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**DR. JOHN PARK:** Welcome to the final day of the second Harvard Korean Security Summit. My name is John Park, Director of the Korea Project at the Belfer Center for Science and International Affairs. Today we'll be continuing our exploration of traditional security issues as they play out on the Korean Peninsula. We have an excellent roster of speakers and moderators.

Here is our game plan for today. In Panel 1 we'll focus on advancing the US-ROK Alliance in the 2020s. We'll then have the keynote address by Syd Seiler, National Intelligence Officer for North Korea. And wrap up with Panel 2, Examining What's Old and What's New in Deterring a Nuclear North Korea.

[00:02:14]

Our first panel today we'll examine US-ROK alliance dynamics with seasoned alliance managers and policy experts. Victoria Kim will be moderating Panel 1 and introducing our speakers. Victoria is the Seoul correspondent for the *Los Angeles Times*. She has previously written for the Associated Press out of South Korea and West Africa, as well as for the *Financial Times* in New York. She [audio breakup] [00:02:37] in Seoul and graduated from Harvard University with a degree in history. Thanks so much for joining us today. Over to you, Victoria.

### **PANEL 1: ADVANCING THE US-ROK ALLIANCE IN THE 2020s**

[00:02:47]

**VICTORIA KIM:** Good afternoon to those of you joining us in the US. And a pre-dawn hello from Seoul. As John was very kind to mention, I am Victoria Kim. I'm the Seoul correspondent for the *Los Angeles Times*. And it's my great pleasure to be moderating this panel on the US-Republic of Korea Alliance in the 2020s, a topic to which I wouldn't be surprised if there are quite a few folks tuning in here from South Korea, despite the hour, given how top-of-mind this topic is on this side of the Pacific in the early days of the Biden administration.

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It's certainly a timely moment to examine the alliance, the challenges it faces, and its role within the broader US strategy in the region, as we have emerged from eventful four years for the alliance on the Korean Peninsula, and head into what looks to be a tumultuous 2020s ahead for the region and for the global order.

The read-up from President Biden's phone call with President Moon Jae-in just last week reiterated what's been the longstanding phrase on the alliance, that the US-ROK alliance is a linchpin for peace and prosperity in Northeast Asia. To tackle this heady topic for the next hour and change, it's hard to imagine a more distinguished panel than the one I have the pleasure of introducing, with deep expertise and experience in and around the alliance on both the US and South Korea.

[00:04:08]

Just as a little bit of an announcement, Dr. Victor Cha, who is, I believe, included in the agenda, apparently won't be able to join us, due to a last-minute conflict. But that is no shortage of expertise that we still have, to get a robust conversation going on this topic. So to go ahead with introductions, I will try my best to do justice to them while keeping things brief.

[00:04:36]

First we have Mr. Abraham Denmark, who is the Director of the Asia Program for the Wilson Center and former Deputy Assistant Secretary of Defense for Asian and Pacific Affairs, and whose book, just out last year, is the *U.S. Strategy in the Asian Century: Empowering Allies and Partners*. So welcome, Mr. Denmark.

[00:04:57]

We also have joining us Ambassador Kathleen Stephens, who is President and CEO of the Korea Economic Institute and a career diplomat who served as the first—who is the former US

Ambassador to the ROK from 2008 to 2011. And she was the first woman and first Korean speaker to speak in that position. So welcome, Ambassador Stephens.

[00:05:20]

We also have joining us Professor Hyon Joo Yoo, who is the Associate Professor in the Department of Political Science at Trinity University, whose research specializes in the US alliance, East Asian Security, China's foreign policy, Korean politics, and international relations theory.

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Last but not least, we have Professor Yoon Young-kwan, who is senior visiting scholar at the Korea Project at Harvard's Belfer Center. And also, the former Minister of Foreign Affairs for the Republic of Korea from 2003 to 2004. And he is also professor emeritus in political science and international relations at Seoul National University.

So to get us started, and set the stage a little bit, I'd like to pose a bit of a broad question to each of the panelists, that perhaps you could go around addressing. President Biden, just days ago, gave his first foreign policy speech. And as he had during the campaign, he stressed the importance of alliance and multilateralism. And in their conversation last week, President Biden and President Moon Jae-in discussed the situation in Burma, the pandemic, climate change, and all of this is taking place within the unspoken, yet unmistakable context of China's growing influence in the region.

