

OVERVIEW REMARKS

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DR. JOHN PARK: Welcome. My name is John Park. I'm the Director of the Korea Project at the Belfer Center for Science and International Affairs. Today we'll be doing a deep dive on day two of the Second Harvard Korean Security Summit. Yesterday in day one, we looked at the non-traditional security issues playing out on the Korean Peninsula, with a specific focus on North Korea's growth of its cyber capabilities, as well as an examination of the COVID-19 lessons from the Peninsula. Today, in day two, we'll be examining the traditional security issues, with a key focus on North Korea and its young leader, Kim Jong Un.

Our first panel today is the beginning of a new tradition at the Summit. We'll be placing the spotlight on the authors of new books about North Korea and its young leader. Robin Wright will be the moderator, and she'll also be introducing our speakers. Robin is an award-winning journalist, who is also a US Institute of Peace Wilson Center distinguished Fellow. She was a long-time writer for *The New Yorker*, a former diplomatic correspondent for the *Washington Post*, and has reported from over 140 countries.

The American Academy of Diplomacy selected Robin as the Journalist of the Year for Distinguished Reporting and Analysis of International Affairs. She also won the National Press Club Award for Diplomatic Reporting, and has been a recipient of the MacArthur Foundation Grant. Robin has written or edited eight books, including the widely-acclaimed *Rock the Kazbah: Rage and Rebellion Across the Islamic World*. She has also written widely on North Korea.

It's great to have you with us today, Robin. Over to you.

[00:02:34]

ROBIN WRIGHT: Thank you, John. I am honored to be moderating this panel today with three exceptional experts, each with their own extraordinary credentials to discuss the world's most [00:02:45] leader. I have been fascinated with the Kim dynasty since I first traveled to North Korea with Madeleine Albright two decades ago. And more recently went back to cover the Trump-Kim diplomacy.

I really look forward to hearing the stories and analyses of our three very distinguished authors today. Anna Fifield is the former Beijing Bureau Chief for the *Washington Post*. She's covered all aspects of Greater China. She was also the *Post's* Bureau Chief in Tokyo between 2014 and 2018, where she focused on Japan and the Koreas. But periodically reported from the other parts of Asia.

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She particularly concentrated on North Korea, trying to shed light on the lives of ordinary people there, and on how the regime managed to stay in power all these decades. She is the author of the widely-acclaimed *The Great Successor: The Divinely Perfect Destiny of Brilliant Comrade Kim Jong Un*. She started as a journalist from her home country in New Zealand, and then worked for the *Financial Times* for several years. I'm delighted to have her join us.

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Our second author is Dr. Van Jackson, who is an adjunct Senior Fellow at the Asia Pacific Security Program at the Center for a New American Security. He's an American political scientist, and one of the world's foremost experts on Korean security. He's a professor of international relations at Victoria University of Wellington, and the Defense and Strategy Fellow at the Center for Strategic Studies in New Zealand.

He is the author of two Cambridge University Press books on US-North Korea relations. The first is *On the Brink: Trump, Kim, and the Threat of a Nuclear War*. And the second is *Rival Reputations: Coercion and Credibility in US-North Korea Relations*.

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Our third author is the Stanton Senior Fellow in Nuclear Policy Program at the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace. He is an expert on the Asia Pacific Region. And his research interests range from nuclear strategy to arms control, missile defense, nonproliferation, emerging technologies, and US extended deterrents. He is the author of *Kim Jong Un and the Bomb: Survival and Deterrence in North Korea*. He was previously a senior Fellow in Defense Posture Project at the Federation of American Scientists. And he's the editor-at-large of *The Diplomat*.

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So let me begin with just a basic question to each of you. What motivated you to write this book? And what did you learn in the process of writing it? Let me begin with Anna.

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ANNA FIFIELD: Thank you very much, Robin, for the introduction, and [00:05:45] as we say from New Zealand. We have 100 percent of New Zealand's North Korea watching [?] community on this call right now. And it's so nice, as well, to see so many familiar names on the attendee list. So hi everybody.

The genesis of my book basically came from my own kind of fascination with how Kim Jong Un had managed to defy all of the expectations and predictions and remain in power. So I traveled to North Korea a bunch of times between 2005 and 2008, during the Kim Jong Il era. And the whole country, you know, it seemed very broken. And there was clearly no love at all for Kim Jong Il. But I just didn't see how this regime, anachronistic regime, would be able to survive another transition to a third generation Kim.

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So, when I returned in 2014, for the *Washington Post*, I was really shocked to see not just that the country, where Kim Jong Un had managed to hold the country together, but it actually

seemed to be doing relatively well. The economy had improved a little bit. And the facade on the Potemkin [?] Village became a little more shinier, I guess, got a paint job. So I, as a reporter, went out and tried to just report out how Kim Jong Un had managed to do this, what his upbringing had been like, what kind of training he had had for the job, how he, at 27 years old, with no experience or qualifications, had been able to do this extremely difficult thing of holding together a regime that should have collapsed several decades earlier. So that's what I set out to do. At the end of my reporting, you know, there were still many questions that I'm not able to answer yet. But it was my best shot at this time of writing a kind of quasi biography of Kim Jong Un.

ROBIN WRIGHT: So Van, let's turn to you. What motivated you to write the book? And what'd you learn in the process?

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DR. VAN JACKSON: Yeah. So I didn't set out to write this book initially. In 2016, I could see reasons why Korea was kind of this slow-moving disaster waiting to happen. The conditions for crisis were all there. But the policy choices, and the policy conversation around North Korea stuff was very kind of like conservative, and risk-averse. And there wasn't a lot of room to kind of influence the conversation. So I didn't even think there was a book to be had here, initially.

But then Trump came to office. He starts talking about having a hamburger with the guy. And then Kim Jong Un assassinates his older half brother with a chemical weapon, in an airport. And suddenly, you've got maximum pressure, as the new strategic patience. And I knew, from previous research that I did on North Korea, that like there is this pattern that has only recently come to the fore, that we've recently acknowledged, whereby North Korea responds, almost reflexively, to pressure with pressure in kind.

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And so I knew I had alarm bells immediately, that like, okay. Maximum pressure is going to translate into maximum defiance, maximum backlash. And that is precisely what happened. There wouldn't have been a crisis if it wasn't for the mirror imaging going on, of like maximum pressure versus maximum pressure, basically.

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And so that is where I found myself, in like mid-2017. And I was talking to friends who were in the administration, who transitioned from Obama to Trump. A number of them were civil servants, so it was not a political thing, necessarily. But they were communicating, that like the White House, some parts of the NSC, and Pacific Command, were in like a very different head space about North Korea. We were basically ready for war. This is not the North Korea policy of old. Like the old American playbook is out the window.

And that got me doubly nervous, because these are normally, you know, people who are—For one thing, they're Korea experts. But they're also like cool customers, like not alarmists. So looking at all of that, you know, I was doing media stuff, along with Ankit and Anna and a bunch of other people. But the 30-second soundbites wasn't enough to do justice to the dangers that I saw. Thousand-word op-eds weren't enough either. It needed, it deserved a book level treatment. So that was kind of what I did. And then I just had this fortuitous thing with my publisher from my last book. And that's kind of how it came together.

ROBIN WRIGHT: Fascinating. So Ankit, tell us the story of what motivated you to write the book, and what you learned in the process.

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ANKIT PANDA: Sure. Thanks Robin for that introduction, first of all. And John for having me here today. It's great to be on a panel with Anna and Van. My book was the last to be published in the series. And I must say, I benefited, first of all, from the work that Anna and Van did before me.

So a little about my book. So I, in I guess my older career as a journalist, I spent a lot of time during the so-called, you know, Pyongyang testing campaigns that Kim Jong Un oversaw, missile tests, three nuclear tests, spending a lot of time writing, primarily analysis pieces about implications of every single new missile that Kim Jong Un was unveiling, including his ICBM. So I basically ended 2017 with a very significant corpus of sort of research writing, source material from a variety of interviews that I had done with folks in and around the US government, and in Korea. So I was just sitting on top of all of this information.

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And of course, interest in North Korea was sort of at an all-time high. But that, in itself, doesn't make a book. So the reason that, ultimately, I took a lot of what I had and decided that it would make sense to write a new book, was, first of all, a conviction that I had, that North Korea was no longer. I mean, and this was at the end of 2017. And this message really hasn't still sunk in the United States to many ends, that North Korea is a full-fledged new nuclear state. It is not the kind of nonproliferation problem that it was in the 1990s and the 2000s. Under Kim Jong Un, we've really seen North Korea sort of flourish and manifest itself as a nuclear state that does it all.

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They have a diversified set of nuclear capabilities. They have operationalized command and control. They have a sea-based nuclear capability. So I was sitting on all this material. And I essentially wanted to sort of break down, you know, how the nuts and bolts of North Korean nuclear strategy, the North Korean nuclear enterprise have evolved, from the days, you know, when the Yongbyon reactor went critical in 1986, all the way to the present day, and what that means, essentially, for Northeast Asian security. And, fundamentally, the US relationship with North Korea.

You know, after, in 2017, 45 years after China tested its first ICBM, North Korea effectively became the third country on earth with a hostile relationship to the United States, capable of ranging the US homeland with a nuclear weapon. And the implications of that, I think, were first of all, very dangerous, as Van just explained. But ultimately, I think it did require an attempt, at least, to fully synthesize what this would be for international security and security in Northeast Asia.

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ROBIN WRIGHT: Thanks. You know, North Korea is the most isolated country in the world. And I tip my hat to all of you, for managing to penetrate the country, to get a sense of the man. And I want to ask you, before we kind of get to the policy and substance of it, tell us a little bit more about the color, the challenges of writing a book about the dynasty, about the country. Let me begin with Anna. You interviewed Kim's school friends, of family servants, members of the family living in hiding. What did you learn about the man, that might help us in the outside world, understand how to negotiate with him?

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ANNA FIFIELD: Yeah. I think the biggest challenge, for me, was finding people who had actually met him, and who knew him, and could tell us a little bit more about him beyond what we see on the North Korean propaganda and things. And that was extremely difficult, because so few people had met him. And the school friends who had met him in Switzerland knew him for, you know, such a short period of time. There were only four of them, really. And they had a limited number of stories to recycle over and over again.

Obviously, things changed a lot during the Trump administration. And suddenly, many more people had met Kim Jong Un. But they were not willing to talk about it at that time, because there were still hopes that this diplomacy might actually work.

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I think the thing that really struck me in the reporting, and talking to his aunt and uncle who lived with him in Pyongyang, and were his guardians in Switzerland, was just how dysfunctional his childhood was. You know, he lived in this completely sequestered compound in Pyongyang. He did not know that other half-siblings from his father's other relationships. He had no friends apart from his younger sister, Kim Yo-jong and his older brother Kim Jong-chul. He didn't go to school. He had nothing like a normal life.

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And in fact, you know, at his eighth birthday party, when he was announced to real life generals as the future leader of North Korea, and named the “Little General,” then these top military brass did actually salute him, and bowed to him. And his aunt told me it just became impossible for him to live anything like a normal life, from that period on. So I guess the thing that really struck me is just how he had no chance to have anything like a normal upbringing, that he was raised, from the get-go, in this extremely strange, dysfunctional environment, to be the person he is today. I mean his brothers were also raised in this same way. But it was him who rose to the top, and proved to be the one to take over the mantle.

ROBIN WRIGHT: I always wonder, how he managed to do that. But we'll get to that in a minute. Van, maybe you can tell us a little bit about how you overcame the challenges of writing about a country so isolated, and a leadership that is so inaccessible. I remember, on my trip with Madeleine Albright, how the team came back and briefed those of us flying with her, and said, “We'd heard all these stories from other intelligence services, that claimed that Kim's father had these blood transfusions from the blood of virgins.” I mean there are so many myths and stories out there. So I'm interested. How do you get to the point of understanding the reality, rather than the myths of this country, and this leadership? Van.

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DR. VAN JACKSON: Yeah. That's a good question. My challenge was, of the three books here, I think mine is the least Kim Jong Un-y of the three, not that that's a word. But like I was

writing about a crisis, as the crisis was ongoing. So I didn't know how the story ended, but I had a very clear deadline for the book. And it was a question of how I was going to put a bow on it, basically. And it just happened that my deadline was after the summit stuff had already started. So I got lucky in that respect.

But the challenge was like, this intense time crunch of writing and publishing and like parallel processing the publishing process. And then not knowing the future. Like what is Kim Jong Un going to do? Is war going to break out? Is peace going to break out? You can't know that stuff, you know.

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What I could do is kind of proceed deductively. And I leaned on my, like, academic background quite a bit. So I could map out the choices facing Kim Jong Un. I had a sense, or I could give a sense of North Korean history, and North Korean strategic culture, and what made sense, given those things. And then, the crucial through-line, or the framework for the book, was what I called this like “pathways to nuclear war” construct, which I laid out early in the book. And I said, basically, “Look. If war happens, it's going to go down in one of three distinct ways, right:” preventive war, conflict spiral, and then what I called a false positive war.

And there are indicators we can observe to confirm that we're going down one or more of these pathways to war. And then, as events unfolded, I was able to use that, to kind of filter the events, and like organize things. And that was the basis on which I was arguing that we were literally, you know, on the brink, right. Like nothing this dangerous, since the Cuban Missile Crisis, particularly in Asia. It was because we were on all three pathways to war at the same time, and we the US had kind of lost control of the direction of things fairly early in the crisis.

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So I simultaneously decentered Kim Jong Un in favor of focusing on the structures that were shaping and shoving his choices. So that's how I sort of grappled with this, like I was

contextualizing him. And it's kind of ironic. Because in my narrative, Kim also emerges as like the lead agent in all of this. Not so much because that was what I set out to do, but it was just what I was observing. Given tremendous constraints, given what the US was doing, he played a “We can” pretty well.

ROBIN WRIGHT: So Ankit, tell us how you managed to determine what Kim really is like, what abilities he really has, and where the country stands. This is, again, how do you penetrate beyond the barriers it imposes to the outside world?

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ANKIT PANDA: Absolutely. So I think, I think in writing about North Korea, it's important to write about what you know and not write about what you don't know. I mean that sounds like an obvious phrase, but I remember, you know, an early conversation with my publisher, you know, when there was sort of an interest in weaving out a narrative of how North Korea, specifically Kim Jong Un, thinks and conceives about things like nuclear deterrents, nuclear war.

And we can say a few things about that, primarily based on what we see, of course, North Korea disseminate to the world, all of that, of course, coming in a highly curated way. But I wanted to focus on the things that I could really see and observe and understand. And I got lucky here. I mean in North Korea's pursuit for effective deterrents, North Korea, like every nuclear state before it, has tried to convey that its capabilities are credible, and they're real.

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And one of the ways you do that without inviting international experts in to come take a look at your nuclear weapon designs, and missiles, is public messaging, videos, you know, flight-testing missiles, footage, nuclear test analyses, seismic signatures from those nuclear tests. All of these things are things that, you know, we can study and understand and analyze. And, of course, I'm not an expert in sort of all of these areas of analysis.

But, of course, the process of writing the book, and the process of really reporting on North Korea in the lead up to this book project becoming a reality, really involved getting myself very deeply acquainted with sort of the technical underpinnings of what North Korea would have to do to credibly practice deterrence. So that was a significant part of the book and the reporting.

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So it was a mix of sort of open source analysis, deductive reasoning, and sort of looking back at the history of, honestly, how the United States and the Soviet Union went about operationalizing their deterrents, certainly in the early days of the Cold War, and how other nuclear states have gone about solving some of the problems that Kim Jong Un needed to solve himself.

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And then on the flip side, the interviews were certainly a very important part of the analysis that ultimately went into the book, sort of getting a sense of the kind of understanding that the US government has of various North Korean capabilities, and how they sort of factor into American decision-making on things, including but not limited to, you know, a potential decision, now or in the future, to undertake military action against North Korea, the kind of factors that inform any US government analysis of that.

So that, again, I think was a facet that I think, without which the book really wouldn't have been complete. So it was a mix of open and closed sources. And in fact, at the end of the day, I would say about 70 percent-80 percent relying mostly on what is freely and openly available out there.

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ROBIN WRIGHT: Thanks. So Anna, back to you. There were a lot of predictions after Kim took power, because he was so young, that his uncle would end up playing the regent-like role. But as we soon saw, Kim quickly eliminated his uncle and purged the senior—many of the senior officials from his father's regime. So as he consolidated power, and developed his own

leadership group to run the country, what do we learn about Kim Jong Un's playbook? How do you think he developed it? And how does it differ from both his father and his grandfather?

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ANNA FIFIELD: Yeah. I think Kim Jong Un was extremely shrewd in the way he approached the task of taking control of this regime. And then, yeah, he was 27 years old. There was no myth around him like there was around Kim Jong Il. You know, the first Kim, Kim Il Sung had 25 years to prepare the nomenclature and the populace for the second transition, the transition in power to his second generation. But everything was extremely hurried with Kim Jong Un. They had barely two years to prepare the groundwork for him to take over.

So he arrived at the tender age of 27 with no military myth or, you know, very little propaganda around him. And what propaganda there was, was extremely far-fetched, like the idea that he could shoot a gun, and drive a car, when he was a small child, things that ordinary North Koreans did not believe it, even they told me afterwards.

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But what he did, I think he kept that old guard in power, the people who had supported his grandfather and his father before him, the people who knew where the money was, who knew how to run the regime. And he capitalized on that knowledge. So we look at people like the chief of the army, Ri Yong Gil, who was in control there. The propaganda chief, Kim Ki-nam. He kept all of these people. And, of course, his uncle, Jan Song-thaek, who was in charge of relations with China, and was, you know, was in charge of a lot of the money as well, that went into the regime.

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He kept all those people around, and took advantage of their institutional knowledge, for as long as that was useful to him. And then, one by one, he slowly dispatched with all of those people. The army chief disappeared. The propaganda chief disappeared. They may have been executed.

