countries for peace and prosperity” and reiterated the importance of efforts to “build a lasting and stable peace regime on the Korean Peninsula.” Reaffirming the recent April 27, 2018 Panmunjom Declaration, North Korea agreed to “work towards the complete denuclearization of the Korean Peninsula.” Additionally, the agreement provided that POW and MIA remains would be recovered and repatriated and called for future negotiations between Pompeo and other North Korean officials.

This joint statement also made mention of Trump’s commitment to North Korean security guarantees—an assurance followed by an abrupt announcement of the end of joint U.S.-ROK military exercises. Using language frequented by the DPRK, Trump called these exercises “provocative” and suggested that the 32,000 U.S. troops defending South Korea could be relocated in the future.

The Immediate Aftermath

After the summit, Trump declared that North Korea no longer posed a nuclear threat, and

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346 Apparently, South Korea and U.S. Forces Korea were not consulted before these decisions
the DPRK’s state media alleged a new era of peace. Many anti-American propaganda efforts—such as posters in Pyongyang castigating the United States and the annual “anti-U.S. imperialism” rally—were removed and canceled.

A few weeks later, President Trump walked back his assertion that the DPRK was no threat and extended Executive Order 13466 by one year, which reaffirmed that North Korea’s nuclear proliferation efforts posed “an unusual and extraordinary threat to the national security and foreign policy of the United States” and declared a national emergency. Following this move, Pompeo traveled to Pyongyang for follow up negotiations with North Korean officials. Despite Pompeo’s assertions that the talks had been productive, the DPRK accused the White House of using “unilateral and gangster-like demand for denuclearization.” Feeling that there had been insufficient headway with the negotiations, Trump canceled Pompeo’s scheduled return trip for August. In the coming months, satellite images suggested the DPRK had developed missile launch sites, fissile material, nuclear weapons, and mobile missile systems. Despite

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this evidence, Trump called these stories “misleading” and “just more fake news.”

Internationally, reactions to the summit varied. Some nations expressed hope at the possibility of reaching a peace deal; others expressed skepticism, pointing to similar efforts in the past that have failed. The outcome pleased China, which suggested that sanctions relief should be on the table following the summit. However, Pompeo maintained that sanction relief would only be on the table after total denuclearization. In particular, Japan and South Korea worried that Trump had sacrificed their security by canceling joint military exercises.

North Korea left pleased with the results. Not only had it received acceptance as a nuclear state but had done so without needing to forgo any warheads, missiles, or launch sites. “Summit day is [Kim’s] payday,” Daniel Russel, a former senior diplomat concluded. “He has landed a seat at the table as a peer.”

Assessing the First Trump-Kim Summit

The Singapore meeting was remarkable in many respects. Not only had the meeting been the first of its kind, but it showed a total about-face by both Trump and Kim, who just months earlier had threatened war. “We’re prepared to start a new history,” Trump said at the summit’s conclusion.

In reality, the “new history” begun in Singapore lacked substance. The communique released at the summit’s conclusion showed vague, abbreviated versions of earlier promises.

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made by Kim and his predecessors. These were not specific enough to be enforced, because the only way to force compliance would be intrusive inspection and monitoring efforts, something the DPRK would not permit.\textsuperscript{357} In the end, the Trump Administration gave up the long-standing American terminology, “complete verifiable irreversible denuclearization” for the bland formulation of “complete denuclearization of the Korean Peninsula,” which enabled Kim to interpret the statement as requiring South Korean “denuclearization” by cutting its military ties with the United States. At least in theory, the joint statement and subsequent comments made by Trump and Kim created a quid pro quo: Kim would stop nuclear and long-range missile tests while Trump would quit joint U.S.-ROK military exercises.\textsuperscript{358} However, for all the fanfare and negotiations leading up to the summit, the communique proved an underwhelming result.