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I would like for our panelists to start by discussing what role that you see the US-Republic of Korea alliance playing in the emerging foreign policy plan of the Biden administration in these early days. Perhaps Mr. Denmark, you could get us started by discussing this.

[00:07:03]

**ABRAHAM DENMARK:** Sure. And thank you very much, Victoria, for moderating. Thank you, John Park, and the Belfer Center for inviting me to participate in this. It's a real honor for me to join you today. I think the Biden administration, like any new administration, is undergoing a policy review. I think it's important to note that the administration has already signaled that that review will be conducted in tandem with, and in consultation with our Korean allies, which I think is off to a good start. There's a lot of questions about how our alliance is going to proceed in the first few months of the new administration.

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But at this point, I think we're facing a lot of questions, and a lot of uncertainties about where the relationship is going, and where the alliance is going, about how we're going to jointly tackle North Korea, how we're both going to talk about, think about China, and more broadly, how the United States and Korea are going to be able to work together on broader regional issues that the United States is tackling, be it with the quad, being in a regional trade and investment issues, democracy, you mentioned the Presidents discussing Myanmar.

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So I actually think that one of the questions presenting to the Biden administration is the question you just presented to us. What is the role of the alliance in American foreign policy, especially in the Indo-Pacific? Is there a role? What is the role for the alliance beyond the Korean Peninsula? And what issues are we going to be able to tackle with our Korean allies, be it on China, be it on human rights, be it on trade, that's going to be effective and in the interest of both sides?

And I expect we're going to be spending the next two hours digging into these subjects, so I don't want to get too far ahead of us. But I think some of these questions about China, about military posture, about trade, beyond just the specific issues within the alliance, like OPCON and whatnot, I think are going to be critical issues, not only for the health and strength of the alliance, but also on the future direction of American strategy in the broader Indo-Pacific.

**VICTORIA KIM:** Ambassador Stephens, perhaps we could go to you next, to sort of set the stage in what the US-ROK alliance, what role it may be able to play within the larger regional context.

[00:09:30]

**KATHLEEN STEPHENS:** Right. Thank you, Victoria. And thank you for your great reporting from Seoul. I really enjoy it. You know, I have been thinking about—trying to think, and I hope you and our participants from Seoul can help me with this. But I've been thinking, you know, how does this look from Seoul? You mentioned some of the conversations that have taken place, the early reporting coming out on President Biden's foreign policy objectives.

And, you know, if we look back to the previous administration, North Korea loomed large. That's where there was a lot of attention, as you well know as a reporter. But in terms of, I guess what I'd call the ROK-US alliance relationship, and relationship itself, Trump himself was obsessed with two things, it seemed to me. And one was the trade deficit, and the sense that trade agreements were unfair. This wasn't just the ROK, but it certainly influenced—it affected the ROK and the relationship. And the second, of course, was burden-sharing, and the notion that aspects of military security alliances, having troops deployed overseas, was a money loser for the United States, and seemed very transactional terms.

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Now we've moved to a Biden administration we were just seeing the speech and the initial phone calls, he's already laid out in these broad terms, that when we talk about the importance of reinvigorating alliances, not just with the ROK, but with other allies in the region, and indeed, in the world, and multilateralism, really, I think the Biden administration is going to be looking at this policy review, looking at its policies, through the lens of, how does Korea interact with the rest of the region, and the rest of the world?

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And I think in that, there are some areas for both, you know, opportunity and challenge. I would say the opportunity is, of course, that Korea, South Korea is highly capable, not only in terms of some of its military capabilities, but I'm talking more about its soft power, smart power, and hard power, whether we're talking—and in areas that are priorities for the Biden administration, global health, climate change the rules of the road for technology, cyber. I think these are all kinds of areas where South Korea has a track record of playing as a middle power, often punching above its weight, and working in concert with the United States. And I think there will be great expectations from the Biden administration that it will be able to do so.

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But at the same time, of course, there are challenges for South Korea. And they come in particular – and it's really complicated set of relationships in the region. Managing, as Abe has already mentioned, China's role in the region, and pressures from China, trying to improve a US—sorry, a South Korea-Japan relationship, which is probably more tense and in worse shape than it has been in some decades, perhaps since normalization.

