

FEATURE



*China's President Xi Jinping with North Korean leader Kim Jong-un on May 9 in Beijing. Kim arrived back in Beijing on Tuesday.
Photo: AFP/KCNA VIA KNS*

Kim arrives in Beijing on third China trip in three months

North Korea leader seems to have been bitten by summit bug, while China maintains position as regional power player

By [Andrew Salmon](#)

June 19, 2018 7:10 PM (UTC+8)

<http://www.atimes.com/article/kim-arrives-in-beijing-on-third-china-trip-in-three-months/>

North Korean leader Kim Jong-un arrived in China on Tuesday for a two-day visit, only one week after his summit with US President Donald Trump in Singapore, global news media reported.

It is the latest international leap by Kim, who has shattered his diplomatic isolation in remarkable style.

Last year, he had never traveled outside his country as a head of state nor met a fellow head of state. This year, he has met Chinese President Xi Jinping twice, South Korean President Moon Jae-in twice and Trump once.

Kim has also been invited to meet Russian President Vladimir Putin, while Tokyo has been putting out cautious feelers regarding a summit with Prime Minister Shinzo Abe.

Kim's Tuesday visit is his third China trip in as many months.

While global media attention has focused on Kim's historic meeting with Trump – the first summit between a North Korean leader and a sitting US president – Xi has played a lower-key game, displaying far less bonhomie or ebullience than either Moon or Trump.

However, this does not indicate that relations are cool.

“This is the Chinese way,” said Hwang Jae-ho, a China expert at Seoul's Hankuk University of Foreign Studies, who was also traveling to China for meetings with his Chinese counterparts on the same day. Hwang also noted the low-key manner in which China inserted itself into the Kim-Trump summit – by lending Kim an airliner for his trip to Singapore.

Beijing previously sponsored the now-defunct six-party talks on North Korean denuclearization, which eventually foundered. Kim's repeated trips to meet Xi indicate that China – one of three signatories to the 1953 armistice that ended the Korean War – is keen to remain a central player in the diplomatic game now unfolding.

There are rumors swirling in Seoul and elsewhere that a peace treaty to conclude the 1950-53 Korean War will be signed on July 27 – the anniversary of the signing of the armistice which ended the fighting.

A trip by Kim to meet Xi to brief him on his summit with Trump, and to discuss likely next

moves, had been widely anticipated. China is North Korea's only formal military ally and its most important economic lifeline, but has been irked by North Korea's repeated missile and nuclear tests, which Beijing sees as damaging to its goal of regional stability.

The visit came the same day that Seoul and the Pentagon announced they would halt their annual Freedom Guardian joint military drills, scheduled for August, while Seoul was undertaking two exercises aimed at countering a potential Japanese attack on its easternmost islets.

Both steps are likely to have pleased China, which seeks reduced tensions in the region, and is adamantly opposed to military cooperation, or any kind of alliance, between Seoul and Tokyo.

Unusually, Chinese state media announced Kim's visit in advance, revealing he would stay for two days. Previously China would only confirm Kim had visited after he had left the country.

Kim's regime is customarily highly secretive; some pundits even suggest that Kim fears internal opponents knowing his overseas travel plans, as his absence would provide them with the time and space to plot or execute a coup d'état.

However, there are no signs of any internal unrest. Moreover, Kim, just prior to his summit with Trump, reshuffled his military top brass without facing any apparent opposition.