

Name	Transcript
George Engels	This isn't the first time the US and DPRK engage in these sort of talks. Should we expect a different result this time, and if so, why?
Tom Plant	We should hope for a different result. But [we should] be very realistic about the prospect, even in the best possible [unclear], about the prospect of one big grand bargain. That's just not going to [unclear]. Given the complexity of the situation in the Korean peninsula, all the different interlocking networks of relationships, a grand bargain is just not going to fix this. And that's not what we should look for as an output of this. What we should be [unclear], I hope so, is a long-term pretty difficult and conscious process of [unclear]... But it's just hard, you've got to accept that a single one of these meeting isn't going to fix these problems, or even reach a deal on any or all of them. This is a process rather than an end
George Engels	What do you mean by interlocking relations?
Tom Plant	It's not just [unclear], it's just very very complicated. The U.S. have alliance relationships with South Korea and Japan, relations with South Korea and Japan are not good – that's [unclear]. China is obviously the preeminent economic actor in the region and it has strong economic relations, but also historical baggage with South Korea and Japan. And in relation to China and North Korea, of course you have the fact that politically they are not particularly friendly – in fact, quite the opposite, but North Korea relies on China for its economic survival. So there's that tentative... All those different complexities somehow being managed by one big [unclear]. I find it very very hard to imagine. Every party will have red lines that don't necessarily overlap with the others. So it's a case of finding small areas where you can make progress now, and then in the future find other areas to make progress and so on to build something productive. But the

	<p>chances of it going wrong are always greater than the chances of it going right. It doesn't mean we shouldn't be hopeful, it just means we should be realistic.</p>
George Engels	<p>As far as you can tell, what is each party hoping to achieve? What would a realistic deal look like?</p>
Tom Plant	<p>I can't answer the question about a realistic deal because I don't think there's a, there's a one-off realistic thing... [unclear] The U.S. wants to ensure the health and security of its allies in the region, South Korea and Japan, who obviously want their security. But they also want economic [unclear]. They want to be able to continue their rise on the world stage. North Koreans would like security, independence, autonomy, the freedom from external interference, or even the threat of external interference. And ultimately, they want to rise economically as well. Kim Jong-un's policy, the [unclear] line of military-economic development is very much part of this picture. So, in the short-term that relates to things like sanctions relief. In the longer-term it relates to things like diplomatic recognition and withdrawal of U.S. forces from the [Korean] peninsula, and so on. But it's really a lot – North Korea stated policy with relation to how it will interpret the American threat, in some readings, would require the U.S. to disarm entirely. Nuclear disarmament across the board. Therefore NK would decide that it's not at risk. I mean, that's an interesting declaratory policy from North Korea. And obviously that's something which could probably be flexible, but it does show how far away the parties are from each other.</p>
George Engels	<p>So this might be the first step to some sort of understanding, but by no means is this indicative of some sort of deal regarding the sexier aspects of all this – denuclearisation in North Korea, the halting of its nuclear weapons programme, that sort of thing – being achieved?</p>
Tom Plant	<p>I find it hard to imagine – I'm always open to the possibility, and I'd loved to be proved wrong on this, but I just don't think</p>

	<p>I'm going to be. I mean, there's this sense of – I think what's worth emphasising as well is less the summit and more the process that leads up to it, if it ends up happening at all. The U.S. hasn't committed to by the end of May publicly, and that's what is hampering -- so there is time if they delay. And if there is a process designed to shape what [unclear] that would be a disaster. [CLARIFICATION] If there was no process between – certainly between the U.S. and South Korea – but ideally between the U.S. and North Korea – it could be mediated by South Koreans but there's no reason why it couldn't happen directly. But what is discussed and even agreed at that summit should be, to a very great extent, have come about beforehand. It's very rare that two leaders would meet at a summit meeting where, yes they might have to meet [unclear], but the broad strokes or even the fine detail might be very well defined beforehand. Summit communique are often written before the summit, almost always written before the summit.</p>
George Engels	<p>So what you're saying is that if both leaders go in there with their own set of demands without having previously laid down the ground rules of what they are going to be discussing, the whole affair might lead devolve into pandemonium?</p>
Tom Plant	<p>Absolutely. That's absolutely bang on... In some – I don't think this would be one – but in some summits before you can have imagined a circumstance where the two staffs on both sides have drafted the deal which is to be signed in. And all the leaders have to do is agree to meet and sign it up together. That's one extreme.</p>
George Engels	<p>That would be the ideal scenario, basically?</p>
Tom Plant	<p>I don't know if it's ideal because I think there is a value to having two leaders get to know each other and sometimes having some friction in that relationship can be quite helpful. So I'm not [unclear] but what I would say is very problematic</p>