And also, again, as Abe has already kind of alluded to, figuring out how it balances all that to fit into a broader set of regional relationships with the US coming back to a more, if you like, traditional role of leadership, but leadership based not only on its hard power, but also on values, and a return of the issue of values to the relationship, whether it means democracy promotion, or human rights, whether it's human rights in Burma or in North Korea, a set of challenges, I think, for South Korea, as, indeed, for the United States. And then, the final thing, of course, is where does North Korea fit into that? But I know that we've already devoted some attention to that, and I'm sure we'll return to it.

**VICTORIA KIM:** Thank you for that. Professor, maybe you could start helping filling in some of the Korean perspectives on this, about with the Biden administration's focus on multilateralism and alliances, what does the view look like from Seoul, in what role the US-ROK

relationship plays in the larger region, in the context of the complex set of relations that Ambassador Stephens just laid out?

[00:13:24]

**HYON JOO YOO:** Thank you, Victoria, for moderating this panel, and introduction. And thank John Park for inviting me to this panel. And I think it's going to be an excellent discussion for the next couple of hours. As the previous presenters have mentioned, I also believe that it is too early to think about what the Biden administration's strategy will exactly look like. But as he has mentioned before about this foreign policy, the America is back strategy. America is back is the words that the Biden administration has emphasized.

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So what do you mean by America is back? You have to figure it out. And he connected America is back with the strengthening alliance with the US allies. And the US allies, as the ROK, the South Korea, is a part of the US alliance partner. It means that maybe related to the number of US military forces in the Korean Peninsula, and how this number is going to be retained, and if Biden administration attempts to maintain or somehow restore the alliance relationship with South Korea, then it means the number of the US forces is going to be remained as is.

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Although we have to wait and see for the new global posture review to come out. But given the fact that the Biden administration promised to stop the withdrawal of the US forces in Germany, I think that it's possible for the US to maintain the number of US forces in Korea as is. And also, it is somehow, from the South Korean perspective, whether or not the United States is going to restore suspended or reduced military exercises in the future with South Korea, which is going to be the major issue for the South Korean government.

As you have seen before, the President Moon Jae-in has mentioned that he is willing to talk about the US military exercises with North Korea and partner. And with the Biden

administration emphasizing the role of the alliances, and strengthening the alliances, meaning that it is possible that he would try to restore the military exercises again, which can be a challenge for the South Korean government.

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And in terms of the multilateralism, we still have to wait and see. And how this ROK and the US alliances play out in a multilateral effort, it can play a lot of role. The Biden administration probably want to make the US alliance function in places, not only in the Korean Peninsula, but also beyond the Korean Peninsula. And perhaps beyond the Indo-Pacific region, where the United States might be able to obtain cooperation from South Korea. So tasks might include a humanitarian assistance, the Myanmar, the crisis in Myanmar, the cybersecurity, which is really important for South Korea and the US alliance in the future, and under the Biden administration, too.

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And also, the global pandemic and viruses, confronting global pandemic and virus and environmental issues. The restore Democratic values as part of the Democratic alliances. So, in many places, the South Korea play, and the US-ROK alliances can play, in line with the multilateral efforts on the major tasks, and many tasks beyond the Asian region.

And, I think it is important to think about this strategic role of the US-ROK alliance can play beyond the Korean Peninsula, because under the combination of the leadership of the Trump—President Trump and President Moon Jae-in, we were able to see that there was a lack of discussions about the strategic role of the US-ROK alliances. We focused too much on how to deter North Korea, or how to use the alliance in order to create a peace within the Korean Peninsula.

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So it's a very important time for South Korea, both South Korea and the United States to think about the strategic role that the South Korea-US alliance can play, beyond the Korean Peninsula, and beyond the Asia-Pacific region. And also, it is important project for the future alliance, and perhaps we have to think about the redesigning the rationality or rationale of the alliances, by linking the US-South Korea alliance along with the multilateral efforts.

**VICTORIA KIM:** Thank you for those comments. Given what professor you just mentioned about the potential of the role the alliance could play beyond the Korean Peninsula, and Minister Yoon, perhaps we could bring you in here to discuss what you're hearing from perspectives from Seoul and how this alliance is being viewed, and particularly its role within the Biden administration's focus on multilateralism. Minister Yoon, I think you're still muted.

[00:19:26]

**YOUNG-KWAN-YOON:** Thank you, Victoria. And I'm very happy to join this panel. I mean regarding the US-ROK alliance, I was pleased to hear that the Biden team emphasized the importance of alliance and democracy and multilateralism. And I thought that America is back when I heard that.