They may have just been relegated to a gulag somewhere. We don't know exactly what happened to them.

But with his uncle, he went a step further, and did have him pulled out of this politburo meeting in this very humiliating public way, which, in itself, was very surprising. That this is not the way that North Korea had traditionally run the mechanics of the regime. So he was really sending a message to the people, the loyalists who keep him in power, that nobody is safe in his regime. That not even his own uncle, and someone who was considered to be a regent, or somebody who was crucial to the running of the regime, was safe under him.

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So he had Jan Song-thaek pulled out, put on this trial, and then publicly executed. And there were reports that a lot of the top officials in the regime were forced to watch that. So, I mean, that sends a pretty powerful message to people to say, you know, "Don't cross with me. Don't cross me. Nobody is safe in my regime."

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And so we've seen that to varying degrees since then, that he has taken advantage of people's knowledge and then got rid of them when they either have served their purpose, or when they have become a challenge to him. So for example, with his brother, Kim Jong-nam, who it's almost four years now that he was executed or assassinated, sorry, in Kuala Lumpur Airport, he is somebody who never stood any—who never expressed much interest in taking over this regime. He was living a life of an exile outside of the system, had been somewhat critical of the system. But still, for Kim Jong Un, that was too close for comfort. I think he viewed him as a potential rival to the leadership, because of the fact that he, you know, could claim to have this mythical Paektu blood flowing through his veins, and therefore could be a rival for the leadership.

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So the way that Kim Jong Un took over, I think was by instilling fear into those loyalists who keep him in power, but also, just quickly, by creating this real kind of oligarchy in North Korea, where the people who did support him, and did—could be trusted at the top, got very rich and corrupt under his leadership by being able to make money on the sides of their jobs. So I think it's this dual use of fear and instilling loyalty and enabling them to become rich, that has enabled him to stay in power this long.

ROBIN WRIGHT: Thanks. Let me turn to Van. You know, fear has been a trademark of the Kim dynasty among all three of them. In what ways is Kim, in both his style, and his approach, different from his father and grandfather?

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DR. VAN JACKSON: Yeah. I mean, so first, I would cosign everything Anna just said. But then, on top of that, you know, Kim Jong Il, his father, was kind of famous for having a divide-and-conquer approach within the regime, institutionally. So like pitting factions against each other, and then serving as the arbiter, or like the equilibrium of balance. And that's how he kind of stayed in power. And Kim Jong Un obviously did the opposite. It was power consolidation, centralization, wide-scale purges, and then installing loyalists like Anna said.

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And all of that seems to like work pretty well. And it was very, like a marked shift from his father. The one big thing he did, that I would just add, is he got rid of the National Defense Commission, which was this all-powerful body, and replaced it with a State Affairs Commission. And substituted out a lot of the old cadre generals for basically civilians, brought into the mandate of this body, to be about more than just national security.

And so all of that was a big deal, and enabled him to consolidate power at home. But then he had these ongoing priorities that he inherited when he came in, right. So part of it was power consolidation. You have to guard your flank internally. Part of it was like, you have to guard

against, you know, the Yankee imperialists, or whatever. Like you see this—You're under siege from without, from external. And so you need nukes. This is obvious, right.

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And you still have this priority for economic growth, or economic development of some kind. It's not clear how you do it. But he was pretty disciplined in pursuing these big macro goals. And then, the thing that was innovative about him, or like unique about him, I guess, is that he was able to improvise a lot within whatever context or constraints that he got. The crisis was like the ultimate hard test of that. Which, like, Trump is going to throw random stuff at you. How well are you going to adapt and improvise toward the goals that you clearly have in mind, right?

So improvisation was this unique thing that he brought. And then, he was kind of like a sultanistic leader, more cultive personality, personality-like than his father. Much more similar to his grandfather in that respect, I guess. But it was this notion of using charismatic authoritarianism, right. So you're showing emotion in public. You're being, you know, JFK to his father's Richard Nixon kind of thing. And that goes a long way, right.

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So, if you're going to centralize leadership in yourself, it's probably a good thing to have charismatic authority. And so all of that is very different from at least his father, and in some ways, his grandfather, too.

ROBIN WRIGHT: It's quite a comparison, JFK to Richard Nixon. [laughter] Ankit, let me turn to you. The excesses of Kim's life are so unbelievable. As Anna pointed out in her book, you know, getting his first real car at the age of seven, being willing to murder his own brother, not just haul him off and execute him, but have him assassinated with a toxic nerve agent, it's just kind of—it's unimaginable what things he—the way he has lived, and the things he's done. Does Kim, given his background, his privilege, does he understand the realities of the world at all?

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ANKIT PANDA: Do any of us understand the realities of the world? I think, you know, to— Yeah. I mean let me take a step back there, though. I mean I think Kim Jong Un, one of the things that we can, I think, determine, based on the way he's conducted himself internally—and here, again, I cosign what my co-panelists said. One of the things I think is, he is a fairly risk-acceptant leader. He understands that, in order for North Korea to accomplish the objectives that he has sought out to accomplish, primarily externally of late, I think, the internal economic agenda in North Korea is not going according to Kim's plans. But he's accepted a very high degree of risk, in many ways.

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I mean the events of 2017, I think, point to that, rather directly, sort of the direct brinkmanship with which Kim Jong Un was approaching a very new kind of US President. I think a lot of evidence of early 2017 suggested the North Koreans didn't quite realize that former President Donald Trump was not necessarily cast in the mold of his predecessors, that he may not behave as the North Koreans had come to expect American Presidents to behave over the years.

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And, on a similar note, I mean the North Koreans have a very well developed model of political leadership in the United States. They have expectations about how US Presidents will carry themselves, about how the US military will behave under normal conditions in Northeast Asia. So under all of these constraints, as the United States entered a very unpredictable new era, I think Kim maintained a very high degree of acceptance of risk.

And that, I think, has sort of persisted. And I think, you know, just to go back to the point that Van made about Kim's similarities lying more with his grandfather than his father, I think we did see that again in the conduct of foreign affairs. I mean under Kim Il Sung, North Korea was adept at playing off its two primary patrons against each other in many ways, China and the

Soviet Union. Kim has sort of taken that playbook, and is now in the process of, I think, adapting it to contemporary so-called great power competition.

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But also, you know, like we saw in the 1960s, with the so-called Second Korean War, the incidents that took place around the Peninsula, including the seizure of the Pueblo, the shoot-down of American reconnaissance aircraft. We saw a lot of threats of that nature from Kim Jong Un, back in 2017, suggesting that North Korea was perhaps pushing the boundaries of what nuclear weapons might actually do.

The kinds of capabilities, of course, that Kim Jong Un enjoys are something that his father nor his grandfather ever enjoyed. Neither Kim Il Sung nor Kim Jong Il ever truly presided over a nuclear state. They presided over an aspirational nuclear state. So Kim Jong Un I think has taken this and adapted it to a rapidly changing world.

ROBIN WRIGHT: So let me just follow with you, Ankit. When you talk about him being a risk-taker, is he more of a risk-taker than his grandfather was, when you think about the Korean War?

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ANKIT PANDA: I don't – Well, no. I don't think—I don't think in that precise way. I mean he's not a risk—he's not a risk lover. The point that I was making is that he's more risk-acceptant than, in many ways, that his father might have been. I think that that manifests in the choices that we've seen North Korea make under Kim Jong Un's tenure so far.

ROBIN WRIGHT: So Anna, based on what we observed of Kim during the season of summits with President Trump, what did we get wrong about Kim Jong Un?

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ANNA FIFIELD: I mean throughout that whole period, I think we saw—I mean to follow up on what Van and Ankit were saying, that personality-wise, he was/is a very bold or dangerous kind of leader, in a similar vein to what his grandfather was, and very, very different to what his father was like. In 17 years of power, Kim Jong Il spoke in public only once. And that was to utter a military slogan at an event.

So to see Kim Jong Un out and about, in this diplomatic setting, and meeting leaders of world powers, he showed himself to be very savvy, and very adept in that situation, in a way that I think was very surprising, because he had had no experience of this kind of thing. So, I mean, one of the things that struck me was the way he was able to be self-deprecating, and kind of turn on the charm, almost, with these leaders. So joking with Donald Trump about, “This looks like something out of a science fiction movie,” when he hosted the head of the IOC, Thomas Bach, in Pyongyang during that year, he even joked about his wife, and said—They went to a soccer game together, and said, “It may not look like it, but I used to love playing sports when I was young, too.”

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So he showed himself to be able—I mean these are obviously small anecdotes. But he showed himself to be able to play this kind of diplomatic game, and to disarm people, and to be able to be treated in a way like a—You know, he wanted to be seen as an international statesman, as somebody of a similar level to Xi Jinping, Vladimir Putin, Donald Trump. And so, by playing along, by cajoling there, as well as being involved in this diplomatic process, he did look like an international statesman, that was something that was extremely useful for him back home in North Korea, to be able to splash this kind of propaganda across the state media, and to say to North Koreans, “Look how internationally respected I am in the world. You know, you're so lucky to have me.”

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And I really think that cannot be underplayed, the fact that he was able to do something that his grandfather and his father both wanted to do, but were not able to do. And that was to be able to meet the American President, and to stand almost shoulder-to-shoulder with him. So that was a very important thing. I mean even just to think the speed with which North Korea got these messages home. So this 45 minute documentary from Singapore was relayed back onto North Korean TV the very next day, you know, the unusual speed for North Korea.

I think just one more thing on the risk-taking thing, though, the fact that he was able to—he did go to Hanoi, to that summit, without having done the kind of preparation that you would have had expected, was a very, very risky move for him, and could easily have backfired, because he was so public during this process, because he did announce to the North Korean people in advance that he was going to this summit, and then came back basically empty-handed. So I think that was, yeah, evidence of his personality traits at that time, but also something that was quite risky politically for him. And I'm sure was a bit dangerous internally, at that time.

ROBIN WRIGHT: Van, let me ask you about the process of this diplomacy. Do you think Kim was surprised by the speed with which Trump was willing to engage with North Korea? And describe a little bit what you think was behind or these love letters to Trump. Was this a con job? Was this false flattery? Describe your take of this bromance.

[00:40:14]

DR. VAN JACKSON: Yeah, of course it was false flattery, first of all. The idea of Trump being anything other than a mark for Kim Jong Un, to me, is not serious. And I think that was one of the fatal flaws of the whole process, was that Trump went in thinking that he could be the charmer, not having any sense of his own blind spots. Like put preparation aside. Put the prudence or not of doing these kinds of summits. Put all that aside. Just the fact that, like, he thinks that it's like a one-way manipulation kind of thing out of his own hubris, when Kim Jong Un has every reason to be sort of reversing that, you know.

And we know, with other world leaders, like Trump is imminently manipulable, right. And Kim Jong Un got through 2017 successfully, you know. He faced down the devil and won. I think Ankit's point about risk acceptance is, you know, should be you can't over-emphasize that enough, you know.

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I think he probably thinks he's a good gambler. And you see evidence of that in the way he handled the summits, improvising meeting Trump's – it's the opposite of bravado at that point, because they're not insulting each other anymore, but meeting Trump's willingness to kind of go crazy on diplomacy in kind, you know. Like I was actually surprised by that myself, that Kim Jong Un would take the risk of getting on a plane, meeting a world leader, without having the proper preparations, and, you know, the considerations of like how might all this look at home, operationally. How can you even be sure about your own security when you're out abroad? Like there are all these questions that a more risk-averse person would collapse under the weight of, you know.

[00:42:17]

And Kim Jong Un pressed on. So, you know, as we look at the summits, and we look at the bromance, considering that they only met for these small windows of time, it's obviously strategic. Also, this is what you're supposed to do with diplomacy, you know. And it happens to be that the US President, at the time, was uniquely susceptible to flattery. This is not a controversial observation.

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And so I think we saw Kim Jong Un trying to play Trump, and Hanoi kind of exploded the second summit. But part of that was like a miscalibration of expectations on both sides. And it's possible that Kim Jong Un thought he could get more from Trump uniquely, Trump the man, than was even realistically possible, because he thought he was a good gambler. And so

understanding this whole like risk-acceptant mindset, I think, helps us explain a lot of not just the fact that this summit process happened, but its implosion, too.

ROBIN WRIGHT: So Ankit, let's take this one step further. Based on what we now know about Kim Jong Un, how should the Biden administration deal with Kim and his regime? This will be quite a contrast. And it's striking that North Korea has not come up very much. And there were some who predicted--[interruption] There were some who predicted that Kim might try another test, to kind of say, "Hey. I'm here. Pay attention" So how does Biden administration deal with Kim?

[00:44:02]

ANKIT PANDA: Well, we're all waiting to find out. And you know, I'm willing to give the administration the benefit of a doubt on the ongoing policy review. That said, the indicators that we have seen, statements from Secretary Blinken, a few other senior officials, indicate that inertia, which is a powerful force in American bureaucracy and foreign policy in general, may take the day again. And by that I mean that I don't think the United States will fundamentally revise the starting point for entering negotiations with North Korea, which is that, ultimately, negotiations have to manifest in North Korea's unilateral disarmament.

That the North Koreans have nuclear weapons, that they shouldn't have nuclear weapons. They should return to the nonproliferation treaty as a non-nuclear weapons state in good standing. And once they've done all that, we will give them all the sanctions relief in the world and work towards building a peace regime on the Korean Peninsula, having a new kind of relationship with North Korea, and all that good stuff.

[00:44:55]

But that just isn't going to happen, right. I mean the question that you asked about what we get wrong about Kim Jong Un, you know, this probably isn't surprising for many of the audience members, and analysts in the North Korea-Washington community. But Kim Jong Un is not

going to give up his nuclear weapons for any kind of economic—any kind of finite economic incentives, precisely because the benefit that he gains from his nuclear weapons are effectively infinite. i.e. his own survival. You cannot put a finite price on something like survival, which is effectively infinite, in the benefits that Kim derives from it.

[00:45:29]

So, what does that mean for policy? There's a spectrum of options here. It's not that, you know, the United States has to simply give up, and, you know, give North Korea a gold star, and welcoming it to the club of nuclear power states. I mean that's never going to happen, first of all, because there isn't really a way to do that in the international system, sort of being one of the five recognized nuclear weapons states under the NPT, which North Korea is never going to be. So what do you then do?

I talk a lot about this in the book. In fact, the final 100 pages or so are highly prescriptive. And my recommendation happens to be that we approach North Korea with more of an arms controlled mindset. Arms control, of course, traditionally has been something Americans only do with super powers. And the only super power we've really done it with is Russia, and formerly the Soviet Union. Of course we don't really do arms control with China today. So recommending arms control for North Korea tends to be a little bit much. But ultimately, I think that is the prescription here, especially in terms of moderating and managing the very real nuclear dangers that exist on and around the Korean Peninsula as a result of the advancements that North Korea has made.

[00:46:31]

I will sort of close on a sort of counter-intuitive note, which is that, you know, we are witnessing North Korea—You know, North Korea has spent a lot of its time, since 2017, quietly quantitatively building up its nuclear forces, and qualitatively modernizing its nuclear forces. And what that means is that North Korea, today, is a much more sophisticated nuclear power, not only than it was 30 years ago, but than it was in 2017.

And the good news for a crisis, at least, would be that a North Korea that has more nuclear weapons, more survivable nuclear weapons, may feel less threatened if the United States does decide that the only path forward will be confrontation. And I'm hoping the Biden administration will recognize this reality, and evolve American policy towards North Korea that recognizes these options. Of course, there are multiple—But there are multiple interests here to be balanced, including engaging a nuclear armed North Korea in a way that isn't fatal to the nonproliferation regime writ large.

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We have to think about how we can induce North Korea to take certain steps, to practice mechanisms of restraint with the United States, that can keep future crises bounded. And believe me, there will be future crises with North Korea. You know, we're coming out of this phase of diplomacy, where things really haven't gotten bad yet. But that possibility is very much still there.

ROBIN WRIGHT: Let me get back to this issue of economic insecurity, because that's the kind of yin and yang of the North Korea dilemma. Let me ask Anna. You're optimistic that a deal could cap, as you say, the growth of North Korea's program. How?

[00:48:03]

ANNA FIFIELD: Well, since I wrote my book, a lot has changed, right. And the biggest thing, I think, is the pandemic, of course. And there's the impact that the COVID crisis has had on North Korea is far, far greater than any economic sanctions or external events against North Korea over the decades. And I mean, we don't know right now what the exact situation is inside North Korea. They closed the border more than a year ago with China, and before even Wuhan went into lockdown.

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So I think that the situation in there must be quite dire, the fact that Kim Jong Un has been coming out recently and talking about mistakes that he's made, is quite a signal there. But this presents an opportunity for the Biden administration, I think, to work more on the economic side, and to look at what incentives they could offer North Korea, to return to some kind of diplomacy in the future.

I mean, but having said that, you know, I agree with Ankit that there's no way North Korea is going to give up their nuclear weapons program. Kim Jong Un has put a lot of time and resources and invested his own kind of legitimacy in this nuclear weapons program. And I just can't see a way that it is going—he's going to negotiate that away for anything.

[00:49:33]

I think the opportunity lies more in—I mean, and all of this assumes a post-pandemic world, which seems quite far away at the moment. But I would like to see more emphasis from the Biden administration on engagement away from nuclear talks, and away from even some of the more traditional kinds of diplomacy. So that means, yeah, sporting exchanges, cultural exchanges, you know, I was on the New York Philharmonic trip to Pyongyang in 2008, and it really felt like that—I mean forgive the pun, but it did feel like it struck a chord in some way at that time.

[00:50:15]

So I think kind of breaking down some of those barriers, and building up some trust, would be a way to maybe pave the—lay the groundwork for more interaction between the two systems in the future. I mean having said that, North Korea has really limited the amount—the number of people that it has allowed to travel to Singapore for financial training, or on sports trips to places, because it does view that as really dangerous. So I think that North Korea will try to limit this exposure to the outside world. But this is definitely something that I would like to see much more emphasis on in the future.