	would be if, you know, the meeting – obviously there would need to be an agenda so that needs to be discussed beforehand. But with no sense of precisely where they're going and, as you say, again – small possibility that a deal could be reached. Far more likely that, if there is any kind of agreement that each side has [unclear]
George Engels	From what I've seen there's this initial overture where NK says it's willing to talk about denuclearization and the U.S. saying that it's agreeing to – But at the same time you have both South Korea and the U.S. saying that they will not let up sanctions, and you have NK that's not committing to stopping the production of nuclear weapons. Do you expect any other olive branches to be extended on either side in the leadup to the summit?
Tom Plant	I don't know if "expect" is the right word. I would hope that, if possible, we would – I mean again, it's worth being quite candid about this, it's worth thinking about it in two different ways. What's the concessions for the process toward the summit and what's the concession for the summit itself? So if the NK are, for example, freezing this other nuclear tests [unclear] and all that other stuff about scope and agenda, then that's actually pretty good. If, on the other hand, that's all the [unclear] that's a pretty poor concession because [unclear]. There's that question of reversability which is kind of critical.
George Engels	Why do you think Kim is ready to negotiate now?
Tom Plant	In his NY statement, he nodded to the fact that the state nuclear force was supposed to be complete and they wouldn't need to develop [unclear]. He could think, "I have [cuts out] In that NY statement, he was seeming to signal that he would be not necessarily wedded to the idea of producing newer, different types of systems and technology. He would instead be producing what they already have. Which sort of did leave open this possibility. Because of course that is less

	<p>high profile and not quite as provocative, even if it still problematic. So I'm not surprised that he's in dialogue mode now, it is kind of part of – I hate using this kind of cycle-argument for NK, the strategy of provocation and offering reconciliation and then breaking the deal and starting again – but it does look quite a lot like that. So let's hope that he's not this time, but it probably is.</p>
George Engels	<p>Could the Iranian nuclear deal be something decision-makers might be looking to for inspiration? An arrangement that isn't perfect but that is enough to satisfy both parties and put them on a track to greater engagement?</p>
Tom Plant	<p>If the model of Iran deal was applied to NK, then the U.S. and allies would be pretty happy because the amount of access involved [would be] far beyond anything NK has committed to do. The only thing they wouldn't be happy about is that – because it would obviously entail North Korea giving up – Let me start again. The difference with the Iran deal is that it's not quite the same because Iran never produced nuclear weapons or fissile material, like highly enriched uranium. It did produce low-enriched uranium. So there are differences there. But let's just say that NK somehow rolled back to the state Iran is in now under the curtain of inspections. I mean, to me, that looks like a win. The North has never been willing to offer even anything approaching that level of transparency or verification, nowhere near. It's not even been willing to offer the level of transparency associated with verification in countries that are not under the same scrutiny as Iran, so there's just a whole long way for NK to be able to accept the provisions. It's a totally different landscape.</p>
George Engels	<p>This might be a bit early to say, but do you think Kim Jong-un has outmaneuvered Trump in this matter? Sort of applied, if you want, the art of the deal against Trump?</p>
Tom Plant	<p>Time will tell, I guess, won't it? Time will tell. I mean, on the summit issue, the U.S. has committed to a meeting at a place</p>

and time to be determined. They're quite vague. So, I mean yes, I've been very critical of Trump and his administration's messaging in the back with and toward NK in the past. I don't think that would be fair this time. I think their response has been OK. Over the last year, Kim Jong-un has played his hand well and the U.S. has played its alliance hand, in particular, poorly. But we're in a new year now and this is a new situation – the U.S. sees an opportunity to build up relationships again with its allies [unclear] and if ultimately the summit meeting doesn't happen the U.S. needs to make sure that it's not their fault, if you see what I mean. That it's not the U.S. or the SK, but the NK who have violated conditions.