And let me explain about the role of US-ROK alliance in the context of Biden administration's global policy. As we know, the US-ROK alliance started as a military alliance, which focused on deterring North Korean military threat, but has expanded its scope and functions in the recent decades. Now it is also an economic alliance, value alliance, also global alliance.

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In terms of military alliance, our primary goal is deterring North Korean's threats, which have become much more complicated because of their development of nuclear missile programs. And I think the challenge for us, the United States and South Korea, is continuing to try hard—I mean to denuclearize North Korea. And it is important for both allies to develop a common strategy of

denuclearizing North Korea. I think the sooner both government officials begin to talk on this matter, when developing a common strategy of the denuclearization of North Korea, the better.

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In terms of economic alliance, KORUS has been working as effective legal framework and the guideline for bilateral trade relations. I think both allies should expand on their perspective beyond traditional economic sectors to the new and important areas, such as cyber, space, fourth industrial revolution, energy, et cetera.

In terms of value alliance, I think South Korea government needs to cooperate with the Biden administration closely. After all, South Korea— South Korean Constitution defines Republic of Korea as a Democratic Republic. Democracy is the state identity of South Korea in that sense. And it is natural to cooperate closely with the Biden administration, when it emphasizes the importance of democracy in its foreign policy. And I wish South Korea join the Summit for Democracy, which the Biden team is planning to hold, and democracy 10 projects, et cetera. Finally, in terms of global alliance, I think there are many areas where both allies can cooperate closely in reserving the global challenges, such as pandemic and climate changes, or I mean, developmental, et cetera, et cetera. I stop there.

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**VICTORIA KIM:** Thank you for those remarks. I am hoping that we could focus in a little bit on one of the aspects of the alliance, and that is the military one, to discuss what is a very political hot button issue always here in South Korea, and particularly now, with the end of President Moon's term approaching. And it's an issue that gets a lot of ink here in the press. And that's the question of the Wartime Operation Control transfer to the ROK military from the US. And this is something that many of you here, or some of you here in South Korea, as a critical stage, in the evolution of the alliance and South Korea's role in it. And President Biden in his foreign policy speech did mention that the administration will be undergoing a global posture review of the US military footprint.

I guess, starting with the US side of things, and perhaps Mr. Denmark you could get us started on this, how important in your view is this transfer process to the nature of the alliance? And what should alliance managers be vigilant about in navigating this process and the discourse surrounding it?

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**ABRAHAM DENMARK:** That's a terrific question. And I do think that OPCON is clearly going to be an important issue in the alliance, and something that both sides are going to have to tackle, hopefully as partners, not in a more adversarial way. I do think there's a few notes I would highlight on this issue. First is, I think it's important to note that the Biden administration has already emphasized that that OPCON transition should remain conditions-based, and shouldn't be subject to a timeline, a specific timeline, but rather the ability to meet mutually agreed-upon conditions. Not all of those, as I understand it, have been made public.

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But we have seen, just in the last four years, how an effort to demonstrate the FOC, the full operational capability was delayed, in part because of COVID. That, to me, is a bit of a concerning sign, not just because of COVID, I understand the piece of that. But our militaries need to remain ready, despite COVID, despite these challenges that come up. And the fact that we weren't able to demonstrate FOC because of—and partly because of the coronavirus, I think, says a statement about that we still have progress to me on achieving the conditions that both sides agreed to. So I would encourage both sides to look at those conditions, and try and make sure that we're ready, if and when it's time to move ahead on that.

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The other piece I mentioned, you mentioned military posture. And this to me is all part of a piece, right, that we have an ongoing negotiations about host nation support. The US is conducting a global posture review. And we're engaging on these discussions about OPCON, all

of which, I think, speaks to the role of the alliance, the scope of the alliance, and the various roles and missions that both sides are going to play.

And I expect we'll talk about host nation support later. But I did want to mention, since you mentioned US military posture, that there's a key question here, that both sides need to ask. But I think is especially salient as the US looks at broader posture, especially considering that China is probably the most significant military challenge in the region. Is Korea sui generis, in terms of military posture? Do we need to think about US military posture on the Peninsula, about our alliance posture, as divorced from, separated from the broader Indo-Pacific? Or is it part of a broader whole?