President Trump made several mistakes in the months leading up to the summit. Simply by meeting Kim, Trump offered a concession up front and increased Kim’s legitimacy and prestige overnight. He gave Kim his dream of sitting with an American president as an equal and even complimented him, calling Kim “a talented man who loves his country very much” and “a worthy negotiator.” Clearly, Trump had poorly prepared for the summit. U.S. experts on Korea and allies anticipated their input being ignored by a president disinterested in briefings and forethought. He seemed unfamiliar with the history of past negotiations, though he criticized them repeatedly. Officials said that North Korea had, by contrast, “been preparing for this meeting for 45 years.”\textsuperscript{359} In addition, the summit underscored miscommunication between


\textsuperscript{358} Trump announced the end of joint military exercises with the ROK without consulting South Korea or Japan. The U.S. Senate passed the 2019 military budget in early August 2018, thereby forbidding funding the reduction of active USFK personnel below 22,000.; Bruce Bennett et al., “After the Summit: Prospects for the Korean Peninsula,” \textit{Survival}, July 16, 2018, https://doi.org/10.1080/00396338.2018.1494976.

Trump and his advisors, with Pompeo claiming that disarmament could occur within two years, but Trump arguing that denuclearization “does take a long time to pull off.”

For Kim, the summit succeeded. At least in part, he transformed his public image from that of a tyrannical leader starving his own people and killing his relatives to that of a poised statesman. He eliminated rumors he was nervous to leave the DPRK and even received an invitation to visit the White House. Trump did not intimidate Kim, who said after the summit that the president needed to show he was sincere in his words and placed the onus for future negotiations on the Americans. Moreover, Trump made almost no mention of human rights violations and had weakened the case for economic sanctions against North Korea by insisting Kim no longer posed a nuclear threat. Most of all, Kim had accomplished all this without committing to a timeline for denuclearization.

For all these shortcomings, Trump’s approach to the Singapore summit was not wholly ineffective. For one, the summit reduced tensions between the two sides and lessened the chance of war, a possibility in the preceding months. It created a special bond between Trump and Kim, leaders who had initiated an unprecedented thaw in U.S.-North Korea relations. Notably, the summit led to the onset of the MIA recovery mission—a process long overdue—and offered hope that North Korea would not develop ICBMs capable of hitting American cities if the freeze agreement held. Even as the Administration continued to send mixed messages about the North Korean threat, the Singapore Summit diminished the chance of miscommunication between the two sides.


As a PR stunt, the first Trump-Kim summit was striking beyond belief. As many have noted, the display of American flags side-by-side with North Korean flags for the historic handshake is an unforgettably jarring image, as are scenes of Trump and Kim on their promenade around the Capella Hotel. In this respect, the Singapore Summit is the boldest and most unconventional example of American summitry to date.

President Trump, it should be said, is not wrong to test engagement. He had watched North Korea complete a missile launch every 24 days under the Obama Administration and grow its proliferation efforts with every passing month.\footnote{States News Service. “President Trump is Holding Rogue Regimes Accountable,” 26 Sept. 2018. Gale in Context: Biography, https://link.gale.com/apps/doc/A555770272/BIC?u=duke_perkins&sid=BIC&xid=2e1ec4f6. Accessed 25 Sept. 2019.} A departure from “strategic patience,” it seemed, was not only advisable but necessary. However self-defeating the alternative, though, the Singapore summit offered a poor course correction. Trump did not prepare adequately, nor did he allow sufficient input from his most senior advisors. While he did not necessarily underestimate Kim, the president moved erratically by calling for the DPRK to eliminate its nuclear program while massaging Kim’s ego. This inconsistency, while unpredictable, undermined his resolve. Because of this, he failed to secure real concessions from Kim and showed his vulnerability to abrupt demeanor shifts and chasing quick wins.

Perhaps instinctively, Trump avoided many of his predecessors’ mistakes. Like Eisenhower, he downplayed expectations ahead of the summit. Unlike Kennedy, he used the summit to de-escalate tensions, reduce the likelihood of conflict, and avoided agitation when dealing with Kim. Surprisingly, he showed some restraint and the healthy fear to negotiate that Kennedy lacked, signaling his hope for engagement but showing it was conditional by canceling the summit. Similar to Nixon, President Trump used the summit to distract from domestic
controversy while playing on his negotiator bona fides, moving from threats of “fire and fury” to handshakes and lunch meetings. This created his own “Nixon-to-China moment” and led many conservatives to accept a deal that would have been snubbed from another leader. Further, Trump even sent Pompeo to conduct pre-summit preparations, in a similar fashion that Nixon deputized Kissinger for Polo One and Two. And finally, Trump made an effort to cultivate trust and chemistry with his counterpart—a factor that had been essential for Carter at Camp David.