ROBIN WRIGHT: So Anna, let me follow up. You mentioned COVID-19. I'm just wondering, how bad is the pandemic in North Korea? Do we have any sense of both how—the kind of infection rate, the kind of fatality rate, and what they're doing about it, since they obviously have no access to vaccines yet?

[00:51:17]

ANNA FIFIELD: Yeah. Well, I mean, it's hard to kind of exaggerate how devastating this would have been if this virus had gotten into North Korea and traveled. Because, I mean, I've been into North Korean hospitals that have no power in the middle of winter, and things like that. They have very—There's no medicine in many of these hospitals at all. So that they definitely could not have coped at all with an outbreak of the coronavirus inside North Korea.

So we don't know to what extent the virus got into North Korea. It's hard to think that it didn't get in at all, given the level of trade and flow across that China-North Korea border. But I think it's fair to assume that there has not been a widespread outbreak of the coronavirus there, because we would have heard about it. It would have been so devastating that the news would have gotten out.

[00:52:09]

I mean, and if there's one thing that North Korea knows how to do, it's how to isolate itself, and how to order people to stay at home. So that does seem to be the—there doesn't seem to have been a devastating thing there. The thing is, yes, how do they get out of this? How do they get the vaccine? Does China give them their Chinese vaccine? How do they return to some kind of normal? Because 90 percent of North Korea's trade has gone to or through China. And that has really been the lifeline for the regime. So I think they will be extremely eager to get back to some kind of normal situation, at least with China, if not with the rest of the world.

[00:52:51]

ROBIN WRIGHT: Great. Ankit had mentioned the danger of crises ahead. So let me ask Van. You write about how close we came in 2017 to a nuclear showdown. And when some say the odds were 50/50, that there would—it would have come to that. You served in the Obama administration, in the run-up to this very close call. What do you think the prospects are that we get to a crisis that was that bad again, 50/50?

[00:53:22]

DR. VAN JACKSON: Yeah. I don't know if I would endorse those odds. I'm not an odds-maker. But the thing that sucks about, right now, and the whole summit process, frankly, is that the conditions that gave rise to the crisis are the same as they were when Trump came into office in 2017. And in many ways, it's worse, because the nuclear missile programs have advanced, right.

The Biden administration has a huge dilemma here. Because on the one hand, to the extent that you consecrate and validate what the Trump administration was, right, like that's representative of America. We're going to keep the Singapore declaration as the starting point for negotiations, you can make that choice. But that means you have to take the whole, like, Trump legacy with you, right. So fire and fury was also America, right.

[00:54:19]

Or you could say, Trump was a weird aberration. And that's not how we're going to go. Fire and fury was not us, right. But in which case, you can't take the quote/unquote good parts, like the Singapore declaration, if you want to think of it as good, right. So there is a dilemma or a tension that Biden will have to resolve by default, with like how we deal with the Trump legacy in relation to negotiations.

But the fundamental problem, structural problem, is that we could have a crisis based on who becomes the personality, or who gives voice to North Korea policy. If we start saying nonsense, and threatening annihilation again, which, you know, you get like President QAnon, that's not

crazy, that could happen. In that case, we're right back to fire and fury 2.0, only with a North Korean nuclear arsenal that's way worse than in 2017, man.

[00:55:21]

And with the Kim Jong Un, with a leader who is much more confident in his own ability to take risks than win, than prior to 2017. So like that's a dangerous situation. I don't think we're facing an imminent crisis right now. I think we have the conditions for crisis. I don't think Biden is going to be the guy who like mouths off with fire and fury, right. But we need to create a situation that inhibits the consequences of President QAnon coming in with fire and fury 2.0, to put it bluntly, and the policy choices that we make in relation to North Korea should have an eye on that. Let's make a situation so that an irresponsible leader doesn't come in and screw all of us, you know.

ROBIN WRIGHT: So I'm curious. And maybe Ankit can take this one. We're not going to get to that fire and fury point. But North Korea clearly is not high or visible yet on the Biden agenda. Does Kim just continue to make his ballistic missiles, and make his nuclear bombs, and we end up, down the road, realizing we haven't paid enough attention? I just wonder how this plays out, what the next—what the next crisis is, or what the next intersection, or the next diplomatic engagement, especially I want to address China down the road. But you may want to begin, now, looking at the tension between Washington and Beijing You know, we always counted on China being the one to leverage its pull or its standing with Kim. Will it be willing to do that down the road? Or is that less and less a possibility? What do you think, Ankit?

[00:57:17]

ANKIT PANDA: Yeah, sure. So I'll start with the China angle, which is a little bit more straightforward to address. So the first few years of Kim Jong Un's reign in North Korea were actually a remarkable period of chilly ties between China and North Korea. It was really not until the March, 2018 meeting between Xi Jinping and Kim Jong Un that we really began to see a reverse of momentum. Of course that doesn't change the fact that North Korea has always relied

on China economically, with the extent to which the political relationship between the two countries is actually false. You know what I mean?

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Going back to your earlier question about what Americans tend to get wrong about North Korea, the biggest thing to get wrong, or the biggest thing you'll probably see, you know, Presidential candidates get wrong on the debate stage, for instance, when North Korea comes up, is leaning on China to solve the problem. I mean Kim Jong Un does not wake up and take his orders from Beijing. His father didn't do that. His grandfather didn't do that. That's just not how North Korea operates.

You know, ultimately, you might be cynical about their self-serving emphasis on self-reliance. But they do tend to behave rather skeptically when it comes to what outside powers want for them. So China, right now, I think, will tend to see North Korea as a useful cudgel, as great power competition between the United States and China intensifies in Asia. They would rather have a North Korea that is a problem for the United States than a problem for China. And this, of course, I think, will be something that we will continue to see over probably the entirety of Biden's first term.

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And, you know, an anniversary that I'm watching this year is, you know, July marks the 60th anniversary of the 1961 China-North Korea Treaty, which, under Kim Jong Un, North Korea has been remarkably silent about, at least last time it was acknowledged was five years ago. So I'm curious to see if the North Koreans will acknowledge that treaty, which does include a mutual defense provision, where China is supposed to defend North Korea in a [00:59:02] conflict, although that might change, now, given that the North Koreans have their own nuclear weapons.

[00:59:07]

And the first part of your question on what is likely to happen? Are the North Koreans just going to hum along and keep building their capabilities? So we just heard from Kim Jong Un at the onset of January, at the Eighth Party Congress. And he sort of addressed a very wide-ranging agenda of nuclear modernization I mean the kind of things he mentioned were basically tailor-made to get the attention of the US intelligence community. And I'm sure President Biden's Presidential daily briefs have included all sorts of details on what North Korea is building.

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Of course, [00:59:35] the news cycles as the Eighth Party Congress did happen to coincide with the insurrection in Washington on January 6th. But, you know, Kim Jong Un is talking about tactical nuclear weapons, something that North Korea has not yet developed or deployed. He's talking about hyper-sonic gliders, solid propellant intercontinental-range ballistic missiles. I mean really, things that are designed to get the attention of anybody working a North Korea portfolio.

But of course, as we know, on the nonproliferation and nuclear policy front, the Biden administration's first agenda item was the extension of new start with Russia. That's been done. The JCPOA with Iran is, I think, where the Biden team is planning on spending a lot of political capital. So until that's squared away, and until the relationship with Iran is either more stabilized to a point where, you know, either the JCPOA hopefully is extended—I don't think the Biden team will be, you know, putting its neck out there to expend a ton of political capital on some kind of bold outreach to North Korea.

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And so, if you're Kim Jong Un, what do you do with this? You know, I don't want to say that Kim Jong Un is not going to test a missile any time soon. They tend to keep things quiet during Presidential transitions. In 2016, the last missile test that year took place during the third Presidential debate. And we didn't see any major missile tests until Donald Trump entered the

Oval Office. And it was, I believe, February 13th, 2017, when the North Koreans kicked off the year's missile testing. So that could happen, you know, as early as next week.

March tends to be a busy month for the North Koreans, who like to stage—You know, they like to stage their own version of military exercises as the United States and South Korea carry out their field mobilization exercises, which will again be downgraded due to the pandemic.

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But ultimately, I think if the policy review is finalized, and you hear the President simply announce a very familiar-sounding North Korea policy, you know, “We will hold off and complete a verifiable and irreversible dismantlement of North Korea's weapons of mass destruction,” I think that's the point at which Kim Jong Un will go back to his more traditional playbook, where he incrementally ramps up the heat, demonstrates new capabilities, demonstrates things like potentially tactical nuclear weapons, multiple reentry vehicles, and ICBMs, and what have you, intending to signal to the United States that the longer—that time, essentially, is not on Washington's side, that time is on Pyongyang's side.

[01:01:44]

Of course, I think the internal economic situation in North Korea is perhaps going to suggest to some in the Biden administration that time is on the United States' side, right. I mean sanctions haven't worked in North Korea. But what we've seen over the last year, in many ways, amounts to a natural experiment in what real maximum pressure looks like. I mean the kind of pain that the North Koreans have put themselves under is significantly greater than the pain that they've endured under Kim Jong Un, under the sanctions regime. So that, I think, paints a pretty complicated picture right now. I could see Kim Jong Un, you know, making a decision tomorrow to launch a ballistic missile or hold out and wait to see where the policy review comes down.

ROBIN WRIGHT: Let me just say, as someone who follows Iran closely, that if North Korea policy or decisions or announcements depend on the pace of developments on Iran, don't hold

your breath. This is a very complicated issue. And far more complicated, I think, than many understand. So Anna, you're such a good observer of the kind of human condition. Let me follow up on the issue of sanctions. You know, having covered South Africa, and Rhodesia, and Iran sanctions and so forth, sanctions is a very, very slow-moving tool. And it clearly has done very little to deter many of these governments. What kind of impact do you think sanctions have had? And can North Korea endure the punitive economic measures indefinitely, even if they get tougher?

[01:03:20]

ANNA FIFIELD: Well, it's hard to imagine how much tougher they could get, because under the Trump administration, the sanctions were really ramped up. So that, you know, a lot of North Korea's exports, like seafood and textiles, labor were all banned, and probably because of the coronavirus and pandemic and things, I think, a lot of those workers in China and Russia would have returned to North Korea as well.

So, I mean, a lot of what the US had been trying to lead against North Korea, in terms of sanctions, was already in place. And we have seen that all of these generations of sanctions did not have any impact on, first of all, the development of the nuclear and ballistic missile program. Kim Jong Un was able to advance both of these programs, despite supposed [audio breakup] [01:04:19] restrictions on his ability to get parts, and also financing, to be able to get those parts.

[01:04:27]

So he made astonishing progress despite the sanctions regime. But we've also seen that Kim Jong Un himself has been able to get around the sanctions. And we know he's been flouting it by showing up in Singapore, and at these various summits, and brand new late model Mercedes Benzes, a Rolls Royce when he met Secretary Pompeo. So it's not just the little things, the Swiss watches and things, and the money that's getting across the border, but big things as well have been able to get through.

So I think there, he has found a way to continue to survive and thrive and make sure that the people who keep him in power have been able to get what they need, and to be able to have that same largess, despite the sanctions regime. I think the area where it has really hurt has been with the ordinary people. And then a lot of things that they would need for their daily life, and a lot of the low-level trades, illegal trade that crosses the border between China and North Korea had been curtailed, or had become a lot more difficult as a result of the sanctions.

[01:05:39]

So I think, I mean, it's pretty clear in North Korea that sanctions have hurt the people and not the leadership. And in fact, the leadership, as in many authoritarian countries, has been able to blame the United States in sanctions for a lot of their own economic mismanagement. You know, Kim Jong Un has repeatedly said that North Korea's issues are due to the hostile American policy, and not because of any, you know, shortcomings in his own leadership there. So it's provided a pretty easy foil for them.

Just one thing, you know, obviously that the seafood exports, and the things like that, is a significant source of income for North Korea. But I think that the labor exports is something that is not so cut and dry, that they have, under Kim Jong Un, there has been this huge increase in the number of North Koreans being sent abroad to work, whether it's in clothing factories in China, or in forestry, or construction in Russia, or even building soccer stadiums in the Middle East.

[01:06:50]

And this is quite controversial, because it is, you know, tantamount to slave labor, in a way, because these people are kept in dormitories. They're highly controlled. They're often not paid properly, or what they're supposed to be able to get. But still, this is something that is very attractive to North Korean people. Because even despite these conditions in the outside world, it's preferable to being inside North Korea, where their lives are similarly curtailed, but they don't have that opportunity to earn as much money.

So you see a lot of North Koreans have been actually bribing officials for the right or for the chance to go abroad and to work, you know, 18 hour days, locked into a dormitory in China, because that was a way to be able to earn more money. So you see people like Andre Lankov [?] who's talking very much in favor of this kind of labor, working abroad situation. Because it was a situation that was life-changing for North Koreans, that when they returned to North Korea with some thousands of dollars, they were able to start businesses or to overhaul their own lives inside North Korea. And thereby reduce the state's ability to control their life, to reduce their dependence on the state.

[01:08:10]

So sanctions on things like that, I think are much less cut-and-dry than, say, cutting off coal [?] exports or things like that. I think that is part of the reason that China and Russia have been unwilling to really enforce those kinds of sanctions.

ROBIN WRIGHT: Thanks. I think we're going to welcome the audience to offer questions, too. And I think someone is going to forward me questions that I can ask the panel. I want to follow, Van, with what Anna's point. There has been greater—a larger labor force allowed to work elsewhere in the world. And we know that the kinds of technology and videos and so forth have crossed from China into North Korea, that the population in general is much savvier today than a generation ago, about what's happening elsewhere in the world. I'm not suggesting a Pyongyang spring any time soon. But is there a sense that, whether it's the level of education, access to the outside world [01:09:15] [noise] is happening elsewhere, that this is not an environment—political environment that can endure indefinitely, that there is, at some point, going to be—whether it's movement or rippling effect, you know, signs of disgruntlement and discontent that are more, maybe not visible to us, but maybe more visible to Kim.

[01:09:48]

DR. VAN JACKSON: Yeah. I mean, nothing is impossible. But I just can't—It doesn't seem very likely, right. Like a civil society uprising, or like an insurrection within North Korea. Part of

the issue here is that North Korea as a regime, they kind of operate the best practices of, like, the dictator's handbook. And one of the very underappreciated things that Kim Jong Un brings to his regime is this, like—I call it like flexibility or like the savvy dictatorship, right. It's this ability to adjust and adapt your prevailing narrative of social control to account for external realities. Because the Andre Lankov theory of change, socialization, and exposure to new things, that only—that can only work, it's only possible for that to work when the new information is a disjuncture with whatever that internalized narrative is.

[01:10:50]

And so it's actually a big deal when Kim Jong Un comes out and weeps in front of everybody and is like, “Oh my God, I messed up the economy, guys. But here is what we're going to do now.” Because it's like he's being—he's coming across as like excessively candid, which creates automatic buy-in. Again, this is like within a post-totalitarian state. So I'm not sure—overstate things here. But like, within context, he's being more candid, which brings people along, and it kind of deflates the impetus for like revolutionary change inside the system, you know.

And we've seen, from the '90s, that the North Korean people can eat a lot of grass, basically. They can suffer pretty well. They can tolerate it. And so the fact that Kim Jong Un can like make tweaks to his internal narrative in a way that makes it harder for people to point out, to juxtapose internal and external realities, I think that's not a trivial thing.

[01:11:57]

And then, on top of that, since Kim Jong Un came to power, all of these purges and all that stuff, installing loyalists, he has been centralizing control of state security institutions, right, like internal security forces. And those are the—that's the system that enforces his rules. It's the system of social control, right. It's the system of fear imposition. And by centralizing it, he makes it more effective.

So Sheena Chestnut Greitens has a book about like dictatorships, and how they will choose to optimize this course of institutions of state security for either divide-and-conquer, to coup-proof their regime, right. They're afraid of elites, or they're afraid of the populace, right. And they create centralized control to have powerful course of institutions to suppress dissent internally, at a mass level.

[01:12:59]

And Kim Jong Un has gone much more toward that latter, right. It's the mass dissent that he's girded himself against, with consolidation of state security and centering himself on it. So like he's done much less of the coup-proofing in the way that his father did. And so, like, in that context, are you really going to expect people to rise up? I don't think so. It doesn't make sense. But, I mean, anything could happen, you know. I didn't predict COVID either, so.

[pause]

[01:13:52]

DR. JOHN PARK: It looks like we might have technical difficulty with Robin's connection here. I'm just going to jump in with some questions that have come in as well. We're editing and grouping them. One comes from Kevin Kim. And it's about the arms control piece. And we'll direct this one to you, Ankit. Kevin asks, what makes you believe that DPRK would be amenable to arms control, particularly considering the stringent verification protocols required? A very easy one for you.

[01:14:16]

ANKIT PANDA: Super easy. But no, but it's a great question. I mean yeah. I mean the “v” word, verification, is really probably one of the worst things you could say to a North Korean, in many ways, right. I mean the IAEA left North Korea last in April, 2009. They haven't returned verification and sort of the kind of access that we have, for instance, of Iran, is almost unthinkable in North Korea.

But, you know, let me just reflect a little bit on what arms control is and isn't. You know, I mean or really on what the purposes of arms control are. I mean the way I see it, arms control can help build confidence between two sides that practice it. It can reduce the costs of competition during peacetime, both for North Korea and the United States, right. If you're an American worried about great power competition with China, and you want to have less to think about on the Korean Peninsula, then you should favor arms control of North Korea, for instance.

