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The Singapore Summit



Commemorative medallion for the 2018 North Korea–United States summit issued by the White House Communications Agency.

FEATURED COMMENTARY

Trump– Kim Summit: The Razzmatazz of Public Diplomacy

By Alan Chong



Trump and Kim shaking hands in the summit room during the DPRK–USA Singapore Summit, courtesy of Shealah Craighead / Wikimedia Commons/ Public Domain

The Trump–Kim Summit of 12 June 2018 in Singapore is not to be remembered solely for its diplomatic significance. Thanks to today's image-making culture and the cult of social media, the summit was equally about making both leaders look heroic.

Commentary

PUBLIC DIPLOMACY is that subset of political communication between governments where they attempt to communicate directly with members of the public in the target state. This may be carried out with or without the permission of the host government, depending on ideology, political circumstances and the dominant forms of media available at any point in time.

During the Cold War between the Soviet Union and the United States, both utilised commercial and state-produced films and technology exhibitions to influence opinion within each other's populations. Today, it may well be social media, cable and satellite television that are offering global platforms for governments to send messages to target populations. But increasingly, the proliferation of social media means that entities other than governments and the traditional media can gain control of the diplomatic narrative. Other than social media publicity by onlookers, the media themselves ran updates on their social media platforms in addition to their print and online coverage.

Making of the 'Heroic' Leader?

The Trump–Kim Summit on 12 June 2018 in Singapore witnessed the features of a new environment for diplomatic summits as processes that are more than just formal meetings for heads of state or government. Summits today have become circuses: just as much as they are venues for serious intergovernmental communication, they are also platforms for image-making, merrymaking, jokes and mass catharsis concerning the gravity of global insecurity. With about 2,500 journalists from all over the world and those based in Singapore here to cover the summit, the publicity is multiplied many fold.

One of the most gripping

and long running stories accompanying the summit was that of its scene-setting. Not unlike a movie set, the arrival planes – both Kim's Air China flight and Air Force One were classic Boeing 747s – and the hotel accommodation, right down to the dining menus, all had to be matched to convey a sense of equality. This was equality of grandeur.

In Kim Jong-Un's case, his title was not that of President of the Democratic People's Republic of Korea (DPRK), yet his very presence had to approximate precisely that. Chairman Kim Jong-Un of the DPRK's State Affairs Commission was the effective leader of his country. In this regard, he was Presi-

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The Trump-Kim Summit

- This was the first meeting between a sitting US President and the Leader of the DPRK
- The Capella Hotel in Sentosa was chosen despite the Shangri-La hosting previous US Presidents, George W. Bush and Barack Obama.
- The summit cost the Singapore government 12million US\$, with half of the expenses going towards security.
- Donald Trump had cancelled the summit in a formal letter less than a month before only to reinstate it one week later.

dent Donald Trump's equal in terms of domestic political power and authority. Trump was directly elected and his office was the Presidency, as specified in the American Constitution. There was little doubt about that.

But the images for the DPRK's propaganda needs on their state-run television back home demanded even more. Chairman Kim had to appear a world statesman at the signing table in the Capella Hotel on Sentosa. This explained the near-riotous jostling of both sides' security agents and approved journalists, for the choicest photographic spots near the table.

This was of course augmented by the early morning spectacle of the placement of US and DPRK flags side by side signifying the commencement of formal diplomatic contact between Washington and Pyongyang. The fact that both Chairman Kim and President Trump strode to the middle of the panel of flags to shake hands spelled out a great deal of state-to-state equality between the two nuclear powers. Such a picture was truly worth a thousand words.

Social Media Summit for All

As events and participants unfolded in parallel to the official channels, the Korean diaspora and American citizens worldwide were not the only ones invested emotionally in the summit. Trump's already legendary outbursts on Twitter and his brusque exit from the G7 summit in Canada the weekend before shaped Twitter-sphere expectations of more drama to come. Some of the hashtags compared Trump's presence to wrestling legend Hulk Hogan, or Heavy Metal icon Def Leppard.

Moreover, Dennis Rodman, Kim Jong-Un's basketball acolyte, called for a journey of trust by both leaders, wore a red cap emblazoned with 'Make America Great Again' and shed tears before CNN coverage and social media. As if on cue, Rodman revealed he was thanked by Trump's White House for supporting Trump's brave gesture towards Pyongyang. All round, #peace, #love, #HistoricalSummit, and #Singapore were announced on Rodman's own tweets.

Even the fact that the State Department committed a faux pas by initially placing Singapore in Malaysia, added to Singapore's unprecedented positive exposure worldwide. Coverage

by prominent media correspondents like Christiane Amanpour of CNN who interviewed Singapore Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong, added to the heightened attention.

During the summit, Singapore became the most searched term on Google. Also heard on a Singapore radio station was the epiphany by the DJ that a new dawn in world peace was breaking in the tiny island-state, accompanied by breath-taking popular songs of hope and harmony.