To the extent that Trump eased U.S.-North Korea tensions through the summit, he also legitimized Kim’s autocratic regime and failed to deliver a viable path for denuclearization. There is little reason to believe that empty promises to “denuclearize the Korean peninsula” are sincere, given that these pledges have been violated in the past. In this, the first Trump-Kim summit showed the president’s vulnerability to imprudent deal-making, even at a cost to American interests.
B. A Historic Near Miss in Hanoi

On February 27, 2019, President Trump and Kim arrived in Hanoi, Vietnam for the second summit between the United States and North Korea. Seeking to build on the communiqué of the Singapore summit, Trump entered the meeting with an optimistic outlook, feeling that Kim had shown good faith since their meeting in June and that a denuclearization agreement could be on the horizon. Kim, most American analysts believed, would not give up his nuclear arsenal, given that this would jeopardize his hold on power. As a result of this wide discrepancy between Trump’s feeling and fact, President Trump entered the Hanoi summit with unrealistic expectations and missed an opportunity to secure an interim freeze agreement with the DPRK. This second Trump-Kim summit would thus be remembered as a setback for the U.S.-North Korea negotiations from which the Trump Administration has yet to recover.

After the first Trump-Kim summit in June 2018, the president declared triumph on North Korea’s nuclear proliferation. “There is no longer a Nuclear Threat from North Korea ... sleep well tonight!” However, events in the subsequent months contradicted this claim. According to multiple news reports, North Korea quietly continued its production of nuclear weapons and fuel “as actively as ever.” A few months later, The New York Times reported that Kim had led a “great deception” against the United States by developing sixteen new missile bases while agreeing to dismantle one. American intelligence officials apparently knew of these developments but had avoided publicizing it for fear of contradicting Trump’s statements and undermiming his diplomatic efforts. In mid-September, White House officials announced that a

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364 Sanger and Broad, “In North Korea, Missile Bases Suggest a Great Deception.”
second summit between Trump and Kim was in the works and that details would be hashed out by Secretary Pompeo and other administration officials during an October visit.\textsuperscript{365}

After a third Korean summit, Kim reiterated his demand for U.S. sanctions relief as a precondition for diplomatic negotiations.\textsuperscript{366} However, the president demanded that the DPRK offer concessions before other issues were considered. In the wake of these disagreements, preparatory meetings between Pompeo and North Korean officials were nixed and subsequently rescheduled.\textsuperscript{367}

In early 2019, plans for the summit became more concrete when Kim’s negotiator, Kim Yong Chol, met with the president at the White House.\textsuperscript{368} At his State of the Union Address on February 5, Trump announced the summit would be held in February in Vietnam, a historic partner to North Korea and country with a good relationship with the United States.\textsuperscript{369}

**Americans Fear and Hope**

Many foreign policy experts expressed reservations about the summit. “What I worry about is the president may want peace most—more than denuclearization,” noted Scott Snyder, senior fellow for Korea studies at the Council on Foreign Relations. He worried that “the


president is going to trade the alliance for the prospect of a Nobel Peace Prize.”  

Others downplayed expectations for the summit, saying a “bad small deal” was the likely outcome.

Meanwhile, the Trump Administration sought to build an understanding of Kim’s objectives for the summit, though it appeared that Trump conducted little preparatory work himself. Some officials believed Kim genuinely hoped to denuclearize in exchange for sanctions relief and other American concessions. Reportedly, Kim told Pompeo when they met that “he is a father and husband and he does not want his children to live their lives carrying nuclear weapons on their back.”  

However, top U.S. intelligence officials disputed the likelihood of North Korea dismantling its nuclear program, a view which National Security Advisor John Bolton agreed with vehemently. All parties seemed to agree Kim wanted to secure a peace treaty replacing the Korean armistice. Trump, for his part, continued to believe that North Korea had shown goodwill and progress, pointing to their pause in testing.  

Despite denial from multiple former White House aides, Trump also claimed that former president Barack Obama had told him during the presidential transition that the United States verged on war with North Korea; Trump had thus saved the United States from this fate.

Ahead of the summit, Stephen Biegun, the U.S. Special Representative for North Korea appointed in late August 2018, publicly reiterated the administration’s position on sanctions:

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they would not be lifted until Kim completed full denuclearization. However, he did suggest that the United States would not call for an exhaustive list of DPRK missile and nuclear programs, an American objective to which Kim objected. Trump also made a number of vague statements regarding North Korean denuclearization, underscoring it as the ultimate American objective but insisting he was in “no rush” as long as “there is no testing.” However, these statements seemed to contradict others underscoring the objective of a comprehensive joint deal.