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And, of course, this brings up concerns that we've faced as allies in the past, as Secretary Rumsfeld talking about strategic flexibility. And I think a lot of these issues are going to come up again, as the US is looking to build a more resilient and effective force posture related to the PLA, in an increasingly tight and constrained budget environment that I think is necessarily going to force questions about US posture on the Korean Peninsula. And my hope is that we're going to be able to address those as allies, in part of the broader conversation about what we're doing on the Peninsula, who's doing what, and how we're going to be able to cross the finish line when it comes to things like OPCON and Korea getting the kinds of capabilities that they need.

**VICTORIA KIM:** Minister Yoon, perhaps we could go to you, to bring in the Korean perspective on this. Mr. Denmark mentioned the conditions-based transfer. There seems to be a lot of anxiety for a timeline here on the South Korea end of things. What are you hearing from the South Korean—What do you sense in the South Korean opinion on this OPCON transfer process? And I guess President Moon's initial aim to have something happen during his term?

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**YOUNG-KWAN-YOON:** Yes, I think it is important to carefully manage wartime OPCON transfer. For example, how effective is the current CFC command system in deterring the North Korean threat and defending peace on the Korean Peninsula, should definitely be an important criteria. And I think this should be—this should be an important criteria. And that was why there was agreement between two allies, was stipulating three conditions for the OPCON transfer during the 46<sup>th</sup> SCM in 2014.

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And the South Korean governments, in the last 15 years, have been operating its defense capabilities and made major progress to meet these conditions. And in my view, they are more prepared to take wartime operational control than any time before. According to statistics, the South Korean government has spent almost \$20 billion dollars for military procurement from US defense companies between 2012 and 2016. However, I think this is also a political issue, in the sense that political leader of the top leaders in both countries is the most important factor.

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Whether South Korea has met the three conditions set in 2014, seem to be—seems to depend on what kind of political judgment top leaders make in both the United States and South Korea. I personally think that operational control transfer is a matter of sovereignty. And the current state of US hoarding of wartime OPCON is abnormal, in the sense that it was—If a war breaks out, South Korea will provide overwhelming measure of fighting forces. But they should be placed under the US operational control.

And this is different from other cases of US having operational control. For example, in Afghanistan. There, the US provided most of the fighting forces. Furthermore, the US operational control was temporary, while it is semi-permanent in the South Korean case. Japan has robust military cooperation with the United States, without being under its operational control.

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So I hope, I mean politically there is, in both countries, can speed up the transfer process, and both the United States and South Korea can strengthen their alliance relationship on the basis of more equal footing as soon as possible. Thank you.

**VICTORIA KIM:** Thank you for those remarks. Professor Yoo, perhaps we could go to you, as a political scientist, to put this into, I guess, what Minister Yoon has said, that this being more of a matter of political judgment and political will. What, I guess perhaps starting with the South Korean end of things, what political context do you see surrounding this issue? And what do you think that indicates about the state of the alliance?

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**HYON JOO YOO:** First of all, it is not a new thing that both the United States and South Korea wants the wartime OPCON transfer. And I would like to, in terms of what you just mentioned, and Victoria has just asked, I would like to focus on how internal politics of South Korea has shaped the discussions about the wartime OPCON transfer. The OPCON transfer discussions with South Korea is tied with the nationalistic aspiration around with the population.

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As Minister Yoon has mentioned it's a military sovereignty with the successful Democratic transformation and increased economic and military capability, South Korea people believe that the country is ready to exercise the wartime OPCON and assume the responsibility to protect the country without relying on the United States. This type of nationalistic view or viewpoint, that OPCON means military sovereignty, is coincided with the current Moon Jae-in administration's notion of responsible defense, which in Korean terms, [KOREAN 00:35:02], the term designating the core defense policy.

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And the Moon administration tries to complete the OPCON transfer by the end of his term in May, 2022, although the elites in the Moon administration understands the conditions should be met in order to complete the transfer But the timing is also important. So within a year, so if you think about May, 2022, within a year, the ROK has to pass the assessment to complete the transformation.