Foreign tourists, members of the Singaporean public, and food outlet owners were equally regaled by the presence of renowned Trump imitator, Dennis Alan, and Kim imitator, Howard X. Both were spotted on innumerable advertisements touting Singapore's tourist attractions like the Merlion park and promoting vending machine-retailed Chilli Crab meals. At popular Singaporean mall, Bugis Junction, both imitators conducted a light hearted pre-summit on 9 June, ahead of the actual meet.

Substance Does Not Matter?

Finally, Trump's production team must surely take the prize for producing the ultimate 'promotional video', themed 'Two Leaders, One Destiny', contrasting images of nuclear missiles, starvation, destitution and destruction against construction cranes, beaches with resort potential and two leaders walking into the sunrise of history.

In several quick strokes, the images circulated fast and scintillating through the social media sphere trans-

formed the Trump-Kim Summit into a sentimental keepsake for the ordinary citizen everywhere. This was personalised drama for everyone who wanted to remember what it was like that day in history.

Pyongyang was not remiss in this jazzy image-making. The forty-minute video on state TV in DPRK on Kim's journey to and from Singapore projected unprecedented diplomatic brilliance and a celebratory mood. The strategic, military and political substance of the summit appears unimportant.

Still, the razzmatazz would have lost its glitter if not boosted by the "soft power" of comfort food and things that work. Many a journalist expressed appreciation for the food, especially those arriving after a long journey, and for the continuous stream of coffee and tea which energized them when filing their reports.

No longer would 12 June 2018 be about President Trump and Chairman Kim signing a declaration of principles of agreement for bureaucrats to act upon; it was equally a memorable moment for the souvenir hunter and the entertained. It also did not seem to matter that some of this exhilaration may be misplaced. ■

Alan Chong is Associate Professor in the Centre of Multilateralism Studies, S. Rajaratnam School of International Studies (RSIS), Nanyang Technological University (NTU), Singapore. This is part of a series on the Trump-Kim Summit held on 12 June 2018 in Singapore.

RSIS-WTO Parliamentarian Workshop 2018



Participants at the RSIS-WTO Parliamentarian Workshop 2018. Pan Pacific Hotel, with Head of CMS, Professor Ralf Emmers as moderator

The ninth edition of the RSIS-WTO Parliamentarian Workshop was held from 7-9 May at Pan Pacific, Singapore. The workshop, which is part of the Temasek Foundation Series on Trade & Negotiations and jointly organised by the Centre for Multilateralism Studies and the World Trade Organisation, invited parliamentarians from across Asia Pacific region, as well as Central Asia, to build on their knowledge of the multilateral trading system.

The multilateral trading system is seemingly under threat by the rise of economic nationalism, particu-

larly in the previously trade liberal Western economies. The Trump administration's behaviour highlights how some parties have turned their back on economic globalisation, with worrying protectionism a real risk. The WTO maintains that a rules based multilateral approach to world trade is beneficial to all parties and it is worthwhile to continue efforts in strengthening the system to work better in the modern economy. The workshop allowed the parliamentarians to discover how they could positively represent their constituents as efficiently as possible.

Speaker Tan Chuan-Jin, of the Singaporean Parliament, spoke of the importance of the continuation of the multilateral trading system to Singapore and the ASEAN region. The workshop gave the parliamentarians opportunities to hear from industry experts as well as representatives from the WTO such as Said El Hachimi, Director of Information & External Relations Division. Topics such as the future of fisheries subsidies and the Information Technology Agreement (ITA) allowed the participants to be updated on the developments within the WTO and gave them a

chance to ask pertinent questions at the same time.

The workshop allowed the representatives of the invited nations to learn more about how their respective nations could benefit from greater free trade and what they could do reignite momentum into the global trade system. The three day event also included field trips to the PSA Port of Singapore, to discover how Singapore maintains such an efficient transshipment industry, as well as a tour of Singapore's Parliament building. ■



Pakistani Parliamentarian addresses a question to the Panel

RSIS Seminar Series on Multilateralism Studies: : “Population Prospects and Profitability of Kuala Lumpur-Singapore High-Speed Rail”



Presenters Dr Akio Tanahashi (R), Dr Tomoo Kikuchi (C), and Moderator Pradumna Rana (L) at the Keypoint RSIS

On June 21 the Centre for Multilateralism Studies, RSIS, hosted Dr Tomoo Kikuchi, Visiting Senior Fellow at RSIS and Mr Akio Tanahashi, Visiting Scholar at the Lee Kuan Yew School of Public Policy and a Civil Engineer for the Urban Renaissance Agency, Japan.

They presented their findings of their paper “Population Prospects and Profitability of Kuala Lum-

pur-Singapore High-Speed Rail” and gave their opinion as to whether it was a feasible project monetarily.

The High-Speed Rail is a topic of much controversy and most recently, newly returning Malaysian Prime Minister Mahathir has cast serious doubts as to whether Malaysia will commit to the project or not. The study by Dr Kikuchi and Mr Tanahashi,

explored whether, if completed, the route would be able to be a profitable project.