[01:15:05]

And finally, in the case that deterrence does fail, practicing effective arms control can reduce the consequences of that happening, i.e., you know, ensuring that any conflict in, on, or around the Korean Peninsula remains as bounded as possible. And arms control doesn't necessarily need to manifest in the sort of traditional kind of new start way, where we bring North Koreans to American soil, to count American nuclear weapons. Then we send Americans to North Korea to count North Korean nuclear weapons. That just won't work, given the lack of parity, first of all. The North Koreans are in a completely different just weight class, when it comes to being a nuclear power.

But ultimately, you can do a lot of confidence-building steps, right. I mean just things like, even in peacetime, moderating the kinds of activities that the United States undertakes to practice assurance for allies. You know, we love to, for instance, fly bombers to the Korean Peninsula. Restricting those flights, which is something that the North Koreans have repeatedly called for, and still practicing effective rapid reaction deterrents on and around the Peninsula, I think, is doable. Is that arms control? I would argue yes, even if it's not arms control in sort of the traditional sense of counting things, and focusing on numbers.

[01:16:17]

The other thing, I mean, you know, we talked a little bit about sanctions policy. You know, I concur with my co-panelists on the efficacy of sanctions. You know, one of the things that I am

quite looking forward to is the Biden administration, the Treasury Department is undertaking a comprehensive view of US sanctions policy around the world So I'm hoping that that leads to an approach on the Korean Peninsula where we recognize that sanctions, even if they don't—even if they won't get North Korea to change its behavior, nevertheless, are useful pieces of leverage that we can asymmetrically trade away for North Korean restraint, or at least behaviors of restraint, things that could manifest in more responsible and more predictable North Korean behavior in a crisis. That, too, I would argue is arms control.

[01:16:59]

So these kinds of things, I think, you know, we need to think about with a very open mind, thinking of arms control sort of in the broadest possible sense, and what that means for North Korea. But, you know, our corollary of all this is that we just need to break out of this nonproliferation mindset when it comes to the Korean Peninsula. Nonproliferation is important, don't get me wrong. You know, nobody wants to see an Iranian nuclear weapon any time soon. But on the Korean Peninsula, specifically in North Korea, the problem now is one of managing and living with a nuclear armed North Korea and recognizing the dangers that stem from that.

[01:17:30]

DR. JOHN PARK: Now turning to our dream team, the 100 percent representation from the North Korea analyst committee in New Zealand, is a question to Anna and Van. This comes from Seuyun in Ohio. Given Kim Jong Un's growing health concerns, should Kim Jong Un die an untimely but natural death, what is your reading of how the current structure of the North Korean regime in society might respond? And then added to that, who can you expect to succeed him? Starting with Anna.

[01:17:57]

ANNA FIFIELD: Yeah. Well remember, I mean the reason I wrote my book in the first place, was because I was wrong, you know, because I didn't expect Kim Jong Un or the third

generation Kim to be able to take over. So I've learned not to predict, predict the imminent collapse of North Korea if Kim Jong Un or the leader was to die.

But, having said that, it did seem like very tenuous that first time around, and it was really hanging in the balance. And there really is, now, no heir apparent for Kim Jong Un, you know, with his various health scares over the past few years, there has been a lot of conjecture about his sister. And you know, I never really thought that it could be his sister, Kim Yo-jong, who would take over from him, because she is even younger. And, of course, because she's female. And I didn't think that North Korea would be able to tolerate a young woman taking control of this.

[01:19:03]

But having said that, I think—I think it can't be anybody but Kim Yo-jong. There is nobody else. There is no—you know, his children are very, very young, and maybe toddlers, maybe just starting school age. So there really is nobody other than her to take over. I mean I would just be getting into the realm of speculation to talk more on this.

But I think—I guess one of the things that does surprise me so much about Kim Jong Un is that he has expended so much effort to stay in power. He has done so many difficult things to try to make sure that he does defy all of these expectations. And yet, he is clearly such an extremely unhealthy man, that he is not doing any of the obvious things that you would expect, to try to ensure his longevity, like, yeah, exercising, and watching what he eats. So, I mean, I'm no doctor, but he doesn't look like a healthy man to me. So I'm surprised that he's not—that he's not doing more to do the one thing that could ensure his, you know, definitely ensure that he stayed around for longer.

[01:20:18]

DR. JOHN PARK: Thanks, Anna. It looks like Robin's able to join us. Robin, I'm just going to wrap up with this question to Van, and then turn it back to you, Robin. And I'll direct you to the Q and A tab. There are some of the questions listed up, ready to go for you. So Van, over to you.

And perhaps a spin, in terms of, this is a different type of regime structure we've seen with Eighth Party Congress and some of the other moves. You look at the personal touches of Kim Jong Un to this regime. So also, from that vantage point, the same question, in terms of an untimely but natural death, what do you see happen, playing out, in terms of the succession?

[01:20:53]

DR. VAN JACKSON: Yeah, I think Anna's basically right about this, although we're all just kind of speculating. The truth is, the dude is just so unhealthy, he's going to die, man. He's going to die, and it's going to be sooner than we think, possibly sooner than some of us would like, right. Doesn't mean it's tomorrow But in the scheme of things, that's probably how we should be thinking about it. Dude is going to die, okay.

[01:21:17]

Kim Yo-jong, makes sense. Everybody thinks, like, “Well, she's a woman, you know, no experience.” Kim Jong Un was the youngest son in a Confucian culture. He's a millennial. And he's run the place like a boss. So like you can't—Anything is possible, if Kim Jong Un can be the great successor, you know what I mean? Anything is possible.

DR. JOHN PARK: I like that image, a millennial with nuclear armed ICBMs. Maybe as a millennial, he'll lose interest and figure something else out. Kevin Kim just texted in a chat box that, added to that, it's a really stressful job. Robin, if you're able to connect, I will hand it back to you for the Q and A portion. [pause] Okay, it looks like we're still having some technical difficulties there. But the next question we have, and this is a little bit of a lighthearted one, this comes from Allison in Los Angeles. And this is to all of you, but I'll start off with Ankit. She asks, you all have titles for your books that ring of a classic. What was the runner-up title that didn't make the cut? And starting with Ankit.

[01:22:25]

ANKIT PANDA: Oh, that's an easy one. I wanted to call the book *Treasured Sword*, with probably the same subtitle, *Survival and Deterrence in North Korea*. My publisher advised against it, for I think good reasons. First of all, you'd have to read the book to know what "Treasured Sword" means. It's about the North Koreans euphemistically refer to their nuclear forces or sacred sword, depending on the translation that you like to use. But I just find that phrase evocative in sort of capturing the prized position of nuclear weapons of North Korean national security strategy.

DR. JOHN PARK: Thank you. Next to Van.

[01:22:59]

DR. VAN JACKSON: So, I did have another title that was very academic and boring. And I don't even remember what it was. But my one request was not to put Trump's name in the title. And I was—my request was denied. Because, at the time, when the publication process was happening, in the publishing industry, there was nothing that would sell more than putting Trump's name in the book, on the title, you know. But like then it was overkill very quickly. It jumped the shark. And by late 2019, nobody wanted to buy a book if it had Trump's name in it. So I'm stuck with the way it is. But I did not want it to be thus.

DR. JOHN PARK: Good stuff. And to wrap it up on this particular round, over to you, Anna.

[01:23:44]

ANNA FIFIELD: Yeah. So I had always envisioned my book being called *The Great Successor*, which is how Kim Jong Un was introduced, you know, from the get-go. So that was my working title. And it remained the title. The issue for me was the subtitle, which I—which, of course, has to be like 25 words long in the current publishing market. So my working subtitle was something like *The Secret Rise and Surprising Role of Kim Jong Un*. But my publisher in the US wanted to go for something much snappier, and more, I guess that hits on the absurdity, or the ridiculousness of North Korea's own system.

And so he came up with a version of what it is today, which is—hold on. I've suddenly forgotten my own sub book title. *Brilliant Conman Kim Jong Un*. So I had a lot of misgivings about that, and also about the—about the image on the front as well, which is a kind of cartoon thing. Because the whole thesis of my book is that he's not a joke, that he's not a joke to the North Korean people, and he's proven not to be a joke to the outside world. And so we should be taking him seriously.

[01:25:08]

But so, yeah, so I was a little uncomfortable with the American edition. But the British version, which is the one we have here in New Zealand, is a much straighter subtitle, which is *The Secret Rise and Role of Kim Jong Un*. And it has just a photo of him on the front. So much straighter for the more sort of British/New Zealand/Australian audience.

DR. JOHN PARK: It's tough. Thank you. Let's try one more time. Robin, are you able to connect?

ROBIN WRIGHT: Can you hear me?

DR. JOHN PARK: Yes we can, loud and clear.

[01:25:38]

ROBIN WRIGHT: I apologize to everyone. My computer crashed completely. And so I went to my laptop, and it lost internet. I mean our technology age in the middle of a pandemic is not always reliable. I don't know whether any of you have answered this question. But I'm kind of curious, is there any challenge, from either inside or outside the regime, to the Kim dynasty? You know, this is where we saw, in places like Egypt and Syria an uprising, even Libya under Qaddafi, we saw an uprising we didn't anticipate.

And again, I go back to my question before. I don't suggest that there's anything imminent. But where could this come from? Especially if we get to a point that Kim does die from bad health, and his successor is even younger, or he relies on his sister? Where do you see that kind of confluence of factors that produces change, that might be unexpected? Anna, do you want to start? Any of you.

ANNA FIFIELD: Over to you, Van. You were getting in there.

[01:26:49]

DR. VAN JACKSON: Okay, yeah. It's weird. The virtual protocol of like, “Oh no, no, no, you, not me. No, no.” It's hard to do. So I would just say, briefly, it doesn't feature in these conversations normally. But the Free Joseon Movement is this. Intellectually fascinating wildcard in all of this. And it's definitely a marginal, non-serious player at the moment. But there's an alternative future in South Korea—Every South Korean I've ever talked to kind of chafes at the notion that, like, this outside group would be able to claim legitimacy over North Korea, when North Korea should be part of South Korea, you know. So there's an internal Korea thing happening there, that makes it even more difficult than normal.

[01:27:34]

But there's a scenario, where you have these, like, North Korean overseas migrants, like a transnational diaspora kind of thing. And you have this Free Joseon Movement that's trying to organize, you know, “We are the government in exile” kind of pose. Under the right confluence of factors, that could create serious problems for North Korea, particularly as North Koreans inside North Korea find out about it.

And so that's very volatile. So it's like high potential in good ways and bad, largely bad. But like right now, it's just not—it's not really a thing. Like there's a reason why nobody talks about Free Joseon, just because like they're not a power player. They're not really a factor. And it makes South Korea angst-y.

ROBIN WRIGHT: So does anyone want to weigh in on that question?

[01:28:29]

ANNA FIFIELD: Yeah. I would just add to that. I mean it's really hard to exaggerate just how controlled the discussion is inside North Korea. So there is no samizdat literature. There is no dissent. There is no graffiti, even, inside North Korea. So, you know, people who are watching South Korean dramas, and listening to music, that are coming in on USB drives and things like that, is one thing. And that is kind of tolerated to an extent by the regime.

But anything remotely political is—I mean first of all, people don't seem to be that interested. You know, young North Koreans want to watch saccharine South Korean soap operas. They don't want to read, you know, Wikipedia or listen to some of the political stuff that's going on. So a lot of the stuff just doesn't get passed around. But also, that that political stuff, and news from the outside world, is extremely dangerous inside North Korea, and is considered a political crime.

[01:29:35]

And so the system of fear and control that Kim Jong Un continues to operate to this day, just makes that kind of—any kind of discussion about why they're spending so much money on nuclear weapons when people are, you know, malnourished, just impossible in North Korea, because yes, you yourself may be willing to stand up and sacrifice yourself to criticize Kim Jong Un and that system, or question the system in some way. But because they still practice guilt-by-association, this means that three generations of your family would also be punished, you know, often sent to a political labor camp for decades if you were to question the system at all.

[01:30:23]

And so, when I've been talking to North Koreans who have escaped from the country, and I've said to them, you know, “Why is there no kind of revolution? Why is there no dissent or

protest?” they all point to this, the fact that it's just so dangerous to—for your whole family to question the system in any way. That if you disagree with it, you don't try to change it. You try to escape from it.

ROBIN WRIGHT: So we have a question, and I'm not sure whether this has been asked or not. But we have a question from Ambassador Kathleen Stevens, who asked about how does Kim Jong Un regard South Korea. Does he harbor any thought of reunification? And what are his concerns and objectives with South Korea? Ankit, do you want to take that one?

[01:31:11]

ANKIT PANDA: Yeah, sure. So I think, you know, we saw a lot of optimism. I mean I was in Seoul at the end of 2018. And the talk of the town at the moment was, you know, not if Kim Jong Un was coming to town, but when he was coming town. There was just a remarkable feeling of euphoria with the diplomacy that took place in 2018. You know, we all remember images of Kim Jong Un and his wife doing, you know, finger hearts on top of Paektusan, with Moon Jae-in. I mean just remarkable images.

But frankly speaking, I mean I think the relationship with South Korea under Kim Jong Un, I mean pre-2018, and now, after the optimism has sort of worn off, is fundamentally competitive. The note of reunification is, of course, the all-encompassing, never-ending debate, that's highly controversial among Korea watchers, the optimists, you know, tend to see the objectives of the North Korean state under Kim Jong Un as being somewhat recalibrated from Kim Il Sung's era, which very much, I think, was practically focused on reunification as an achievable goal, I mean especially through the 1970s, until the agreement of that decade between the two Koreas.

[01:32:16]

But under Kim Jong Un, I mean I think we see a different kind of competitive relationship. We see sort of arms-raising dynamics between the two Koreas. You know, if the South Koreans do something, the North Koreans would try to replicate that specific capability. And even new

missile systems the North Koreans have recently demoed, resemble South Korean missile systems. So, you know, there is some degree of parallelism there.

Anna talked about a little bit, you know, the architecture in Pyongyang under Kim Jong Un. I mean, you know, Ryomyong Street, where North Korea's top scientists involved with the missile program are allotted residences, is designed to emulate the impressive high-rises of Seoul. So Kim Jong Un, I think, recognizes that for North Korea to survive, ultimately, in the 21st century, will have to sort of make a case for itself on the Korean Peninsula, as a state that deserves to exist alongside South Korea.

[01:33:05]

So I think, in terms of that fundamental competitive relationship, he has—he does see South Korea as a rival to directly compete against. And ultimately, I think, you know, this other dynamic will continue to play out. He's also, I think, particularly savvy at sort of manipulating and playing the internal political scene in South Korea. You know, we'll have to see how Kim Jong Un will adapt if a conservative does return to power in South Korea. But certainly, I think the transition from Park Geun-hye to Moon Jae-in, Kim Jong Un managed that sort of with an adept understanding of where the political waves were going in South Korea. So that, again, is something that I'd highlight.

[01:33:45]

ROBIN WRIGHT: Great. So we're nearing the end. I think we're supposed to stop at 5:20. And I want to give each one of you a last chance to have a few minutes to reflect. If you were sitting at the National Security Council, in the new Biden administration, what two, three, four, five things would you urge the administration to be doing now, even if there is not direct engagement? What does it need to lay the groundwork for? And what does it need to prepare for in the event there is some kind of engagement or some kind of diplomacy in the future? Anna, let's begin with you.

[01:34:26]

ANNA FIFIELD: Oh wow. That's a tough one. I mean assuming that the whole world gets vaccinated, and this pandemic comes to an end sometime soon, I think—I mean, and the reason that you alluded to before, Robin, that I was a bit optimistic about the Trump effort at diplomacy, was because it was unconventional. And that conventional diplomacy had not worked over decades. So I thought it was fair enough to try something different. I mean obviously, it didn't work out. Obviously, it was very different. But I think that there needs to be more creativity when it comes to dealing with North Korea.

And so, as I mentioned before, I think making this not just a transactional thing about nuclear weapons, but trying to create a broader relationship, and particularly one that is focused on exposing as many North Koreans as possible to the outside world, is something that could be really beneficial and could, perhaps, tip the balance. I mean we don't know. And I'm not just talking about like the ordinary people, and there's been a lot of discussion previously about having officials going out into the outside world.

[01:35:49]

But I think the more North Koreans of all stripes, going into—I'm not talking about the US either, or Europe, or something like that, but I thought it was genius to have that summit in Singapore. And I've been on a couple of the trust and exchange courses in Singapore, where you had North Korean economists and scientists and things walking around the place, and seeing a country that is Asian, and a little bit authoritarian in its own way, that is identifiable in a way, and aspirational, I think that's why Kim Jong Un agreed to Singapore for that first summit, and why there was that documentary showing the high-rises of Singapore, and showing, this is something that North Korea could be aiming for.

[01:36:41]

I think those kinds of things could open people's eyes to what could be possible. And hopefully empower them to bring that about in some way. I remember when the Kaesong Joint Industrial

Complex was operating, and somebody I knew in Pyongyang went to visit, and took his North Korean staff there. And the thing that they talked about in the car the entire way back to Pyongyang was not the sewing machines, or the electricity, or anything like that. It was the toilets. You know, they were amazed at the flushing and clean inside toilets.

[01:37:17]

And so it's really difficult to tell, you know, what things are going to make an impression on people, and where that's going to meet critical mass, and empower [audio breakup] [01:37:31] people to make a change inside their system. So I mean, that's not four or five things that I would do, but I would just be looking at more creative ways, you know, of engaging North Korea and accessing different people, exposing more North Koreans to the realities of the outside world.

Because the fact is, that North Korea has survived for so long, by isolating itself, by cutting its people off, by feeding them this steady diet of propaganda. So anything you can do to beam information into North Korea, to bring people out, I think is all something that we should be pursuing more assiduously over the next few years.

[01:38:12]

ROBIN WRIGHT: That reminds me of going to see Stalin's hometown, and his home, a few years ago, in Georgia. And they took us to the railway car that Stalin used, because he was afraid of flying, which reminds me a little bit of Kim, too. And the one thing they kept pointing out was this toilet, Stalin's toilet, which he insisted on being the most modern version. So apparently, toilets do have an impact on diplomacy.