It might be too tight for the ROK government to pass assessment within a year, because as previous presenters mentioned, that the FOC and FMC have been delayed. But the Korean government is likely to endorse the nationalistic discourse about the self-reliance, and take advantage of this nationalistic viewpoint, in order to gather momentum, and push forward with the plan within the specific time-frame

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And if the new administration, the new Biden administration, in order to emphasize the conditions more, and that will create the disagreement between the South Korea and the United States. And the secondly, the often lacking in discussions in South Korea, is the costs engendered by the wartime OPCON transfer. The first cost is related with an effort to meet the conditions for the OPCON transfer. So the ROK government has to increase the military expenditure by obtaining proper military procurements, to pass assessment, and to complete the transfer of the wartime operation control.

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So it is important for the South Korean government to clarify the cost to the public during the process of OPCON transfer and explain the increased spending. But there is a lack of discussion about such costs from the South Korean government side. And also, the second cost, or secondly, the cost is also expected for the South Korean government, related with the relative freedom that the US forces in Korea would have in carrying out the operations beyond the Korean Peninsula, with the OPCON transfer.

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The cost for the ROK is related with a few possibilities. The first possibility is that it would get involved in the unexpected conflicts when the US forces in Korea might get involved in other regions, with the freedom of—with the freedom after the OPCON transfer. And second possibility is the US might not be able to provide enough support immediately after the crisis in the Korean Peninsula. And particularly from South Korea's conservative side, they are worried about this possibility. So they might want the South Korean government to obtain the increased commitment from the United States in the process of the OPCON transfer that makes sure that United States will give and provide a help when the crisis occurs. So I'm going to stop here and give the mic to other person.

**VICTORIA KIM:** Thank you, Professor Yoo. It's interesting that you mentioned some of the nationalistic aspirations that may be linked to the discourse around OPCON transfer here on the South Korean end of things. Ambassador Stephens, perhaps, could you address how that type of—those types of anxieties, or the discussions of timeline reverberate on the American side?

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**KATHLEEN STEPHENS:** Yeah. What I was thinking about, honestly, as I listened to these three very excellent presentations, is one, how complicated this issue is, and two, how it plays so differently in the United States, and in Korea. And I think there are a number of reasons for that. And I think that's kind of what I'd like to talk about.

One, and I think we've seen this in the comments made, symbolic is not quite the right word, but that symbolic, sort of political, historical weight in Korea is, I think, much, much greater. It is, as has been alluded to today, taken by, you know, much of Korean society, and successive Korean leaders, as kind of a barometer or a measure of Korean sovereignty and autonomy.

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And also, of getting it. But on the other side of, if the US is no longer having OPCON, there is another side that sort of thinks this is going to be a symbol of lessened American commitment or engagement in creating greater risk. So I think it goes to a very almost existential part of South Korea's strategic dilemmas, of autonomy and the need for the strong alliance and the security guarantee in alliance, and the insecurity, sometimes, about American commitment.

And you were a major in history, but I'm not going to subject everybody to a lot of history. But I think there are historical reasons for it. It's going all the way back to 1953, and the establishment of the alliance, and the aftermath of the armistice, to Vietnam and the US withdrawal from Vietnam, and Nixon's Asia policy, the establishment of the CFC came out of some of these same anxieties.

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And all the way into the 1980s. I mean I actually was a political officer at the American Embassy for six years in the 1980s. And at that time, not being a security specialist, I was doing domestic politics in Korea, I had to learn—I still remember them, but the Korean words for OPCON, wartime OPCON, and peacetime OPCON, because I was engaged in conversations every day, literally every day, with Koreans, mostly young Koreans, who blamed the United States—or, let's say, didn't understand, and wanted explanations of why the United States, if it had operational control, at that time, in peacetime, as well as wartime, why didn't it stop things like coup d'états in Guangzhou?

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So it's a very loaded issue. And I have to say, when I went back as ambassador, now a decade ago, when I departed in 2011, I was given a lovely lacquer plaque that said it came from ten million grateful Koreans who signed a petition to stop OPCON transfer. And this was, again, the wartime. So we have been at this for a long, long time.

And I think that's important for Americans to understand, that this has so much more salience as a political issue in ministry than it does, I think, in the United States, where I think it is seen more in the security experts, practical implications, looking at some of the broader strategic issues. And indeed, there are very, very important strategic and security and practical issues in this. And I think they've been—they've been well laid out by each of the speakers.

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And I would just reinforce that by saying, I think they do include—Just asking ourselves, and I don't speak as a security expert wonk. I mean are we properly organized to face an evolving, increasing threat from North Korea and from its nuclear missile program? I think there need to be clear answers to that, that also the general public could understand. Because again, this is not just a specialist issue, this is a political issue, particularly in Korea.