Trump and Kim Meet Again

Kim arrived in Vietnam after a 60-hour train ride from Pyongyang. Upon his arrival in Hanoi, President Trump met with Vietnamese President and General Secretary Nguyen Phu Trong and they observed the signing of business deals between American companies and Vietnamese airlines. After this, the president met with Vietnamese Prime Minister Nguyen Xuan Phuc before the summit began.

The Hanoi summit began as the Singapore summit did, with a brief one-on-one meeting between Trump and Kim with interpreters only. They then held a social dinner with Pompeo, acting Chief of Staff Mike Mulvaney, North Korea Vice Chairman Kim Yong-chol and Ri Yong-ho, Kim’s Minister of Foreign Affairs. Kim described the occasion as a “courageous political decision” by Trump and the president reciprocated this praise, reminding Kim that the DPRK had a “tremendous future.” Kim added that he had been reflecting on their last meeting. That night, the Trump Administration revealed that a joint agreement would be signed the following

On the summit’s second day, the press asked Kim if he would be open to creating a U.S.
liaison office in Pyongyang. Reluctantly, he welcomed the idea, a response Trump viewed
positively. The press then asked Kim if he would shut down his nuclear program. “If I’m not
willing to do that, I wouldn’t be here right now,” he replied before he and Trump excused the
press for a private meeting.

As negotiations between the two leaders dragged on, White House Press Secretary Sarah
Huckabee Sanders indicated that the ceremonial lunch meeting and signing ceremony had been
canceled.  Reports later surfaced that in this last meeting, Trump passed a note to Kim
demanding for North Korea to give up its entire nuclear program, a demand North Korea had
dismissed on multiple occasions.

As the summit came to an end, President Trump explained in a post-summit press
conference that North Korea had wanted an end to all economic sanctions. “Basically, they
wanted the sanctions lifted in their entirety and we couldn’t do that,” he noted. “We had to walk
away from that.” These assertions came in contrast to comments by Ri Yong-ho, who claimed
that Kim only wanted an end to five of eleven U.N. sanctions, in exchange for the permanent
dismantlement under American observation of Yongbyon, the DPRK’s primary nuclear

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korean-summit-1155134265.

379 Ben Wescott et al., “President Trump Meets with Kim Jong Un,” CNN, February 28, 2019,

380 CNBC, “The Day North Korea Talks Collapsed, Trump Passed Kim a Note Demanding He Turn over His
over-nuclear-weapons.html.

381 Everett Rosenfelt, “Trump-Kim Summit Was Cut Short after North Korea Demanded an End to Sanctions,”
schedule.html.
facility. \(^{382}\) Apparently, the American delegation had become frustrated when the Vice Foreign Minister, Choe Son-hui, did not offer specifics. \(^{383}\) Further, Ri claimed that North Korea had proposed ending all its long-range missile and nuclear testing, but could not get the Americans—who demanded an additional concession—to agree. The North Korean position, Ri made clear, would not change in the future. \(^{384}\) Based on the available evidence, it appears that Trump demanded that Kim surrender his entire weapons program before other concessions would be made available, while Kim demanded that the United States offer sanctions relief upfront. \(^{385}\) This came in contrast to earlier reports, which suggested the United States would be open to a moratorium on fissile material production. Trump defended his actions in Hanoi. “I’d much rather do it right than do it fast,” he explained, noting that his administration could “do something very special.” \(^{386}\)

In the aftermath of the summit, South Korea and Japan supported Trump’s move to leave. A South Korean official noted that the summit had “made more meaningful progress than any other time in the past,” though expressed disappointment they reached no agreement. \(^{387}\) Domestic reactions showed disappointment but support for the move. In a survey, nearly two-


thirds supported a U.S.-North Korea summit, and 44 percent agreed it would likely reduce North Korea’s nuclear threat. However, President Trump received significant criticism for his comments on the death of American student Otto Warmbier, whom North Korea returned comatose to the United States died after 17 months of imprisonment. Trump Administration officials reacted by noting that the Hanoi Summit has helped deepen each side’s understanding of the other and expressed optimism that a third summit would be arranged. Even House Speaker Nancy Pelosi concurred that Trump did the right thing by not signing a joint agreement.