Sorry for the digression. So Van, what are your two or three or four thoughts that things the Biden administration can do to get things going, or prepare for the future?

[01:38:52]

DR. VAN JACKSON: Yeah. I mean, so toilets are important. I would cosign that. In addition, [laughter] I think – I mean like the thrust of Anna is correct here, right. Engagement is obviously the answer. The problem is that the way we've defined now what engagement is, to be basically this kabuki, obligatory, working level interaction, where we're hyper-stiff, and our demands are—there's no win set. Like there's nothing in our demands that make it conceivably doable, credible, realistic. That's not really engagement, you know. So like widening the aperture and what that means for sure.

[01:39:32]

What I would say, instead of like four or five things, though, is four or five analytical assumptions. No matter what Biden does, there needs to be a common set of knowledge and working level assumptions, right, to make sound policy. You know, one is that North Korea responds to pressure with pressure. Know this. Got a book about it. I sort of have two books about it. Know this. Pressure for pressure, okay.

Two, Kim Jong Un thinks he's a good gambler. I've said this before, but he faced down the devil in 2017. We have to take into account that he may be risk-prone because of experience, right. Three, China is not the answer. It has never been the answer. And the more that we think that China is the solution to the North Korea problem, the more we are misreading the regime, right.

[01:40:26]

Four, deterrence is working man. There is no such thing as deterrence being in a process of failing. So do not fall into the trap of doing aggressive stuff in the name of deterrence. That is self-defeating, okay. And then finally, the most important priority in Korea, Ankit said it, is avoiding nuclear war. We have other interests in Korea, but nothing is more important than avoiding nuclear war. When you look at what we've actually done as policy for the last 30 years, that is not our priority. And it needs to be. Our policies should reflect our priorities. So like, whatever Biden does, if it's anchored in those assumptions, I think we'll be fine. If it deviates from those assumptions, we're in trouble.

ROBIN WRIGHT: Great. So Ankit, you get the last word on recommendations. And I will just add to that. Do you actually think Kim is really interested in the kind of accommodation with the United States, that the United States would accept? So if you can address both of those, that'd be great, as our final word.

[01:41:33]

ANKIT PANDA: Sure. I mean, so you know, so to address that last question, I mean, it fundamentally depends on what President Biden is willing to accept as the bottom line in North Korea, right. I mean you know, I would encourage the President to sort of plan, in terms of what is realistically attainable on the Korean Peninsula by the end of his first term. He might get a second term. No one knows yet. But, you know, focusing on realistic agenda.

I mean the first thing, just to really get down to the nuts and bolts right now, you know, in December, 2019, Kim Jong Un renounced his April, 2018 moratorium on long-range missile and nuclear testing. It is absolutely in our interest, in South Korea's interest, and Japan's interest, and the interest of the international community at large, for Kim Jong Un to return to that moratorium and abstain from testing all of, you know, his new weapons systems that he was talking about at the Eighth Party Congress recently.

[01:42:20]

There's a reason Kim Jong Un brought that up, and that transcript of 14,000 words was translated and made available for the outside world to peruse as much as we had liked. Qualitatively, sort of keeping North Korea's nuclear advancement limited is absolutely in our interest. It not only facilitates practicing effective and smart deterrence on the Korean Peninsula, but it also makes the task of eventually engaging in risk reduction, arms control, whatever you want to call it with North Korea, ever so slightly more realistic and possible.

[01:42:48]

So once that's done, I think COVID-19 does sort of introduce a new wrinkle to the diplomatic environment. I mean traditionally, during a Presidential transition, you would have track 1.5 exchanges between the United States and North Korea. It's my understanding that those have really not happened this time around, primarily given North Korea's guidance to its own diplomats, because of COVID-19.

So it means that with the new administration coming in, we have even less understanding, or at least the North Koreans will understand less about where the Biden administration is going. But that means you've got to be bold in how you signal publicly. And that means—You know, I think that means that when the policy review is completed, again, I'm not going to prejudice where that's going to come out. I think, again, giving the administration the benefit of a doubt on that, it will be important to communicate where that policy review is meaningfully different from previous, you know, the previous 30 years of American policy. And my hope is that it will be different.

[01:43:36]

You know, I mean, just going back to what Van said, I mean, you know, we cannot lose sight of the fact that the reality on the Korean Peninsula today has manifested in a unpleasantly high risk of nuclear war being a real probability. And, you know, right now, we're not in a crisis. But we need to plan for the next crisis. And that means thinking through the kinds of activities that we do in peacetime, that could result in the North Koreans potentially miscalculating, thinking about what the growing survivability of North Korea's nuclear forces might mean, for how North Korea might reasonably behave in a crisis.

[01:44:06]

You know, partly where I might differ with Van's analysis is I think 2017 was a uniquely terrible time, precisely because it just so happened that, when North Korea crossed that threshold of obtaining an ICBM capability, sort of qualitatively capping its nuclear forces, Donald Trump happened to be President of the United States, right. I mean those two factors just uniquely made

for a very dangerous crisis. Because especially when a new nuclear state crosses important thresholds, like North Korea did in 2017, that's when, you know, things like use-or-lose pressures in a crisis are particularly acute, and command and control was rusty and not well developed.

And, as time proceeds, North Korea will augment its command and control practices, recognize what nuclear weapons can and can't do for national strategy. And I think it behooves the intelligence community to sort of keep up with advances that North Korea is making, how North Korea is thinking about conflict, peace and conflict on the Korean Peninsula, and push ahead there.

[01:45:00]

The final note I'll say, and the administration is already doing this, is you know, coordinating and collaborating with allies. And here, I think the picture gets particularly complicated, because I think unlike, at least, any time in the last decade, the preferences that we see in Seoul and Tokyo for how to proceed with North Korea could not be more different. And I think that's going away. That's going to be a particularly complicating factor for the ongoing policy review. I mean if Tokyo gets a veto, certain things just aren't going to happen. And, you know, on the flip-side, if the administration decides to go with what Moon Jae-in wants, that's going to leave many people uncomfortable in Japan. So there will be this matter of squaring the circle with two allies that, not only aren't getting along too well themselves, but just have a very different set of preferences right now on what matters on the Korean Peninsula. So I'll stop there.

[01:45:50]

ROBIN WRIGHT: You guys have been absolutely superb. I have learned a lot. I have so enjoyed this. I can't thank John Park enough for organizing this insightful panel, the reflections on your book, and on this, you know, this country that fascinates us, and frustrates us all. So thank you to the Harvard Kennedy School. Thanks to John Park. Did you want to have a final word, John?

[01:46:13]

DR. JOHN PARK: Yeah, thank you so much. And Robin, I think your experience from reporting from 140 countries gave us a sense, the ease with which your resilience with the tech difficulties. Thank you so much, Robin. And to our authors here, Anna, *The Great Successor*, Van, *On the Brink*, Ankit with *Kim Jong Un and the Bomb*, I just want you to know that on campuses, and in capitals, your book is having an impact and is a part of the conversation. And you've gotten us to a great start with this new tradition of bringing authors of new books for this particular panel and upcoming summits. For that, I commend you.

Thank you all for joining. And please join me in a round of applause to our panel here. Virtual applause here.

[applause]

DR. JOHN PARK: Thank you so much. We are going to break now. We're going to take a break until 5:50 p.m. East Coast time. And we'll start again with Panel 2, Looking at What's Old and What's New, with Negotiating with a Nuclear North Korea. Thank you all.

ANKIT PANDA: Thanks a lot, John.

ANNA FIFIELD: Thank you.

DR. JOHN PARK: We'd normally be heading over to a pub right now for [01:47:20]. But we'll take a rain check on that. See you all again.

[side remarks]

END OF PANEL 1

[BREAK]

PANEL 2: NEGOTIATING WITH A NUCLEAR NORTH KOREA-WHAT'S OLD?
WHAT'S NEW?

[00:01:42]

DR. JOHN PARK: Welcome to our second panel today, where we'll be examining what's new and what's old with negotiating with a nuclear North Korea. It's a very timely discussion, as the Biden administration conducts its North Korea policy review. We have a stellar panel to explore these questions in more depth.

Our moderator today is Dr. Francesca Giovannini, who is Executive Director of the Project on Managing the Atom. She'll be also introducing the speakers shortly. Dr. Giovannini previously served as Strategy and Policy Officer to the Executive Secretary of the Comprehensive Nuclear Test Ban Treaty Organization in Vienna. Prior to that, she was the Director of the Research Program on Global Security and International Affairs at the American Academy of Arts and Sciences in Boston. Dr. Giovannini holds a Doctorate from the University of Oxford. Thank you so much for joining us, Dr. Giovannini. I hand it over to you now. Thank you.

[00:02:36]

DR. FRANCESCA GIOVANNINI: Thank you, John. And good evening everyone. John, let me thank you first for this extraordinary event. The Second Annual Harvard Korean Security Summit sets a fantastic framework for much needed discussion on nuclear issues and beyond. And brings together speakers and attendees from three continents. I think this is an extraordinary achievement that speaks volume to you, of course, and to your team. So again, thank you so much for inviting me and for hosting this great event.

[00:03:12]

As John said, we have an all-star panel. And I couldn't emphasize more the amount of knowledge and expertise that these speakers bring with us today. And so we are so very thankful for your time and your availability to share your unique experiences. As John said, this is a panel that talks about negotiating with a nuclear North Korea. What's old and what's new. And the premise of this panel is pretty simple. That why the significant advancements in North Koreans' weapons and ballistic missile capabilities are new, the challenges to negotiate with North Korea is not.

[00:03:49]

And it's also clear that the sanctions were designed to impede the progress of North Korea nuclear weapon program has not been as effective as we had hoped to be. And despite the season of summits, North Korea continues to expand its nuclear weapons arsenal. So we hope our speakers today will be able to enlighten us on the path ahead, incentives, and what needs to be done to really engage in much stronger nuclear weapon in North Korea today.

Let me begin by introducing the panelists, one by one. Professor David Kang is Professor in International Relations, Business, and East Asian Languages and Cultures at the University of Southern California, with appointments in both the School of International Relations, and the Marshall School of Business. He is also the Director of the Korean Studies Institute. And I have to say, he has an infinite list of awarded books. But I want to mention, Professor, your latest one, which is *American Brand Strategy in East Asian Security in the 21st Century*. And again, welcome to the panel.

[00:05:05]

Andrew Kim is a non-resident Fellow with the Korea Project at the Kennedy School Belfer Center. And we welcome Andrew so much for joining the Belfer Center for this panel today. Mr. Kim retired in November, 2018 as a senior intelligence officer for the Central Intelligence Agency, after 28 years in service. His last position was Assistant Director of CIA for the Korea Missions Center. He established the Korea Missions Center in April, 2017, in direct response to

the Presidential initiative to refuse North Korea longstanding threat to global security. And again, welcome.

[00:05:47]

Dr. Jina Kim is a research Fellow and Chief of the North Korean Military Research Division at the Korea Institute for Defense Analyses. She's also an adjunct professor at Yonsei Graduate School of International Studies. Dr. Kim specializes in US-North Korea relations on nuclear nonproliferation issues. She serves on the Advisory Committee for the Blue House National Security Office, the Advisory Committee for the US-ROK Combined Force Command, and the Policy Review Committee for the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Dr. Kim, welcome.

[00:06:18]

Dr. Gary Samore is a senior Fellow with the Korea Project. He is with us, and will remain with us hopefully for a long time. He's also Director of the Crown Center for Middle East Studies and professor of the Practice of Politics at Brandeis University. Dr. Samore was also formerly Executive Director for Research at the Belfer Center. He served for four years at President Obama's White House coordinator for Arms Control and Weapons of Mass Destruction, including as a US Sherpa for the 2010 Security Summit in Washington, D.C. And in 2012, Nuclear Security Summit in Seoul, South Korea. Welcome, Gary.

[00:06:56]

And finally, last but certainly not least, the honorable Susan Thornton is a senior Fellow at the Paul Tsai China Center at Yale University. In 2018 she retired from the State Department after 28 years diplomatic career, focused primarily on East and Central Asia. In leadership role in Washington, she worked on China and Korea policy, including stabilizing relations with Taiwan, the US-China Cyber Agreement, Paris Climate Accord, and led a successful negotiation with Pyongyang and monitoring of the agreed framework on demilitarization. And again, very welcome to have you.

[00:07:37]

All right. So let me begin with a question that I would like to pose to all the panelists, mostly to set the framework for our discussion. And my first question is the following. Now that the season of Presidential summits has ended, what has changed for the better? And what has changed for the worst? Professor Kang, let me begin with you.

[00:08:06]

DAVID KANG: Well, first thanks for having me, Dr. Park, and the security studies. It is a wonderful, wonderful conference. I'm delighted to be here. And I have far less experience than anyone else on this panel in actually negotiating. So perhaps what I can do is provide a little bit of overview to set the stage for those who have far more, far more experience than me. Which is, you know, the Presidential summits, by themselves, in this sort of historical arc of things, were interesting because we had never had summits. But also, without the actual preparation for what we wanted to achieve and how we were going to do it, in many ways, even if you support diplomacy, these were unlikely to have a major impact, because we weren't prepared to seize the opportunity, if you will.

[00:08:57]

And so, as I see us now back to normal negotiating, meaning we will have a lot more lower level interactions, what we're back to is the same kinds of questions that we've had for 20 or 30 years. Are the sanctions not working because they're not being pushed hard enough? Or are they fundamentally unlikely to get North Korea to change their ways? Is North Korea strong and able to survive? Or is it very weak, and about to collapse? And these are the kinds of debates that we have had for 20 years or so.

And I think that the Biden administration is going to have to grapple with where they come down on, is it just not enough pressure? Or do we need a fundamentally new approach? And how strong is North Korea? So I'll stop there for now.

DR. FRANCESCA GIOVANNINI: Mr. Kim, how strong is North Korea? And what has changed for the worst and for the better?

[00:09:55]

ANDREW KIM: Okay. So also, I really appreciate this opportunity to actually hear what other people have their views on North Korea and this very interesting topic. And really appreciate the Belfer Center to have this wonderful session. So with just me taking from the Professor Kang, what he said about, you know, kind of where now we're coming back to sort of where we were in terms of how we usually—you know, your practice of negotiating with North Korea in the working level through working up. Because I guess the last administration [audio breakup] [00:10:38] was part of that team that where we worked— kind of worked sort of down, up to down kind of a system.

[00:10:50]

And, you know, there was a definitely lesson learned from each of different type of negotiation styles. But what I can tell you, based on my experience, when the previous administration, this is going to be very difficult for Biden administration to meet the expectation of what North Korea now have, or they had experienced meeting, have a summit with US President. When that expectation is up, it will be difficult to kind of managing that expectation from this point on. So I think that will be a first challenge that they're going to face.

The other thing, if I can address a little bit on the difference between what we had before and what we're going to be facing in the future, is that over the last 30 years, you know, starting '94 without frameworks, up to six private [?] talks, and up to the recent engagement with North Korea, we tried different styles, so many ways. And we all had lesson learned from different kind of events

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And I think we kind of cycled through a lot different type of negotiation. And I'm not sure, at this point, there will be kind of a very innovative way to deal with the North Korea and negotiation in the future. I think probably, it will be kind of more wise to look at how we did it. There are many different terms. And then probably pick up the sort of what we know, how we do it well before, and then probably mix some of those negotiation styles to moving forward at this point.

So basically, what I'd like to summarize, is that it's going to be very challenging for Biden administration, with dealing with a North Korea who will have a high expectation, based on their last experience. Let me stop there.

DR. FRANCESCA GIOVANNINI: Thank you. Dr. Kim.

[00:13:13]

DR. JINA KIM: Yes. I'm very glad to be part of this meeting today. Thank you very much. While I think North Korea must have lessons learned, the US President alone can change how to negotiate with North Korea. But not what to negotiate, or what to demand from North Korea. Kim Jong Un will understand that Washington will not accept any deal short of comprehensive disarmament of the WMD program. And also, that the long-range missile program will always be an issue.

Although the US approach under President Trump was different in terms of negotiation style, but [00:13:53] is not at all different from CVID. At least we can tell what Chairman Kim wanted to offer on the table, partial lifting of sanction, in exchange of phased implementation of denuclearization. At the [00:14:09] press conference, North Korean diplomats emphasized that the North asked for easing sectoral sanctions, not the entire sanctions measures, including strategy expert control.

[00:14:24]

So in my opinion, opening of the Yongbyon [?] facility, and placing inspectors on the ground, is not really a bad deal. The reason why we are reluctant to accept North Korea's offer is because of, I mean, distrust. We are concerned that North Korea can walk away any time from talks, and restart nuclear activities. But if we have no botnet, in other words, that's alternative to the negotiated agreement, we have to figure out how to keep North Korea's long-term commitment, and how to prevent cheating by increasing transparency, and how to increase our leverage by convincing North Korea of the benefits of a nuclear disarmament deal.

[00:15:11]

What can change under the Biden administration is that North Korea cannot exclude South Korea from negotiations with the US. History shows that North Korea always wanted to have a direct talk with the US while weakening South Korea's position in the whole process, in dealing with North Korea problem. But, the Biden administration is supposed to keep close consultations with the allies. And South Korea is keeping close communications with the North, is not bad at all. When Seoul has leverage on Pyongyang, then Washington can use it.

What changed for the worse is that, in my opinion, North Korea became more cautious than before, in the negotiation. Officials handling Pyongyang's relations with Washington have been demoted amid lack of progress and talks with the US. However, Kim Yong-chol maintained his position in the political bureau, within the party, and is currently having a united front department.

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Considering his background as a head of a delegation from the North to the inter-Korean high level military talks, and Director of the Reconnaissance General Bureau in the military, he will continue to represent a very conservative voice in Pyongyang. So that's my concern.