And I would also add to that, what lessons have we drawn from earlier experiences, in trying to coordinate our response to provocations, attacks from North Korea, whether in the West Sea, or the DMZ, or elsewhere, in the '60s, more recently, and with the sinking of the Cheonan, and the shelling of Yeonpyeong, where yes, I mean those are political and diplomatic consultations, the decisions that take place.

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But how does that work in this still imperfect armistice world? So it's a very specialized discussion. But there's a very broad political context, too, that I think sometimes is not spoken about in, at least to my mind, clear enough language for people to understand what the stakes are here, and how we go about it. So, you know, where do I end up? I understand what we've all ended up saying, because of this, it really—it really depends. That's what conditions mean. It depends on what the conditions are. And the conditions are changing by the broader changing and strategic environment of the region, too.

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So I guess you asked me a question about the American position. I guess I've heard a lot more about OPCON transfer in my years in Korea than I have in my years in the United States. And I think there just has to be an awareness, as we go into this, that you know, there is a lot of detail in it, but there's also a broad picture that we need to try to understand and manage together.

**VICTORIA KIM:** Thank you for that perspective And I wonder where some of those young Koreans who put those questions to you in the '80s are doing now, and what decisions they're making.

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**KATHLEEN STEPHENS:** Well I know where some of them are. [laughter]

**VICTORIA KIM:** That dovetails nicely into what I was hoping to ask next, which is to zoom out a little bit and think beyond election cycles, which is often difficult to do. And I'm hoping that we can go from this more granular issue to perhaps a longer view of what you all see as being the challenges facing the alliance in the 2020s, and perhaps looking at the decade as a whole, and going beyond the end of the Presidency here in South Korea, and also even the Biden administration. What challenges you see ahead for this period in the alliance? What are some of the new challenges and some of the old ones, that will crop up again?

Ambassador Stephens, since you were so kind enough to offer a long-range view, perhaps you could get us started talking a little bit in the forward looking, but a bit further in the long-term of what you see as the primary challenges facing the alliance.

[00:45:57]

**KATHLEEN STEPHENS:** Well, I mean, as a former Ambassador to the Republic of Korea, I am sort of Constitutionally bound to be an optimist, and say that the alliance will continue to broaden, and deepen, and become more resilient. And I actually believe that. But I do think that both of our countries face very serious challenges. And you know, I like the title that, although I

didn't quite understand it, of this three-day summit that the Belfer Center has organized, of Korea as an Oracle of Global Trends.

[00:46:27]

And I think that, as I understand the conference, that's a reference to the fact that some of the security challenges that Korea faces, indeed are ones that are kind of presaged broader security and other challenges that the world sometimes faces. I used to, and I guess I still do call Korea sometimes, South Korea itself is kind of a canary in a coalmine, or I used to say like a bird in Yongsan Tunnel 1 [?] to judge the level of survivability.

But I think there's a lot of, a lot of stresses on our democratic societies, on our modern economies. And I don't have to, I guess, elaborate too much on this, as we pull out of 2020, and look to the rest of the decade. But I think there's a lot of those stresses where we've seen South Korea's, you know, response, both positive and less positive, really be kind of a harbinger of, I think, some of the things that the rest of the world, including the United States, have to think about.

[00:47:20]

So I guess I would say one thing that's going to really shape our relationship in the years going forward, is to the degree which both of our countries can address some of the very serious, but I do believe not insurmountable domestic issues we face. And I know that's a little beyond what we usually talk about at these conferences. But it is the strength and the resilience of our democratic institutions, the degree to which we can organize an economic recovery, that addresses deepening inequality in both countries, which is leading, I believe, to greater populism, alienation by young people. I see all these things. I mean you tell me, Victoria, you report them in South Korea. I see them here too.

[00:47:58]

And also, the existential challenges of our age, climate change, I think South Korea is kind of way ahead, at least rhetorically, and I think in many ways in action, in terms of a broad political consensus about the existential nature of the climate change. And of course, adjusting and shaping our relationship with China, and what that's going to look like. So I think those are all issues that could either drive us—I mean put the alliance in some trouble, if we're unable to deal with some of these domestic things ourselves, as well as find common global action and alliance action on them.