Within days of the summit’s conclusion, satellite images showed North Korea reassembling an ICBM launch site known as Sohae, which they pledged to demolished. Many analysts speculated the site was operational and that construction likely began before or during the Hanoi summit. With these revelations public, the State Department noted that “some level of reassembly” had begun but made no further comment.

Trump’s Poorly Calibrated Approach

The Hanoi Summit’s failure underscores President Trump’s misjudgments. The president misread Kim’s desperation for economic support, thinking this would preoccupy him in Vietnam when Kim showed more concern for his regime’s survival. Because of this miscalculation, the president worsened an already troubled relationship.

Trump, above all else, demonstrated an over-reliance on his personal rapport with Kim. While personal chemistry is an asset in diplomatic negotiations, it is no substitute for proper preparation. By most accounts, the president poorly prepared for the summit and continually dismissed advisors’ opinions in favor of his intuition and personal conclusions. Both sides believed they would be most successful by pressuring the other at the summit; in Kim’s eyes, Trump would be malleable without his advisors, while in Trump’s eyes, he alone could hammer out a nuclear agreement. In this, the president showed far too much trust in top-down diplomacy.

In addition, both sides had too much cynicism to strike a deal. Since the June 2018 summit, meetings between American and North Korean diplomats had been sporadic, and in the lead-up to the second Trump-Kim summit, Biegun did not meet with his counterpart. The lack of regular communication between the sides created an atmosphere of distrust between the delegations, even if Trump and Kim had initiated the summit and had built chemistry. Had the United States engaged in a bottom-up diplomacy strategy—in which working-level officials meet ahead of time to hash out disagreements—the prospects of success at Hanoi would have increased.

In hindsight, it is also clear the president left for Vietnam with unrealistic objectives, and as a result, made unrealistic demands. Full denuclearization was a remote possibility; Kim’s nuclear weapons program is far too vital to his regime and the intelligence community knew this. According to former Director of National Intelligence Dan Coats, North Korea’s leaders “view nuclear weapons as critical to regime survival.” For Kim, denuclearization always required sanctions relief. However, instead of looking for a more realistic objective, President Trump went in with an all-or-nothing stance with demands that Kim viewed as insufferable. Bolton, it seems, also played a significant role in this by advising Trump to increase his demands beyond
the Yongbyon site. By following Bolton’s advice, Trump failed to learn the lessons of past summits. These demands insulted Kim, who had rejected them previously. President Trump could and should have seen from the start how Kim would react to this proposal. Had President Trump sought a more modest, interim agreement—and recognized Bolton’s suggestion as a self-defeating diplomatic move—the summit could have ended differently.

President Trump did, however, follow some of summitry’s best practices in Vietnam. Unlike Kennedy threatening war with Khrushchev, President Trump did not aggravate the situation when the talks devolved and instead signaled his hope for future negotiations. Like Reagan, the president avoided an imprudent deal and unnecessary concessions and even took the chance to deepen his relationship with Kim as Reagan had done with Gorbachev. And of course, the summit showed the boldness and unconventionality of Nixon’s visit to China.

Ultimately, the president’s violation of certain best practices precluded success in Hanoi. Unlike Eisenhower, Trump lost credibility and failed to strike a proper balance between resolve and civility, showing deference and respect for Kim as he had in Singapore. Like Kennedy in Vienna, Trump lacked proper preparation and foresight. He dismissed input from advisors, carried unrealistic expectations and misread Kim’s intentions. He failed to recognize his proclivity for the overambitious—a central blind spot of his—and lacked the humility to delegate negotiations to qualified diplomats. In contrast to Nixon, President Trump did not use his persona effectively; he had nothing to show for his reputation as a successful negotiator. Media coverage worked against him as well, and the spotlight he placed on an agreement instead turned on his failure. Unlike Carter, Trump lacked proactiveness to his counterpart’s demands and instead reiterating nonstarters. He did not show particular flexibility or patience and did not earn Kim’s confidence that he could give up his nuclear arsenal while retaining power. Finally,
Trump fell into the same pitfall as Reagan by being overly ambitious in his objectives. As a result of his amateurish approach, he failed to reduce tensions and leave Vietnam with any substantive changes. Even if the president did the sensible thing by walking out on a bad agreement, he should not have been in that position in the first place.
C. Trump Crosses the DMZ

