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Analysis of today
Assessment of tomorrow

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Might North Korea offer a way for Trump to clinch a Nobel?

Donald Trump has been the target of much mockery for his ambition to win the Nobel Peace Prize while his peacemaking has so far stalled in Israel, Iran, and Ukraine.

But might Trump's personal attributes help him towards fresh dialogue with Kim Jong-un, as recently signalled by the North Korean leader's sister?

Kim Yo Jong, Kim's sister who oversees the propaganda operations of the ruling Workers' Party of Korea, said last week that the "personal relationship between our head of state and the present US president is not bad."

This may sound like faint praise, but analysts say this marks a shift from recent anti-US rhetoric. But they also note that she also said any US attempt to persuade her country to give up its nuclear weapons would be "nothing but a mockery".

"The recognition of the irreversible position of [North Korea] as a nuclear weapons state and the hard fact that its capabilities and geopolitical environment have radically changed should be a prerequisite for predicting and thinking about everything in the future," said Kim Yo Jong, according to North Korea's state news agency.

"Not bad" relations

North Korea may no longer constitute part of the "axis of evil" along with Iran and Iraq, as designated by former President George W. Bush in 2002, but the country remains a tough challenge for Washington.

Trump went to North Korea in 2019 during his first term as president, and even though the talks went nowhere and Pyongyang's nuclear arsenal remains intact, Trump still appears convinced he deserves a Nobel.

> Kim Yo Jong once called a South Korean defence minister "a senseless and scum-like guy"

The first summit between Trump and Kim in 2018 produced an agreement that they would "work toward complete denuclearisation of the Korean Peninsula". This goal is still elusive, but the recent remarks by Kim's sister could be seen as trying to tempt Trump into another summit.

She was the subject of a book called "The Sister: North Korea's Kim Yo Jong, the Most Dangerous Woman in the World", written by a South Korean academic, Sung-Yoon Lee. The book details how Kim, seen as a possible successor to her brother, has amassed power and details her charm and cruelty. She once called a South Korean defence minister "a senseless and scum-like guy".

So when she speaks about "not bad" relations between her brother and Trump, it seems worth listening to her.

Unconditionally supporting Russia

Trump himself described North Korea as "a nuclear power" in remarks to reporters earlier this year, although Washington's official line continues to insist the country eliminate its nuclear weapons programme.

North Korea would like to see a lifting of US sanctions, but this would be further complicated by its nurturing of close ties with Moscow.

Just over a year ago in Pyongyang, Russian President Vladimir Putin and Kim Jong-un signed a strategic partnership to deepen their trade and military ties.

The partnership includes an unspecified mutual assistance clause that would apply in the case of "aggression" against one of them.

> Pyongyang has dispatched 13,000 troops and 12 million rounds of shells to Russia since October

These close ties were reaffirmed last month when Kim Jong Un told visiting Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov that he will "unconditionally support" Russia's goals in Ukraine.

It was unclear if North Korean troops will help Russia in fighting beyond its borders after earlier this year they helped Russia to restore control over the Kursk region, which had been occupied by Ukrainian forces.

Pyongyang has dispatched 13,000 troops and 12 million rounds of shells to Russia since October, according to a report by South Korean military intelligence cited by the news agency Yonhap.

North Korea pledged a further deployment of 6,000 military personnel, including 5,000 military construction workers, to aid Russian reconstruction efforts in its Kursk region, Russian Security Council Chair Sergei Shoigu announced in June.

Playing to Trump's desire for a Nobel

Trump would have to exercise extraordinary gymnastics to overcome these close ties between Moscow and Pyongyang, particularly as he weighs further sanctions on Moscow if no progress is made on ending the Ukraine war.

But the US president's desire for public adulation is well known. "Pyongyang may be playing to what it knows is Trump's desire for a Nobel Peace Prize, knowing this could create conditions in which the White House is more inclined than usual to hold another summit with Kim Jong-un," said a recent article in the US National Security Journal.

President Trump deserved a Nobel for "restructuring" global trade - Peter Navarro

Peter Navarro, White House trade advisor, said on 31 July that the president deserved a Nobel for "restructuring" global trade. "I'm thinking that since he's basically taught the world trade economics, he might be up for the Nobel on economics," Navarro told Fox Business Network.

Trump's peacemaking efforts should be more widely recognised, say other loyalists. According to Karoline Leavitt, White House press secretary, who read from prepared notes on 31 July, Trump "has brokered on average about one peace deal or ceasefire per month during his six months in office. It's well past time that President Trump was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize."

Let us leave aside the continued hostilities in Gaza and Ukraine, unrest in the Democratic Republic of Congo, simmering tensions in Iran, India's rejection of Trump's claim to have ended its most recent conflict with Pakistan, and questions about whether there would have been a war between Serbia and Kosovo had the US president not intervened.

Trump will be hoping the esteemed grandees at the Norwegian Nobel Committee are looking elsewhere.