DR. FRANCESCA GIOVANNINI: Thank you so much, Dr. Kim. Dr. Samore.

[00:16:46]

DR. GARY SAMORE: Thank you, Francesca. It's great to see you and appear on this wonderful panel. So I think the situation is fundamentally unchanged. Kim Jong Un is not willing to give up his nuclear weapons on long-range missile program, at least over the next four years during Biden's first term. But Kim Jong Un might be willing to accept limits, such as extending the current moratorium on nuclear weapons, on long-range missile testing, or even beginning to limit production of fissile material, starting with the Yongbyon facility, as Kim Jong Un proposed to Trump at the 2019 Hanoi Summit.

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And I think it's at least possible that North Korea's economic difficulties, because of COVID and sanctions and natural disasters, might make Kim Jong Un a little bit more willing to accept limits on the program in exchange for sanctions relief and economic assistance, mainly from the ROK. So the only way to find out whether there's an opportunity here to negotiate limits is to actually engage in negotiations, mainly between the US and North Korea. And I hope the Biden administration, once they finish their policy review, I hope they appoint a special envoy from North Korea and offer to resume negotiations based on the Singapore Summit Declaration. And then we'll find out whether Kim Jong Un is willing to accept. And if so, whether those negotiations produce any positive result.

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But in any event, I wouldn't expect there to be really dramatic or quick progress. We know, from experience in all of our previous negotiations with North Korea, that the results are extremely difficult to achieve. It takes a lot of difficult negotiations. And any agreement is, of course, subject to North Korean cheating or renegeing, as they've done so often in the past.

DR. FRANCESCA GIOVANNINI: Thank you. Ms. Thornton.

[00:18:57]

SUSAN THORNTON: Yeah, thank you. Thank you so much, Francesca. It's great to see everyone again for this great event that John is putting on. Really honored to be here among so many Korea nuclear experts. I am not one of those. But I would like to echo what Gary said, which is, I don't think many things have fundamentally changed.

[00:19:17]

What I always look for on the Korea nuclear issue is kind of, what can we learn? We've had, now, almost 30 years at this. And we should have learned a bunch of things. And I think we've – I mean those of us on this panel have probably learned them. Some of the people higher than us may not have learned them.

So let me just go over what I think they are. I mean I think we've learned that we can basically live with the status quo, which is not going to be a comfortable thing for many people to hear. Different people have different levels of comfort with the status quo. That's true. But, if you look around at Japan, China, the US, the ROK, and the DPRK, the main players, you know, they've all shown that they can basically live with the status quo to varying degrees of comfort.

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Second, I think, what we've learned, is that the sanctions don't work. I mean the sanctions were supposed to bring North Korea to its knees, was supposed to make it easy to get a deal that we were going to work toward. And you can poke around on whether they're being implemented or not. But let's remember, you know, under the Trump administration, we put on so many sanctions on the North Korean economy, and they—you know, they have not come sort of begging with their tin cup. It's amazing, actually I wish more people would talk about this.

But that's a big thing that I learned. Because I thought, for sure, when we put those last series of sanctions on, that was going to make a big difference. It really didn't make a big difference. And at that time, we had the Chinese working with us. So I think that's important to look at. I think another thing we've learned is that we cannot do this by ourselves. And Jina Kim, good to see

you here, said rightly that we've got to get over this notion that we can do it unilaterally in the US. We've got to work with the South Korean government. The South Korean government ideally would get—generate a firmer consensus in South Korea around what they want to do. That's always been an issue. But I think working with them is absolutely necessary. And I take, as a good sign, the Biden conversation with President Moon recently. And I think we will do that. So that'll be a good step.

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But others in the region, too, need to be brought in, in a contact group or whatever, just to keep everybody on side so North Korea can't do their usual splitting and working the seams. I think we need to make up our mind that this is a long-term project. I think it was Gary that just said, you know, four years is not going to be enough time to negotiate something with North Korea. And we've got to see that this is a long-term project. And I think it's also important that we see it as a problem that is going to be managed and not necessarily solved.

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So those are the things that, you know, from my approach, which is probably not as close as some of the other people on the panel, I have learned, or at least think I've learned over the last period of time working on this issue.

DR. FRANCESCA GIOVANNINI: Terrific. Thank you so much. I wanted to ask, then, a follow-up question to all the panelists, mostly about the probabilities that North Korea has developed, in fact, in most recent times. And not only, of course, nuclear weapons, but a missile program. I wanted to ask a little bit about whether you think these advancements have changed their bargaining position. For example, even the most latest statement by Kim Jong Un during the Eighth Party Congress in January, announcing they would increase, in fact, their nuclear arsenal. Does it actually matter, at this point? Or more capabilities would not necessarily change the bargaining dynamics? Can I start with you, Susan? And then I'll go in reverse.

[00:23:23]

SUSAN THORNTON: Yeah. I mean, I am not an expert on North Korean weapons. But the thing that strikes me, is that, you know, as their capabilities continue to grow, it makes the US more and more kind of exercised. And it creates leverage for the North Koreans, I think. So I would say that, you know, I mean, it's a difficult thing to deal with in the negotiations, because there are all kinds of other things that, you know, once we start talking to them, and enter into the picture, from various angles—human rights and other things.

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But I think that definitely, the elevation in capabilities, it does give them—I mean as we've seen in previous negotiation, it gives them a bit more leverage. But I'll let others speak to this, because I'm not as expert in this.

DR. FRANCESCA GIOVANNINI: Thank you. Gary.

[00:24:23]

DR. GARY SAMORE: So I think North Korea, like any nuclear arm country, is worried about the risk of its nuclear forces being destroyed in a preemptive attack. So North Korea, like other nuclear countries, will try to develop technologies that give them a more survival but nuclear deterrent. That means moving from liquid fuel to solid fuel missiles, which are easier to move around, and can be launched on much shorter notice. It means developing submarine-launched missiles, which North Korea clearly is seeking to do. And it means developing more accurate missiles and missiles with penetration aids, in order to overcome US missile defense.

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So I think all of the lines of North Korea's strategic nuclear development are exactly what we would expect from a nuclear country that fears a preemptive attack by the United States and its allies. Now North Korea obviously has limited capability. They're not China. They're not Russia. So they can't proceed as quickly, or they can't amass as capable a force as those countries. But

North Korea, I think, will continue to pursue nuclear missile developments that will give them more confidence that their nuclear forces can survive a preemptive attack from the United States and the ROK and Japan.

DR. FRANCESCA GIOVANNINI: And Gary, just a follow-up question. Do you think this will actually impact the bargaining position, then, and the strategy?

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DR. GARY SAMORE: Well, North Korea is not going to give up its nuclear weapons in any event. So again, the best we can do is achieve limits. And you could argue, I mean if you wanted to be an optimist, you could argue that at some point, Kim Jong Un may calculate that he has sufficient nuclear force to have a credible deterrent. And therefore, he would be willing to accept a freeze on further development.

Now, of course, that's a proposition that can only be tested in negotiation. But it's at least possible that North Korea may feel that a couple of dozen nuclear weapons, with a reliable delivery capability, is enough. And that would make it easier for him to accept limits on production of further nuclear weapons or further missile development.

DR. FRANCESCA GIOVANNINI: Thank you. Jina.

[00:26:50]

DR. JINA KIM: Yes. My [00:26:51] is that North Koreans who believe that time is on their side. As announced at the Party Congress, North Korea never stopped the development of this nuclear weapons program, although there has been self-imposed moratorium on testing. But production of fissile material, upgrading infrastructure, diversifying delivery means, import of banned and dual use items from abroad, all of these contributed to the advancement of North Korea's weapons program.

And North Korea keeps disclosing the existence of its advanced weapons programs, advancing day by day. By doing so, North Korea can ask the US to make more negotiating room to avoid a worsening situation caused by no agreement. The North would like to wait and see without seeking a dramatic change by resuming dialogue any time soon. It'll be in North Korea's interest to achieve a shared disruption [?] capabilities.

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Therefore, North Korea has focused on securing second strike [?] capabilities. And it recently warned that it made a significant progress in the ICBM and [00:28:11] project at the Party Congress. That's the message to the US. A message to South Korea is that the North Koreans engage in a tit-for-tat rivalry with their counterpart in the South. Pyongyang has been preparing its nuclear force to undertake various operational missions. KN23, 24, and 25 are all short-range weapons that can give North Korea a hedge against South Korea's modernized conventional forces. And it can be a challenge to South Korea's missile defense system.

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In the long run, it will also be in North Korea's interest to join any kind of arms reduction talk on an equal footing with others. I will be surprised if the US begins arms control negotiations with North Korea any time soon. However, if North Korea begins talks with the South on structural arms control, which is limiting the number of weapon systems on both sides in the future, it'll be in North Korea's interest to prepare bargaining chips, as many as possible, for future trade-offs. So I think we are going to see similar patterns in the following months or years.

DR. FRANCESCA GIOVANNINI: Terrific. Thank you. Andrew.

[00:29:40]

ANDREW KIM: Thank you. So I kind of agree with Dr. Jina Kim on many different points that she made. So going back to sort of lesson learned, I think we're going to have to be in Kim Jong Un's—Chairman Kim Jong Un's head. What did he learn from the last go-round? I think

they came in to negotiate with the Trump administration, with their own mind that they had a lesson learned from way back in Clinton administration, where they got year 2000 with Secretary of State then, Albright visited North Korea, they thought they were almost there to have a normalized relationship with the United States.

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However, after the election in year 2000, when President Bush came in, it became— sort of went back to sort of a square zero. So they realized that, with a different political system, dealing with the United States, they don't have much time. They got to start talking to US administration very early on, to even with the thinking that they probably deal with that administration only four years, let's say, they've got to accomplish what they want to accomplish within that time.

I think that was their lesson learned. And then, coming into Trump administration, they did exactly what they learned from that previous, by reaching out to Trump administration very early on, hoping that they can start the negotiation very kind of where all this starts. Well, second lesson learned, it didn't work again, right. So what are they going to, from this point on, how are they going to deal with this?

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Which is, I think, with the recent development of announcement of their intent to further develop their weapons and all that, is kind of the way they want to preposition themselves to negotiate with the United States, hopefully that US will come to them and agree with action for action, which they wanted that so much, for the last four years. Every time I went and sat down with North Korea, Kim Yong-chol and everybody wanted to have that drilled in our head, say, “Action for action. We don't trust you. We hated each other for 70 years. How can we give up everything because you gave us a blank check or promise that you're going to help us at the end. But how can we trust you? What you want us to do is to non-reversible action. But what you promised is that you can reverse any time you want.”

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So action for action is a very core issues that they want us to agree with. They're going to put on table again, I believe, with the new administration in the United States. In order to—If they're ever going to that path, they're going to have to have a more leverage for action for action, right. So that's why I believe they want to make sure that everybody understand that they have a war capability, and they have a more intent to develop the weapon. So let me put it, stop there.

DR. FRANCESCA GIOVANNINI: Thank you so much. David.

[00:33:10]

DAVID KANG: Yeah. I mean I can't add too much to what's already been said, because I agree with almost all of it. The way that I think about it, is this. It's fairly clear to me that, in the run-up to 2016-2017, Kim Jong Un signaled fairly clearly that, instead of waiting at the bottom of the hill, and trying to negotiate some kind of a nuclear deal or whatever else, they were going to march up the hill, nuclearize, and then offer to come back down the hill if we met some kind of, you know, what they want, what they need.

They were tired of doing the “stop me before I do it.” And they marched up the hill. And we all saw what happened. That's where they are right now. And they may be willing to take a couple steps back down. But they're not going to do it, again, just as Mr. Kim said, just because we sort of offered them some vague things.

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And so, in that sense, I think Kim is in an actually very good position. Whereas five or six years ago, they didn't really have the kind of a nuclear force they have now. They've really gone for it. And now they'll say, “We can move forward. We can take a step back. It's up to you.” And I think that's where we are right now. And I don't think it's going to be very easy for us to simply bluster or make vague promises for them to do anything meaningful. And that's what's up to this administration.

DR. FRANCESCA GIOVANNINI: Thank you. I have a follow-up question to all of you. And some of you have already started trying to address this question. So Gary, you talked about, you know, in agreement to achieve limits. And some other panelists have talked about denuclearization of the [00:34:46] really, but the status quo may be acceptable with some conditionalities. So the question I have for you, now, is really talking about an age of arms control with North Korea. If we are now exiting this prospect for nuclearization, and we are entering into a phase of arms control, how do we structure an arms control negotiation with North Korea? Where do we start? And how do we structure it? Jina, can I start with you? I think you have started sketching out some of the steps. And I think that will be a good start for us.

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DR. JINA KIM: All right. Regarding arms control, [00:35:29] the two Koreas have discussed arms control and confidence-building measures for three decades, since early 1990s. We have almost ten major CBM agreements, including the last one in 2018. But we can never fully implement those agreements. The question is, why. Because we could not solve [00:35:55] which always have been an obstacle to build trust between the two Koreas. Without trust we cannot move from operational to structural arms control.

Therefore, arms control should be linked with denuclearization process anyway. South Korea will not support arms control without denuclearization. And, as I understand, the US Congress will not accept anything short of complete denuclear—nuclear disarmament in North Korea, unless, at the track one level we still support complete denuclearization.

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South Korea can continue perhaps discussing operational arms control, that is regulating the operations, and associated readiness of forces, such as training, exercising, and positioning. We haven't fully discussed, by the way, structural arms control, which limits the size and

composition of the force structure. And besides, there is a tit-for-tat going on between the two Koreas, which is obviously not good for the regional stability, indeed.

The two Koreas agreed to discuss phased arms reduction in 2018. But, at the time, we said, these can happen in accordance with sufficient confidence-building measures. Another problem is, in the post-denuclearization era, perhaps North Korea's reliance on other types of conventional weapons will certainly increase, rather than decrease. Building arms can help North Korea offset any change of the military balance after giving up nuclear capabilities.

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This makes it really hard for the two Koreas to discuss structural arms control. Plus, South Korea's weapons acquisitions, such as reconnaissance and surveillance assets, destroyers, fighter jets, such as F-35, is part of South Korea's defense reform. And transfer of operational control from the US, these are necessary conditions that South Korea should acquire. It becomes an alliance issue, not an inter-Korean issue.

And all these alliance issues should go through closed consultations between the two allies. This is not easy, and will take a lot of time. So in the near future, can we talk about structural arms control? I'm not sure about that.

DR. FRANCESCA GIOVANNINI: Thank you. Excellent point. Gary.

[00:38:42]

DR. GARY SAMORE: So I agree with Jina Kim that it's very important for the US to continue to maintain the ultimate objective of denuclearization, even though that won't take place for many years. If only to relieve pressure on South Korea and Japan to produce their own nuclear weapons, which of course they're both technically capable of doing. So in terms of interim steps, steps toward denuclearization, I think the most important immediate objective for the Biden administration is to prolong the test moratorium. Because the test moratorium has not

only had the effect of imposing some technical limits on North Korea and development of nuclear weapons and ballistic missiles, but also it served to reduce tensions on the Korean Peninsula and the risk of conflict.

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So I think the first focus is on extending the test moratorium. And then secondly, I think it's worth at least trying to achieve limits on production of fissile material, because that's the most effective way to limit the number of nuclear weapons than North Korea has in its arsenal. And we know Kim Jong Un was prepared to, or offered to shut down and dismantle Yongbyon in his meeting with Trump in Hanoi.

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Now dismantling Yongbyon by itself is not—doesn't solve the problem, because North Korea has additional facilities to produce fissile material. But it could be the start of a process that would eventually lead to shutting down and dismantling additional—those other facilities to produce fissile material. What does North Korea want in return? I think they mainly want economic benefits. That partly would take the form of sanctions relief. But I think a lot of it has to take the form of economic cooperation and assistance. And that's where South Korea really has a dominant position, in terms of willingness for private business to be engaged in investment and trade, infrastructure development in North Korea.

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China also has a role. But I think South Korea is probably the most critical. And then finally, I just want to mention that the difficulty in arms control is verification. I mean North Korea poses one of the most difficult challenges, in terms of verification, because so far, they haven't even been willing to acknowledge all of their secret nuclear facilities, much less allow international monitoring and inspection that would be necessary to verify that those facilities are shut down, or they've been dismantled.

And the idea of verifying North Korean number of nuclear weapons, or their ballistic missile inventory, I mean this is so far beyond what has been politically possible, that I think we have to recognize there are real limits to this arms control process, unless North Korea fundamentally changes its attitude toward international verification.

DR. FRANCESCA GIOVANNINI: Thank you, Gary. Let me go to Susan.

[00:42:01]

SUSAN THORNTON: I was listening to Jina and Gary. And I want to say, basically yeah, what they said. I think, you know, keeping denuclearization as the ultimate objective is absolutely essential, you know, for many reasons. Starting with the continuation of the moratorium on exercises, I think is probably obvious, because that's how we've gotten to this very uneasy status quo that we're in now.

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And then, I think that sort of reducing—trying to reduce production of fissile material, going after [00:42:36] that all makes perfect sense. I think, you know, it's going to be a difficult discussion. The arms control piece, I mean I've listened to a lot of people talk about, you know, we need to get rid of denuclearization because they're never going to give up their nuclear weapons. And we need to turn to threat reduction. But I just don't understand what the North Korean motivation would be in that case. You know, I'm not sure that they are going to be—I'm not really understanding why they would basically participate in that, unless it's for some kind of economic benefits. But then you have the same verification problems as Gary said, that you do with the nuclear program.

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So I think that the picture seems, to me, to be pretty clear, as to what we should be trying to do. But the question is, will the politics allow for it? And I think, you know, the politics are in Pyongyang and in Washington probably.