A few months after the failed Hanoi summit, President Trump met Kim at the DMZ for an unprecedented encounter. In mid-June, the president said he received a “beautiful letter” from Kim and hoped that it would lead to a resumption of negotiations. Kim, in turn, praised Trump’s “excellent” reply and pledged to “seriously contemplate” its content.392 While at the Osaka G20 summit, President Trump tweeted: “If Chairman Kim of North Korea sees this, I would meet him at the Border/DMZ just to shake his hand and say Hello(?)!”393 After a DPRK official requested a formal notice, North Korean Foreign Minister Ri Yong-ho met with Biegun in Panmunjom to discuss the possibility of a summit. The following day, South Korean President Moon Jae-in announced that Kim and Trump would meet while the president toured the border.394 Moon praised Trump for “being so brave,” while Trump downplayed hopes for the summit, noting that it would be very short and “virtually a handshake, but that’s OK. A handshake means a lot.”395

On June 30, Trump became the first U.S. president to cross the North Korean border.396 The event coincided with the 69th anniversary of the onset of U.S. aerial bombardment of North Korea. After Trump visited the DMZ with Moon, Kim greeted him at the DMZ. “It’s good to see you again,” he told Trump. “I never expected to meet you at this place.” Trump underscored his surprise, adding that the press has “no appreciation for what is being done, none.”

393 Donald J. Trump (@realDonaldTrump), “After some very important meetings, including my meeting with President Xi of China, I will be leaving Japan for South Korea (with President Moon).” Twitter Message, June 28, 2019, https://twitter.com/realdonaldtrump/status/1144740178948493314?ref_src=twsrc%5Etfw%7Ctwcamp%5Etweeters%7Ctwterm%5E1144740178948493314&ref_url=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.voanews.com%2Feast-asia-pacific%2Ftrump-kim-dmz-summit-changed-little-experts-say
395 Miller and Lemire.
Together, they crossed the border before stepping back into South Korea.\textsuperscript{397} Trump said he hoped Kim would be able to visit the White House as well, and that they had “liked each other from day one.” After this, the two met with Moon briefly and then Trump and Kim held a one-on-one session in the Freedom House. With the press still present, Trump told Kim the meeting had positive optics.

Rekindling Negotiations

After the summit, the two sides agreed to continue nuclear talks beginning in mid-July.\textsuperscript{398} In a New York Times analysis, David E. Sanger and Michael Crowley suggested that White House officials considered the possibility of pursuing a nuclear freeze, rather than complete denuclearization.\textsuperscript{399} This shift in priority, they argued, would accept North Korea as a nuclear power; Kim would not be required to dismantle its current stockpile. Biegun, however, claimed these comments were conjecture and that he had not prepared a new proposal.\textsuperscript{400} Also, the Hill reported that the summit had not been arranged on such short notice as the president had claimed.\textsuperscript{401}

Domestically, Trump received significant criticism for the DMZ summit. After Trump fired Bolton in mid-September, Bolton—who had been cut out of the meeting and sent to Mongolia—said the president should not focus on distracting summit negotiations, which could


\textsuperscript{400} Crowley and Sanger.

only lead to an agreement North Korea would “never honor.”

Many foreign policy columnists and analysts decried the meeting for its lack of substance, granting of further legitimacy to Kim, and labeling the move a political stunt. Meeting Kim without preconditions, some argued, signaled U.S. acceptance of North Korea as a nuclear power. Others, while conceding that substantive results did not emerge from the summit, praised the meeting as a trust-building exercise that, with due patience, would yield a breakthrough on denuclearization. The South Korean and North Korean governments, for their parts, praised the summit for rekindling negotiations and its symbolic significance.