The study looked to compare the prospective line to the JR Tokai Tokyo-Osaka High Speed rail, which is one of the most profitable railway routes in the world. Taking into account the projected population and demographic profile in 2030, the line would not prove as profita-

ble as the JR Tokai route. However if ASEAN achieved greater regional integration that allowed greater movement of people, then the estimated growth of major cities such as KL following the rank-size rule, might allow the KL-SG High-speed Rail to become more profitable. The key indicator to monitor therefore, according to Dr Kikuchi and Mr Tanahashi, if the project is to be a success, is the population density of the cities along the route.

It was noted, however, that whatever the feasibility of the project might be. The politics of the project will be the driving force behind whether the KL-SG HSR will become a reality or not. ■

Consultation on a Rules-Based ASEAN: Process of Forging Legal Instruments

On 16 and 17 May, the “Consultation on a Rules-Based ASEAN: Legal Instruments and their Implementation” was held at the Grand Copthorne Waterfront Hotel in Singapore. It was organized by the Centre for Multilateralism Studies (CMS) of S. Rajaratnam School of International Studies (RSIS), together with USAID, German Cooperation, GIZ, and the ASEAN Secretariat.

The two-day workshop is a follow-on activity to the 2017 Consultation on a Rules-Based ASEAN event. The 2018 Consultation generated short research papers ensued by discussions on how

ASEAN agreements are developed, negotiated, and implemented. The papers and discussions provided greater clarity on how legal instruments might be introduced and implemented within the ASEAN framework.

Several experts, including those from academia, law, and international organisations, came together to discuss how the processes by which legal instruments and agreements are made might be improved. For example, Dr Krajiakr Thiratayakinant, First Secretary at the Permanent Mission of Thailand to ASEAN, spoke about the good practices among ASEAN member states

pertaining to the groundwork necessary for successful treaty conclusion and implementation. Ms Faith De Los Reyes from the ASEAN-US PROGRESS spoke about factors and practices that improve negotiation and effectiveness in other international organisations and how these might apply to

the ASEAN framework.

RSIS Executive Deputy Chairman Ambassador Ong Keng Yong concluded the programme by reiterating the need for a rules-based ASEAN and thanked the organisers for a fruitful series of Consultations. ■



Amb Ong Keng Yong representing RSIS at the Consultation on a Rules-based ASEAN

Upcoming Event: Panel Discussion on “European Security Strategy at a Crossroad: A stronger Europe in a fragile world?” and Launch of Book on “EU Security Strategies”

RSIS and the EU Centre are will be cohosting a panel discussion on “European Security Strategy at a Crossroad: A stronger Europe in a fragile world?” and Launch of a new book on “EU Security Strategies” on **Wednesday 1 August, (3pm—5pm)**. It will be held at **NTU @ One North**, and the session

will be moderated by Professor Ralf Emmers, Head of the Centre for Multilateralism Studies, RSIS.

The panel discussion will consider the future status of the European Union within international security. At a time when US global leadership is seriously in doubt, how should the European Union respond to reassure its partners that it

is still a responsible and valuable ally. Could this lead to closer cooperation with their Asian partners, including ASEAN?

These questions will be answered by a panel of distinguished experts. Dr Spyros Economides, Associate Professor at the London School of Economics, Dr Yeo Lay Hwee, Director of the EU Centre, Singa-

pore, Dr Reuben Wong, Professor at NUS, and Ambassador Barbara Plinkert, Head of the EU Delegation in Singapore, make up the esteemed panel.

Registration details can be found [here](#). ■

SELECTED PUBLICATIONS

Trump-Kim Summit: A Tale of Two Endings

Alan Chong & Ong-Webb
RSIS Commentaries
22 June 2018

Trump-Kim Summit: The Razzmatazz of Public Diplomacy

Alan Chong
RSIS Commentaries
20 June 2018

Trump's Trade War: How should Asia Respond?

Pradumna B. Rana
RSIS Commentaries
19 June 2018

Inching For A Trade War: Worst is Yet to Come

Kaewkamol Pitakdumrongkit
RSIS Commentaries
14 June 2018

Pre-Summit Posturing: The Trump-Kim Manoeuvres

Alan Chong & Ong-Webb
RSIS Commentaries
31 May 2018

Seeing Through The Fog of Trade War

Evan Rogerson
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30 May 2018

Global Shocks and the New Global and Regional Financial Architecture: Asian Perspectives

Pradumna B. Rana,
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Pradumna B. Rana & Xianbai Ji
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Brexit: A Long Way to Go

Aédan Mordecai
RSIS Commentaries
02 April 2018

The **Centre for Multilateralism Studies (CMS)** is a research entity within the S. Rajaratnam School of International Studies at Nanyang Technological University, Singapore. The CMS team conducts cutting-edge research, teaching/training and networking on cooperative multilateralism in the Asia Pacific region. The Centre aims to contribute to international academic and public discourses on regional architecture and order in the Asia Pacific. It aspires to be an international knowledge hub for multilateral cooperation and regional integration.

Multilateral Matters is the quarterly publication of the Centre for Multilateralism Studies (CMS), analysing the most recent developments regarding multilateralism by our team. It covers articles on relevant economic and political issues as well as programmes and latest publications from the research centre. The objective of the newsletter is to promote the research being done by our centre, raising awareness of the many events that we hold on a regular basis.