DR. FRANCESCA GIOVANNINI: Thank you. Andrew, it seems to me Susan is bringing up very important point, right, the shift between arms control to threat reduction, and the incentives that DPRK would have in one or the other cases. What were your discussions in North Korea? And how can arms control bases [?] be structured realistically? Based on your information?

[00:44:03]

ANDREW KIM: So arms control basically means, are we ready to recognize North Korea as a nuclear power? Because when we start going into arms control or arms reduction discussion, that means indirectly or directly, we recognize them as a nuclear power, right. So I think that's where the problem is on that, right. So let me clarify the whole kind of steps. So they, North Korean, with very beginning of our negotiation in 2018, they promised, and which they did, they put the moratorium on their nuclear weapon development and, you know, the testing of missiles, you know, ICBM, which they did.

[00:44:56]

And then, the next step should be fissile material reductions, and all that, which is they close the Yongbyon as the part of the bargaining for them. And I think there is a little misunderstanding or misinformation out there, that when Kim Jong Un mentioned about Yongbyon, it was actually it as a Singapore Summit. I was there when he raised that, says—he asked President Trump [00:45:25], “If I give up Yongbyon, would you give up all of the sanctions?” That was the first time he raised that. It's not on the public, but I'll share that with you.

[00:45:39]

So that discussion started from the Singapore. President Trump rightly said, “That's not enough, right. You got to do more.” So anyway, so he put the moratorium, and then he started talking about the Yongbyon, get rid of Yongbyon. And I think Gary mentioned, and everybody agree, that the [00:46:04] is always the stumbling block in any of the negotiation, past negotiation with North Korea. Same thing.

When we ask North Korea that we would like to send some of our technicians to do inspection when they promised that they're going to get rid of their engine testing site in Tongchang-ri [?], and all that, they were absolutely don't want to do that. They didn't want to do that. But then, they finally agreed, said, "Okay, maybe we will entertain that idea. But you cannot bring any IAEA inspectors." There's something about them, just don't want anybody else, right.

[00:46:46]

And we said no. It's not going to be just American. It's going to be international community, right. And so we could not go inch beyond that conversation, because they absolutely didn't want it. So again, verification, very beginning conversation, was stopped. So I think it will be very advantage for this new administration in United States will take it from there. I know that there is some political difference, and there is some reason for the new administration to start all over, or doing some different than what happened in last, you know, three or four years. But I think there's advantage for this administration to take it from where they left. Because you can save a lot of time, right. So that's just my opinion here. Thank you.

DR. FRANCESCA GIOVANNINI: Thank you. David.

[00:47:50]

DAVID KANG: Yeah, no. I think this is really insightful. And the only thing I would add, which I think is a important stumbling block, as Mr. Kim said, if we're going to talk about arms control, we're actually going to deal with North Korea. We have to admit, you know, the elephant in the room or whatever, that they actually are a nuclear power. We refuse to admit it, but that's the case, right. And I would actually say, I think in some ways, a longer effort, or a more enduring effort towards any kind of actual negotiation or arms control of North Korea, requires something else, which is fundamentally almost impossible for us to do, which is to realize that North Korea is a real country, with real people.

[00:48:39]

Like we know South Korea is a real country. It's got a real government. It has people, right. We don't tend to think of North Korea as an actual country. But if we're going to do something about it, we're going to have to actually recognize that, and be prepared to live with a North Korea nuclear or non-nuclear. And that is a massive transition from the expectation that, once we get their nuclear weapons, somehow everything will be done, and it will just sort of disappear. It's probably a little more realistic to say, we've lived with this country for almost 70 years. We've probably got to live with it a little bit longer. But that is really hard to do, both, I think, conceptually, and politically.

DR. FRANCESCA GIOVANNINI: David, I wanted to add a follow-up question for you. When you say we just don't consider them a real country and real people, given your status, your scholarship, the time you spend in each day, what drives you to say this?

[00:49:39]

DAVID KANG: Well, what I mean is, that it's easy for us to see that South Korea is a legitimate existing country. But we tend to hold to—And, you know, this happens a lot. You go to briefings, you talk to people. It's like it's not a country. It's one dictator and, you know, 25 million slaves. And it's going to collapse, and blah, blah, blah, blah, blah. It's very conceptually hard for us to realize, there's a country there. People, probably like in many countries, like some things about their country and don't like some things about their country as well.

And I think conceptually as well, one of the reasons much of what we expect to happen doesn't, is because we don't take it as a real country. So we keep expecting it's going to fall apart, or the sanctions aren't going to work, and they'll all come caving down. And we realize that it is way more stable as a country than we think.

[00:50:31]

One small point about that. I haven't done this, but I would encourage any grad student who's listening, go to the Foreign Policy Failed States Index that they've been doing for 15 or 20 years. I suspect North Korea is always at the bottom of that list. But it's still around, and it's still thumbing its nose at the United States. And I think that conceptualization makes it hard for us to say, "We may have to live with this country for a while." It's probably not going to go away.

DR. FRANCESCA GIOVANNINI: Thank you. Now before we take many numerous questions from the audience, I'm already seeing, I want to ask one last question if I can. And that involves China. We all know that previous US administrations have pressured China to turn the pressure on North Korea to come to the negotiating table. So I wonder if you can tell us a little bit about how you have seen this played out, and how will this play out in the future? Will China accept pressure to put pressure on North Korea to come to the table? And if so, at what cost? Let me start with Gary.

[00:51:52]

DR. GARY SAMORE: Well, Ambassador Thornton is really the expert on this. But I don't expect much from China. I mean it's true that the US and China share an interest in avoiding conflict on the Korean Peninsula. So I think in principle, there's a common interest in negotiating. I think the Chinese have decided, a long time ago, that denuclearization is not longer a practical objective. And, as Susan said, the Chinese are prepared to live with the current situation.

[00:52:21]

And I think the interesting question is, whether the overall context of US-China relations has made it even more difficult for the US and China to cooperate. But in my experience, the Chinese may occasionally get angry at North Korea, and support sanctions when North Korea's testing ballistic missiles and nuclear weapons. Certainly, they were willing to support very strong UN Security Council sanctions. But when North Korea is behaving itself, I think the Chinese attitude on sanctions becomes pretty—they don't really enforce the sanctions very seriously. And

I doubt we can expect China to support the kind of pressure that might actually raise questions about stability or survival of North Korea.

DR. FRANCESCA GIOVANNINI: Susan.

[00:53:16]

SUSAN THORNTON: Yeah. I spent a lot of time on this. And I think basically, that maximum pressure is over. So whether you are happy about that or sad about that, I think that's the reality. And because to have maximum pressure, you need not just China, you need a lot of other players in the world. But you definitely need China. And we did have maximum pressure at one point. And then we kind of lost it.

And I don't think we're ever going to get it back. Because there was a period when the Chinese had pretty poor relations, actually, with North Korea, and with Kim Jong Un. There was quite a period there that coincided with a lot of the fire and fury time period. And we were able to use that to get the sanctions put in place. And then the Chinese actually did a lot of work to try to implement them. But I don't think we're going to be back there, both because the North Korea-China relationship has improved, and of course, as Gary mentions, the US-China relationship has really gone downhill.

[00:54:23]

And I think, you know, we shouldn't be too pessimistic about it. I mean the Chinese are happy with the status quo, as long as it's like stable, and there's a more or less stable North Korea that's not going to create problems for them if they don't—if they don't have nuclear tests, and if they're not collapsing and sending refugees to China, and if China can trade with them, I think that they can live with that. They'd probably be happy to see a better, more developed North Korea, more stable North Korea. But they probably don't think they can get that. And so you know, they can live with the status quo.

[00:55:00]

What they're not going to be happy about, is if we try to engineer something around, you know, behind their back, then you could see where they could work to not throw a spanner in the works, but certainly to be not helpful and possibly even, you know, a little bit undermining whatever we're trying to do. So, I mean, that's why I would support some kind of contact group. Not that relies too much on them for help, but at least keeps them feeling like they're participating, so they don't, you know, get coming in the backdoor or something.

But that would be what I would expect in the near term. If we, you know, see some kind of unexpected improvement in US-China relations, you know, maybe they could be convinced to do something productive in the way of whatever project or whatever negotiation we set up. But I think for now, certainly, it's not probably a realistic place to call prospective for cooperation between the two.

DR. FRANCESCA GIOVANNINI: And Susan, for the operation, do you ever see China taking the lead like in a six-party talk? Is it feasible in the future that China will decide to actually have even a bigger leading role in this? Or is out of the question?

[00:56:24]

SUSAN THORNTON: I would be skeptical of China taking a leading role. What I've seen them do is be a pretty proactive intermediary between parties that were not on the same page in a negotiation, to try to get to a goal, in the six-party process, in particular, where they were sort of the host. And that's how they saw their job. But I can't really see them. They think that this is, you know, this is a US kind of centered problem. And so they probably wouldn't think that they would be able to solve it, even if they wanted to take a leading role and do something about it.

DR. FRANCESCA GIOVANNINI: Thank you. David.

[00:57:07]

DAVID KANG: Yeah. I'm going to make a slight—I agree with everything they said. I don't think China has any interest in really pushing forward. I'm going to make one point more about South Korea in this case, which is just that we often sort of view countries in the region potentially as having to take sides between US and China. I'm not sure how much of the D.C.-- you know, how much of the D.C. policy-making establishment has gone that way towards the China threat.

But we want to cause, you know, countries to choose, choose us and not China. And sometimes we get mad at them when they don't. We often view US as the provider of security and China as a potential economic partner of these countries in East Asia. And the reason that South Korea is never going to make that choice, is that China is not just an economic partner of South Korea, it's central to its security, as we're finding. No matter what, we want a solution on the Korean Peninsula that Chinese have to be onboard, as Ms. Thornton pointed out.

[00:58:16]

Maximum pressure is over if they're not involved. And the South Koreans know that. And so I don't see China taking a very forward-leaning role on this. I think they are done with the American pressure. But, no matter what, the South Koreans have to navigate that relationship. And I think they see great value in it. It's not simply that they have to. They have to have good relations with China in order to manage their security relationship. And that's how I see this sort of playing out.

DR. FRANCESCA GIOVANNINI: Thank you. Andrew.

[00:58:50]

ANDREW KIM: So my point of—I guess the experience dealing with China on these issues, I learned from my own experience that I think we had folks in the US government in the past that they are pressuring China, will eventually will work, pressuring—turn and pressuring North Korea will eventually work. I always kind of thought that that will not work, because despite

what sometime people think that China may feel that the North Korea is their liability, but I believe that China think the United States is the biggest liability for them.

[00:59:44]

So I don't think for the interest of national security and with whatever, I don't believe that China is going to ever work with the US in a full honest manner to solve the North Korea. And also, as Susan mentioned about the China possibility leading all as kind of six [01:00:10] format, I don't think it really matters what China think, what kind of role they can play. I believe that if North Korea doesn't recognize China as the leading role on their own North Korean issues, I don't think it's going to work. And I believe North Korea will not going to agree to any China taking any leading role for resolving their own North Korea issues at all.

[01:00:43]

So I think, you know, having some kind of expectation what China will do for, you know, helping solving these issues, is probably we should not have that. The other thing is, about the maximum pressure. I agree with all the comments people made about the—It is [01:01:04]. And I know that some point during the whole campaign, that China and Russia kind of agreed with our proposal, and the UN sanctions. And I was actually amazed watching that they actually did, because I thought it's going to be always, you know, challenging to convince them at the UN format to agree with us.

[01:01:31]

I think the sanction itself—and I think someone mentioned very early on the session, that we put so many sanctions on China. And I think Susan mentioned that, that they don't work. And I agree. We put sanctions against North Korea over the years of so many different sanctions over the years. The reason it didn't work is that—I'm going to be a little bit harsh on this. But if you are trying to tell someone who doesn't have anything, say that we're not going to give you any more, or you cannot have any more, it doesn't really affecting them, right.

So the sanctions that we've been putting on to North Korea is against North Korea as a country. I think maximum pressure work a little bit in the beginning, because we kind of focused on certain sectors. And we focused on certain privilege class people who believe that they have something in their possession. And when you try to take this certain thing away from those people, they are the one who feel most hurt.

[01:02:34]

And I think that was the kind of a way we designed. For instance, you know, North Korea, the people sent their people out, the workers out overseas, making money. All the money goes into certain, you know, back channel to North Korea government. But when North Korean wants to go work in overseas, they have to bribe somebody to get that job. And when we put on the sanction to send those workers back to North Korea, who actually get most hurt is the people who are taking those kickbacks, right. Because those income is drying now, right.

[01:03:11]

So I think if we design a sanction that will target a certain sector and certain class of people in North Korea, it will work. But I think what happened up to this point was that we just sanctioned the whole economy. And that's what didn't work. So let me stop there.

DR. FRANCESCA GIOVANNINI: Fantastic. Thank you. Jina.

[01:03:38]

DR. JINA KIM: Yes, thank you. In my opinion, China's leverage on the DPRK is very significant. But we should not overestimate it. For the time being, North Korea's strategy aligns with China. But having reliance on China is not desirable. And it certainly contradicts with North Korea's political philosophy, *juche*, self-reliance and self-sufficiency. As we all agree, China prefers regional stability. When it has to focus on especially responding to Washington's tough policy, it is likely to prefer stability in North Korea. And that means that it will not push North Korea hard enough to cause regional instability.

[01:04:24]

China will support multilateral cooperation, as long as such form of interaction does not target a specific country, though. But China will also—knows living with a nuclear armed North Korea is not desirable. There are areas of competition and areas of cooperation between the US and China. And I believe denuclearization is one of the issues, that the US and China can cooperate. China's interest is directly challenged by nuclear proliferation and nuclear safety issues that may be caused by the nuclear program in North Korea.

[01:05:02]

China's interest is joining [01:05:04] peace treaty, by the way, which can change US military posture in this region one way or another. In order to be there, that kind of stage, China should support denuclearization. And for the purpose of slowing down the pace of North Korea's weapons proliferation, I think China's role is crucial, because, well, it is responsible for the export of fewer use items to North Korea. This is happening, not just because Beijing condones it, but because probably North Korea is very good at getting around the international monitoring.

By creating and closing down shell companies, disguising activities, and hiding traces behind, North Korea is challenging the existing nonproliferation and expert regime. If North Korea expects that the UN Security Council will be divided on taking additional measures to pressure North Korea, then it will be emboldened to attempt military actions. It is also important in that regard to get China onboard, in sending a unified message that anything that can destabilize the regional peace can be met by strong actions, by the UN.

[01:06:28]

My final thought on the sanctions is, regarding sanctions that list one list on strategy export seem to work, although still there is a loophole in these sanctions regime. The trade volumes significantly dropped in 2018 and 2019, which made a few countries major exporters of goods that can be used for the WMD program in North Korea. Indeed, China is the number one

exporter of controlled and dual use items to North Korea. If increasing China's national capability to control all different kinds of transactions is the problem, then we have to work on that in cooperation.

DR. FRANCESCA GIOVANNINI: Thank you very much to the panelist, to this extraordinary amount of knowledge and expertise you have all been willing to share. I want to turn now to some of the questions that have floated in my chat. So clearly, that is a show that you have all touched upon very, very important issues that our attendees want to know more about. I want to pick on one comment that Eric has made on the chat. He said that many of you have said the DPRK will come to the table when it is ready, and form a position of strength. Sam also said the DPRK has learned that he has to start early given the four-year US Presidential terms. Do you think the Biden administration is starting from a mistaken assumption when we hear statements that it will use sanctions to force the DPRK back to the negotiating table, maybe DPRK is already ready to come to the table. Who wants to take this question? Gary.

[01:08:29]

DR. GARY SAMORE: So, you know, the Biden administration is still in the process of doing their policy review. So they don't have a clear approach yet for North Korea. But the people that are in the administration working on Asia, whether it's Kurt Campbell at the National Security Council, or Song [?] Kim, or Jim Park at the State Department, they're very experienced. And some of them, of course, have been directly engaged in nuclear negotiations with North Korea, over many years.

[01:09:04]

So I don't think they have any illusions about the prospects for achieving denuclearization, in reality. Although of course, as I said, the US will continue to say that that's our long-term objective. So I really—And I also think the Biden administration has an overriding interest in keeping things on the Korean Peninsula quiet. Because Biden has focused so much on domestic problems, dealing with COVID, and the economy, and social justice issues, and even in foreign

policy. North Korea is not very high on the agenda, compared to China or trying to recover the nuclear deal with Iran.

[01:09:48]

So I think there's a very strong overwhelming interest on the part of the Biden administration in offering to negotiate with North Korea. And the big question is whether Kim Jong Un accepts. I mean we know, after the failure of the Hanoi Summit, the Trump administration tried over and over again, under Steve Biegun, to start negotiations among high level officials and experts, to try to negotiate an agreement. And Pyongyang was not interested.

So to me, and I can't predict what Kim Jong Un will do, but the problem in negotiations is not in Washington, it's in Pyongyang. And the only point I made is that, given North Korea's economic difficulties with COVID, because of COVID, and sanctions, and natural disasters, Kim Jong Un might be a little bit more disposed towards seeking negotiations, in order to get sanctions relief and economic assistance. And the way to test that proposition is to offer to negotiate and find out whether North Korea accepts. And if so, whether it's possible to come to an agreement on some limited measures.

DR. FRANCESCA GIOVANNINI: Jina.

[01:11:06]

DR. JINA KIM: Yes. Regarding North Korea's position on talks, my takeaway from the Eighth Party Congress in January is that, while North Korea values talks with the US, between Singapore [?] and Hanoi, Secretary [audio breakup] [01:11:23] that North Korea makes it clear that it does commitment in denuclearization. And people in the Blue House National Security Office, who have conversations with leadership in Pyongyang, also believe that there's still a chance. Now we are in 2021, will North Korea change their minds? Not sure yet.