A Final Word

Though the DMZ summit continued to cultivate trust and rapport between Trump and Kim, the encounter bolstered Kim’s ascendant legitimacy. The Supreme Leader has been normalized as an international statesman while little substantive progress has been achieved. This third summit, yet again, showcased how Trump’s fondness for Kim led him to offer another propaganda win to the regime. But substantive progress, it should be said, was never expected to emerge from the meeting. Thus, at least to some extent, the summit succeeded by delivering a political message—that negotiations were not dead—while dampening unreasonable

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405 Park, “Trump’s DMZ Meeting with Kim Kicked Diplomacy Back into Gear.”
expectations. Further, it reanimated the drama of the Trump-Kim relationship and kept public attention on North Korean denuclearization.
D. Discussion

President Trump’s approach to these summits has not been wholly ineffective. It moved U.S. strategy away from strategic patience and helped diminish tensions and the chance of war, not an unlikely possibility in 2017. To the president’s credit, the two countries are talking rather than threatening nuclear strikes. The Trump-Kim relationship, while problematic, diminishes the likelihood of miscommunication. Trump also showed restraint with the first two summits, temporarily canceling the Singapore meeting when Kim made unacceptable comments, walking away from a weak agreement in Hanoi, and avoiding many imprudent concessions. When the Hanoi summit failed, he did not aggravate tensions and signaled his optimism for future denuclearization talks instead. Notably, he secured the MIA recovery mission through the Singapore talks.

But as a whole, the Trump-Kim summits have failed to further American interests sufficiently. All three meetings—particularly the Hanoi and DMZ summits—have boosted Kim’s stature while normalizing his regime’s atrocities. Trump has praised Kim as a “great leader” with whom he has “fantastic chemistry” and fell “in love,” all while North Korea continues missile tests. Concurrently, the summits have achieved little progress toward denuclearization. The Singapore communique was vague, nondescript and unenforceable. Kim has already violated his pledge to halt nuclear and long-range missile tests even as Trump ceded joint U.S.-ROK military exercises. When preparing for the meetings, Trump ignored his advisors’ recommendations and contradicted Pompeo and others. In Singapore and Hanoi, he misread North Korean intentions and lacked clear objectives, saying that Kim should not rush for denuclearization. When he had clear objectives, they were overly ambitious, leading to the proposal of a nonstarter at the Hanoi Summit. He lacked humility in all three encounters, placing
faith in his negotiating skills and friendship with Kim. In the process, he missed the importance of regular communication between lower-level diplomats.
CONCLUSION

Initially, I hypothesized that President Trump violates summitry’s best practices in a few important respects: his lack of preparation, treatment of Kim, and overconfidence in his personal negotiating abilities. In addition, I suggested that President Trump transcends best practices by stepping outside the political norm, using media coverage to support his diplomatic efforts, and trusting top-down diplomacy to bring policy breakthroughs. While the former hypotheses proved correct, the latter did not. Contrary to my initial assumption, President Trump’s unconventionality, reliance on PR stunts and trust in top-down diplomacy have hurt his efforts more than they have helped. This approach undermines American efforts to resolve the nuclear problem.

Though my data analysis offers considerable insight into these summits, my approach had a variety of limitations. The historically oriented, qualitatively analyzed data is a mere microcosm of U.S. summitry and the insights it provides, while reliable, are by no means infallible. Because of source classification, my analysis of the Trump-Kim summits relied on public records and reporting and will thus require additional research.

To some extent, this thesis does not address exogenous factors that could impact the success of summits. Four out of the five historical case studies cover negotiations between superpowers rather than with small or rogue states, which might require a distinct approach. Given that superpowers have more to lose in negotiations and generally are more concerned with their global perception, rogue nations could benefit more from the legitimacy offered by face-to-face interaction. In addition, sometimes, policymakers cannot control the effectiveness of best practices. As my research shows, effective counterparts are essential to successful negotiations. If Sadat did not want U.S. aid or Gorbachev did not seek internal reform in the Soviet Union,
their respective summits would have been far less successful. Leaders must seize conducive conditions and plan for summits carefully, but there are many factors outside their control.

Another complication to my research is Kim’s unlikelihood of surrendering his nuclear arsenal. The North Korean government, U.S. intelligence estimates, sees its nuclear program—which deters foreign destabilization—as vital to its survival. Kim’s insistence on this point has only grown as Saddam—who never obtained nukes—and Qaddafi—who voluntarily gave them up—each lost their grip of power. In addition, Kim has pushed a nuclear deterrent to the North Korean public and elites, making it politically problematic to switch course. Furthermore, comments by U.S. policymakers—such as Bolton’s likening of the DPRK negotiations to the “Libya model”—show disregard for the significance Kim attributes to his nuclear program and only encourage him to cling to it. In Kim’s eyes, the United States has lost negotiating credibility, given its recent withdrawal from the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA) and other agreements on non-nuclear issues. These actions raise concerns that the United States would not respect a nuclear agreement and that future administrations could withdraw from it. For a deal to be lasting, it would need to become a treaty and have Congressional support, a complication for the negotiations. Given these many hurdles and considerations, it seems untenable for Kim to give up his only real leverage.