[01:11:40]

But one thing is sure. At the Congress, North Korea did not mention the possibility of a dialogue. But, it's that North Korea could demonstrate its dignity and status in the world by holding a summit and declaring the establishment of a new relations between North Korea and the US. It described the summit as a monumental achievement in the history of world politics. That's what they said.

Besides, North Korea views the US as the primary obstacle to the development of the socialistic country. In other words, North Korea knows that it cannot complete the construction of socialism without solving the problems between North Korea and the US. And North Korea sent a very carefully calculated message at this time. It toned down its rhetoric a little bit, compared to the past. And the Biden administration can try to see if North Korea is still interested in denuclearization talks. Well obviously, North Korea's new policy introduced this year is people first policy. That means that North Korea should seek an exit for the improvement of its economy.

[01:12:58]

DR. FRANCESCA GIOVANNINI: Thank you. I want to connect to this with a question about revenue generating activities. Andrew, I'm looking at you. But I think others, like Susan, will probably be asked next to address this question. A couple of our attendees have asked, how important to North Korea's nuclear program is illicit revenue generation, such as through cyber crime and smuggling?

ANDREW KIM: So can you repeat? Sorry. Can you repeat the last question?

DR. FRANCESCA GIOVANNINI: Yes. How important to North Korea nuclear program is illicit revenue generation from cyber crime and smuggling?

[01:13:48]

ANDREW KIM: So we've seen it enough, in even just the open source, that there was a lot of cyber activity, illegal cyber activities by the North Korea. And we saw even some huge revenue generated operations they had over the years. However, we haven't seen—maybe now different. But at least when I was in government, we haven't seen any specific, we'll say, evidence that the money or, you know, that they illegally collected through those kind of activities, went into their nuclear or missile development program.

We assume, because of such a large amount of funding requires to build their missile, that we assumed that some of those money that they illicit are going into that program. But do we have a specific evidence? I cannot pinpoint that at all.

DR. FRANCESCA GIOVANNINI: Thank you. Susan, you have been involved in negotiating US-China cyber agreements. What is your view about how cyber crime plays into North Korea nuclear missions? And is there something that we are in a position of doing on this?

[01:15:23]

SUSAN THORNTON: Well the cyber agreement between the US and China had to do with not, you know, using state assets to steal commercial secrets for commercial gain. So that's not exactly the same thing that has been, you know, at issue with North Korea. I mean it's basically just straight-out hacking and cyber crime on behalf of the state coffers, not to increase competitiveness of a private sector company or a company.

So I think—I mean obviously, there's so little that we know, actually, about what goes on inside North Korea, how they fund things, where they get their money, how their economy can possibly still be working, et cetera. And, you know, somebody has made the point that the North Koreans themselves closed the border because of COVID. So even though China was their lifeline, they cut their own lifeline in order to shut down the country for COVID, to keep transmission of the pandemic from coming in.

[01:16:29]

So, you know, they are not without ability to survive privation [?], let's put it that way. So if they can gain resources through, you know, these criminal activities, certainly smuggling goes way back in the case of North Korea. And as, I think, Jina mentioned, they're quite expert at hiding and evading and disguising subterfuge, that kind of thing. So I think all of these funds are going to probably be important in some way, for keeping the country going, including the military. And I think, you know, keeping the military going back in the '90s, when we had the famine going on, was quite a major undertaking for the state. And it probably still is. So I think we have to look at trying to stop these things. But I don't think there's going to be an agreement that's going to do it. You're just going to have to keep working on countering hacking.

DR. FRANCESCA GIOVANNINI: Yep. I want to go back, actually, to what Will Tobey said. And you just mentioned it, Susan. Will Tobey in the chat commented that North Korea themselves created maximum pressure with their post-COVID restriction, which affected the closed border. So the question is, if that did not change policy, it is hard to see how near sanctions will. Do the panelists agree? Susan, let's start with you, since you have the floor.

[01:18:01]

SUSAN THORNTON: Yeah. I mean I feel like we've been testing this proposition on sanctions with North Korea for the last 30 years. And we've ratcheted it up. We've tried targeting luxury good items that would be important to the elites. We've tried cutting, you know, every source of energy. We've tried cutting seafood and food products. And they went through the famine in the '90s.

I just really have been amazed at the way that they have been able to adjust and adapt. And I just think it's really not going to be in the cards that somehow, sanctions are going to bring them to their knees. Now maybe putting on additional sanctions gives you more cards to play in a negotiating game, as they build up weapons systems, we build up layers of sanctions, and then we can sort of reciprocally take them off each slice. But, you know, as far as having, you know,

bringing down the regime, or increasing their motivation to come to the negotiating table, it hasn't—it just hasn't worked that way.

DR. FRANCESCA GIOVANNINI: Yep. David.

[01:19:18]

DAVID KANG: Yeah, no. I mean I would—I would basically agree with that. It's—At the risk of being a little flippant, we say pressure hasn't worked. What should we do? More pressure! And again, if they lived through the famine in the '90s, they can survive this stuff. It's very clear, right, that's not the way. Someone I saw in the question and answer, and I'll sort of move over to that, like what would it be like to deal with North Korea as a real country? Means realizing that we have to live with them. North Korea is not a problem to be solved. It's not like we're going to do some combination of sanctions and pressure, and then problem solved. They're just going to disappear. They're going to be here.

[01:19:57]

So much of this stuff that we say over and over again, “We can't negotiate with them. We can't have diplomatic relations with them,” that gives them what they want. We still refuse to treat them as a country. And in many ways, we are going to have to live with them. And so this is the type of stuff. They crave recognition, et cetera. It's a country that we are having problems treating as a real country. And I think we're going to have to live with North Korea, no matter what, for the foreseeable future. That's not a [simultaneous conversation]

DR. FRANCESCA GIOVANNINI: There's a specific follow-up question for you in the chat, that says, to Dr. Kang's comments earlier, how might then the US and others go about treating North Korea as a real state? How would this look like?

[01:20:42]

DAVID KANG: Very simply, what I would say, is something like, we actually realize we have to have diplomatic relations. And I always use the Soviet Union as the example. We really didn't like the Soviet Union. But we had relations with them, and we talked with them, precisely to keep the issues under control, and figure out how to manage it. That we refused to do that with North Korea, I think, is a major failing on the part of a sort of general American approach to North Korea. I think we'd be better off if we were consistently talking more often.

DR. FRANCESCA GIOVANNINI: I want to Gary, yep.

[01:21:22]

DR. GARY SAMORE: So I just want—I mean I agree with David that establishing diplomatic relations would be a useful thing to do. I just want to point out, the last time we tried that, it was North Korea that balked. I mean after the 1994 agreed framework, that included a provision to establish the Zone Office. And, at the end of the day, the North Koreans were not willing to allow the US to have a liaison office in Pyongyang with the free use of the diplomatic pouch.

So I think we should offer it. I think it's an important thing to establish. And maybe Kim Jong Un, unlike his father, is more willing to have some Americans living in Pyongyang. But so far, the main obstacle to actually executing that agreement has been North Korea, not Washington.

DR. FRANCESCA GIOVANNINI: I have two more follow-up questions, but I want to go to Jina one second, to ask you a question about sanctions. What is the view on South Korea of why sanctions have not worked as we expected?

[01:22:26]

DR. JINA KIM: Well, because of lots of loopholes in sanctions regime. And North Korea relies on its neighbors, Russia and China, especially China. And we talked about the COVID-19 impact on North Korea as a society. Well this year—No, last year, in 2020, the trade between North Korea and China dropped by 80 percent, almost 80 percent. That means a lot because of

the self-imposed sanctions restrictions, decided by the leadership, in dealing with the COVID situation.

[01:23:01]

But that caused some price change in the market. And major markets were closed, because there are not many to sell, because they cannot import any goods from China. In the long run, it will affect North Korea's economy, which heavily rely on service sector and manufacturing sector. So I think in the long run, economic challenge is of great concern for the leadership in Pyongyang. And for example, participants to the Party Congress returned home without any gifts, which was very unusual. It creates a lot of problems with the system to manage its leader elite relations. And if North Korea, which is, by the way, [01:23:50] the situation, it can do so. But, well, clock is ticking, actually.

DR. FRANCESCA GIOVANNINI: Thank you. I want to close with two big framing questions. And I consider them extremely important. One asked, what would be the implications of recognizing North Korea as a nuclear arms state? How would that affect international nonproliferation efforts? Who wants to take a first stab at this? Gary, I'm going to call on you.

[01:24:34]

DR. GARY SAMORE: All right. So I think the first thing to recognize is that the word “recognition” has two different meanings in the English language. Of course, we know that North Korea has nuclear weapons. They've had nuclear weapons for at least 15 years. So we recognize that North Korea has nuclear weapons. And everybody in the US government knows that. But another meaning of “recognition” is to accept North Korea as a nuclear weapons state, which means that we give up on the long-term objective of achieving disarmament.

And I think that would be a grave mistake. I think it would put political pressure on South Korea and Japan to reconsider their own nuclear position. And we know, in South Korea in particular, there are a number of politicians and ordinary people who think South Korea should have

nuclear weapons in order to balance the north, and because they can't really rely on the United States to defend them.

[01:25:38]

So my concern is that if we do anything that shows that we've given up on the long-term objective of nuclear disarmament, and we accept and recognize North Korea as a nuclear weapons state, I'm very concerned that that would increase the likelihood that South Korea and then Japan would also develop nuclear weapons, which I think would really fundamentally change the security architecture of East Asia.

DR. FRANCESCA GIOVANNINI: I'll take volunteers in the order in which you want to speak. I think this is a really important question. Andrew.

[01:26:24]

ANDREW KIM: Yeah, I absolutely agree with Gary about the recognition of North Korea will cause regional issues in the Northeast Asia. Also, once we start having that expectation to negotiate with North Korea, that will be the baseline, I think the US is going to have a tremendous problem with dealing with North Korea in the future. That's why I'm going back to, although it was very kind of a general terms, the agreement at the Singapore, at least Kim Jong Un came out and saying that he has intent to denuclearize, okay.

If we can pick it up from there, yes, it's a very general terms, and have no specific timeline how to go about doing it, yeah, there is no such kind of detailed plan. But since he made that promise, or he made that statement, we can start from there. And then, if we start it from that point, you know, that point, then we don't really need to go into arms reductions or arms control conversation, right. So that's sort of my point.

[01:27:56]

SUSAN THORNTON: Yeah, I would say that you don't need to do that in order to make—I mean in order to have a very fruitful, theoretically at least, a very fruitful conversation and progression in the entire kind of relationships among Northeast Asian players, South and North Korea, the US and North Korea, possibly Japan and North Korea. You can get a lot done. You don't have to give recognition and acceptance of this state of affairs. And I think also, it just would be sort of politically untenable, also, in the US to—I mean realistically speaking, to walk away from that.

DR. FRANCESCA GIOVANNINI: Yep. Could I then finish with one last question. And two of our attendees have asked, what preconditions should the US attach the resumption of future negotiations? Should the US continue to spearhead negotiations itself? Or take a more multilateral approach? And if so, which countries should play the role of key partners? Let me go to David, and then ask all of you maybe for some closing remarks on that.

[01:29:19]

DAVID KANG: Yeah. I will only point out one thing, which almost everybody here has better knowledge than me. And the question for preconditions, right, would be, who actually went big in Singapore—sorry, Vietnam, in Hanoi, right? My understanding was that there was a small deal that was being negotiated on both sides. It would be the precursor to going bigger. And that somebody decided to go for it all, and the other side walked away.

I have heard conflicting arguments about who said, “Do everything now or we walk.” If it was the US that went big, it's on us to figure out a way to go back to going small first. If it's on North Korea, then the preconditions for moving forward are actually going small. But I honestly do not have any of the inside information that almost all of you do. But to me, that's the real question of where we start.

DR. FRANCESCA GIOVANNINI: Andrew, you already gave some of the answer. But it would be interesting to see, what are the preconditions? And should the US delegate to other countries part of this negotiation?

[01:30:35]

ANDREW KIM: So [01:30:36] very challenging for this coming administration, as well as when we placed this issue with the North Korea. First of all, I mean I think everybody understands this. Dealing with the North Koreans, especially I think Gary also has a tremendous experience dealing with them, is communicating with them in very nuanced ways, you know, kind of style with the North Korea. It takes a lot of long time to really filter through what they really want, right. So there's going to be a time-consuming process dealing with North Korea.

[01:31:14]

Precondition in this, in order to avoid that type of a process, I think precondition will be—I would like to see this administration pick it up from where it left in Singapore. And then, I think Professor Kang mentioned about what really happened in Vietnam and all that. The reason I earlier mentioned about this whole Yongbyon on the table, not as a formally, but informally, by Kim Jong Un at the Singapore, was the kind of significant step.

Then, year later, they show up in Hanoi, and they haven't added anything. I think that was the big kind of problem. Because after we said in Singapore, even informal conversation, we said, “Yongbyon is not enough. You've got to do more, right.” We gave them a message. And a year later, they came to Vietnam, Hanoi, and they haven't changed anything. They put that Yongbyon only on the table. That was why we walked away, right. There was no real progress on their side.

[01:32:44]

Well, I guess it's so—You know, our side was waiting for that additional things that they—we were expecting them to put on the table. So my point is, the whole year was kind of spent the time in order for this new administration to produce such time, I think would be best if they can

pick it up from Hanoi and saying, “Okay, this is what the base agreement. Can we take it from here and move forward? If you want action for action, let's talk about that. How can we do this, right? What will be important for you, first? And then, what will be important for us?” I think that will be a kind of way to start. And I think it will reduce a lot of kind of time upfront.

[01:33:33]

SUSAN THORNTON: Yeah, I agree that the preconditions should be that both sides recommit to the Singapore Summit declaration. I mean the thing you have to understand is the North Koreans are always in the driver's seat. They're always in control. And they're more patient than we are. And if we, you know, if we end up trying to chase them, then we won't get the result we want. So even though nobody likes strategic patience, and people say, “Oh, you know, they're just going to keep building their weapons program,”

I think you can sort of say, “Recommit to Singapore. And then we're going to sit down and have a discussion based on that.” But don't chase them. I mean, you know, they may make it difficult for us to be patient, too. They have quite a lot of practice at that. But I think, you know, they're in the driver's seat. And you have to recognize that and just wait until they're ready.

DR. FRANCESCA GIOVANNINI: Thank you. Jina, are they in the driving seat? And shall we commit from Singapore?

[01:34:42]

DR. JINA KIM: I think I agree with Susan Thornton. North Korea will say they already have done for talks, moratorium on testing, that it will ask the US to give cross-funding [?] measures. Without struggling with additional preconditions, we can start talks to discuss step-by-step approach, starting from preventing the future nuclear armament, and then moving onto destroying existing nuclear stockpile.

There should be a tailored road map for this that both the US and North Korea can agree with. And doing so, we have to understand condition-based sanctions lifting should be one of the things that we should work on. And we can, before doing so, we can work on subdividing lots of actions to be met. And then, watch whether or not North Korea is meeting the requirement and gives them rewards afterwards.

DR. FRANCESCA GIOVANNINI: Terrific. Gary, you have the last word.

[01:35:42]

DR. GARY SAMORE: Well, I agree with the other panelists. I think the Biden administration should offer to resume nuclear negotiations on the basis of the Singapore Summit, without precondition. And I hope they appoint a senior special envoy for North Korea, just as Steve Biegun was in the Trump administration. But I will say this. If North Korea resumes testing, if North Korea breaks the moratorium, then I think it's going to be very difficult politically for the Biden administration to engage in any negotiations. Instead, the automatic reaction will be more sanctions. So again, I think it's really up to Kim Jong Un, whether he wants to have a nuclear negotiation or not.

[01:36:27]

DR. FRANCESCA GIOVANNINI: So on behalf of the Korea Project, I want to thank you immensely for having spent one hour and a half with us debating a very difficult and complex, wicked problem as we would fight it. What I think is really incredible is, in spite of, and during crisis, and the ups and downs of negotiations, we have a very vibrant community of scholars and experts like yourself, who continue to engage in this issue. That speaks volume in my view. Many would have already, you know, given up, and thought this is an impractical [?] problem that has no solution. And I think this is incredible to see the commitment you have towards this issue, towards the country, and towards global peace and security. So I really, really want to thank you. This has been a terrific panel. John, over to you. And thank you again for offering me this opportunity to moderate.

[01:37:18]

DR. JOHN PARK: Well, thank you. And thank you to our panelists. It was a rich discussion with a lot of nuances on this enduring challenge of how to negotiate with a nuclear North Korea. My thanks, again, to all the panelists.

We'll now move to the wrap-up session for day two. Today's panel speakers provided great insights, looking at North Korea and the North Korean leader through the books of three leading authors, and the panel that we just heard, where we brought together the practitioners and leading scholars, looking at and dealing with this perennial challenge.

[01:37:49]

The North Korean regime's persistent development of nuclear armed, intercontinental missiles, is changing the international security landscape with second-third order effects. And we'll get into some of those in tomorrow's panels.

During the third and final panel of our summit, we'll continue exploring the traditional security issues. Panel 1 will focus on advancing the US-ROK alliance in 2020s. Victoria Kim, the Seoul correspondent for the *Los Angeles Times*, will be moderating this panel. And it will feature Dr. Victor Cha, Abraham Denmark, Ambassador Kathleen Stephens, Professor Hyon Joo Yoo, and former Foreign Minister Yoon Young-kwan.

[01:38:29]

Our keynote speaker will be Sydney Seiler, who is the National Intelligence Officer for North Korea at the National Intelligence Council, the Office of the National—The Director of National Intelligence.

Panel two will examine what's new and what's old in deterring a nuclear North Korea. The *New York Times'* David Sanger will be moderating an outstanding panel feature Professor Graham

Allison, General Vincent Brooks, Dr. Oriana Skylar Mastro, Dr. Sue Mi Terry, and William Tobey.

[01:38:59]

Thanks very much for joining today. And we look forward to seeing you for day three of the Summit tomorrow.

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