These realities have several implications for future Trump-Kim summits. Firstly, they are worthless endeavors if they pursue complete denuclearization. However, Kim might make an interim agreement if presented certain concessions and incentives. Sanctions relief, improved DPRK-ROK relations, and concurrent U.S. and North Korean actions would build trust and give Kim a politically viable path for phased denuclearization. In return, Kim would dismantle some nuclear facilities to the satisfaction of international inspectors. This approach would allow the
Trump Administration to maintain its objective of full denuclearization while deterring North Korea and building toward that objective. This approach, of course, has several limitations. Kim benefits from stalling these negotiations, which buy him time to develop his program. Because sanctions relief has much more value to Kim than a marginal reduction in North Korea’s nuclear abilities has to the United States, there is an asymmetry in benefits with this approach. Though it is far from perfect, there are few viable alternatives. The current U.N. sanctions regime is depreciating in usefulness and other strategies have failed. As unconducive as current conditions are, they could deteriorate in the future, making this a unique window for an agreement.

Diplomacy should be America’s tool of first resort. The Trump Administration needs to make common cause with our allies while pushing engagement with Kim. While my research shows that summits are not formulaic, it suggests that leaders should use summits with hope and restraint, for realistic aims and in conjunction with coercive measures. President Trump should make clear that he hopes for a diplomatic course but is prepared to defend U.S. interests with military force. A credible threat of military action will light a fire under Kim, propel the negotiations, and prevent Kim from stalling.

Though flawed in his approach to these summits, President Trump is right to attempt engagement with Kim. He has come closer to securing North Korea’s denuclearization than his predecessors, and his diplomatic efforts—imperfect as they may be—have reduced the chance of a disastrous North Korean first-strike. As this thesis notes, a potential agreement is both elusive and incomplete. It will require concessions to give Kim a political exit ramp from his current nuclear path and secure compliance with monitoring efforts. Problematically, it forces the United States to live with a nuclear-armed North Korea for the time being. But the alternatives to
engagement—which only embolden or provoke North Korea—are far less preferable. An interim deal is not the yearned outcome, but it is the best one.

My thesis does not pretend to solve U.S.-North Korea relations, nor does it insinuate that historical lessons alone are sufficient for success. Indeed, Trump would have no guarantee of success even if he applied these best practices perfectly. Despite these limitations, learning from America’s diplomatic history is promising in a way that President Trump’s current tactics are not. To be clear, President Trump should play on his strengths. But given that his approach has failed to transcend best practices, he should heed historical lessons while overcoming his blind spots and avoiding unhinged comments. Ultimately, abiding by the political norm will be more successful than defying it.

At least in part, this academic venture was a risk because the jury is still out on the Trump-Kim summits. Unlike future literature, it will have assessed the negotiations as they are—hazardous, complex, and incomplete—rather than with the benefits of hindsight, outcomes, and documentary evidence on which my assessments rely. Hopefully, this undertaking challenged students of history and policy alike, forcing them to grapple with uncertainty and avoid the intellectual pitfall of chalkling strategy up to outcomes. My work on the Trump-Kim summits show that the disciplines of history and public policy, while distinct, should not be pigeonholed. In this, my thesis invites historians to enter the policy arena more fully and further change history, rather than simply remember it.
# APPENDICES

Table 1

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<tr>
<th>Leader(s)</th>
<th>Length of rule, years</th>
<th>Number of summits</th>
<th>Summits per year</th>
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<tr>
<td>Roosevelt/Truman</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>3</td>
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<tr>
<td>Eisenhower</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>0.4</td>
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<td>Kennedy/Johnson</td>
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<td>0.2</td>
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<td>Nixon/Ford</td>
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<td>5</td>
<td>0.6</td>
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<td>Carter</td>
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<td>1</td>
<td>0.25</td>
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<tr>
<td>Reagan/Bush</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>1.25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Clinton</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>2.75</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bush</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>3.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Obama, until 2014</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>4.0</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>72</strong></td>
<td><strong>104</strong></td>
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