[00:48:32]

But it can also bring us closer together. And of course, that's what I hope it will do, because I think, not because our societies are so similar, but indeed, because we've had such different experience, but because we do share. I think common vision and common values, broadly, broadly speaking, are there going to be differences? If we are going to accommodate some of those differences, I think that's where the alliance is going to really become, as was already mentioned by Minister Yoon and others, you know, certainly a security alliance, but those elements of—these are all tied up, security and economy really aren't different anymore, right, in many, many ways. A new definition of what an alliance is.

**VICTORIA KIM:** Thank you for getting us started, thinking in the longer term across the decade. Mr. Denmark perhaps you could speak on top of that to discuss what you see as the primary challenges ahead for the US-ROK alliance in the next decade or so.

[00:49:38]

**ABRAHAM DENMARK:** Ambassador Stephens gave a great overview, and took a lot of the points I was planning to make. So I'll have to dig a few more bullet points deeper than initially planned. I think that talking about redefining the alliance, and really broadening its mission to be more than just military, but seeing it as a broader platform for cooperation across all elements of national power, be it in international institutions, on trade and investment, on building

international norms and capabilities and cooperation. And areas that Ambassador Lippert would call the new frontiers of space and cyberspace, I think all of that is exactly right.

[00:50:18]

As a—Ambassador Stephens mentioned, as a diplomat, she's not domestic I think as a person who used to work in the Pentagon, that makes me a bit of a pessimist, or at least a planner for the worst outcomes. So some of the other points that I would mention, areas of the alliance that I think are going to be a bit challenging beyond what Ambassador Stephens mentioned. First is adapting our alliance and especially in security around, to the changing threat from the DPRK. That we have seen, in the last four years alone, intense versions of both confrontation and engagement. And we've ended up back where we started, in a lot of ways, in terms of North Korea still with nuclear weapons, building increasingly sophisticated and capable ballistic missiles, investing more in its military and representing a more dire threat, both to the United States and to our allies.

[00:51:13]

So we're going to have to deal with that. And the threat that it's posing is going to change, that we're going to have to deal with efforts by Pyongyang to split the alliance, to drive a wedge between us, but also what political scientists refer to as the stability/instability paradox, that if Pyongyang feels increasingly confident in its nuclear deterrent, then that could actually encourage some in North Korea to believe that they can act even more irresponsibly and belligerently than they have in the past, believing that no one would dare retaliate in a way that could generate a nuclear response. So we're going to have to deal with those issues as allies. And I think that's going to challenge our military planners, to make sure that we retain the ability to fight [00:51:58] and to deter conflict.

[00:52:01]

The last piece I mentioned, in terms of a challenge for alliance, is China. That China is the top security challenge for the United States. President Biden, today, visited the Pentagon, and

announced a China-focused policy review to be run by my friend, and I'm sure many of your friends, Ely Ratner, to take a broad look at US policy from the Pentagon, US defense policy towards China. And I think that's going to necessarily impact the alliance with South Korea.

And I think it's going to force us to have some difficult conversations in areas that make our Korean friends a bit anxious. But if this is going to be the top security challenge for the United States, if this is going to be the top foreign policy for the United States, foreign policy challenge for the United States, for the coming decade, it's going to be an issue that our alliance is going to have to talk about and deal with, even if that makes our Korean friends uncomfortable in some ways.

[00:53:03]

It doesn't mean that we need Korea to come out publicly, in an anti-China bloc. It doesn't mean that we need to reorient our alliance to counter China. But it does mean that we share a lot of interests. We share a lot of values. And at times, those run afoul, run against the interest of the Chinese communist party. And I think one of the key pieces for the United States in that is to understand where our Korean friends are coming from, and develop mechanisms and capabilities to try to help them look at these decisions and potentially make some decisions that Beijing would oppose.

[00:53:41]

For example, we saw Korea take a significant economic hit after the THAAD decision. And I think we could be better planned, along with our allies and partners, to help countries mitigate their vulnerability to Chinese economic coercion, so that Beijing does not get a veto over decisions to secure ourselves and to secure our allies.

[00:54:05]

And how we deal with China, managing different—differing opinions, developing an allied approach that deals with the interests and concerns of both sides, I think is going to be a

significant challenge for both of us. It's going to require deft diplomacy from both Washington and Seoul. But I think in the coming decade, that's going to be one of the biggest challenges that we face. And I think both sides have the expertise. And I think the commitment to the strength of the alliance, to find a way ahead on such a difficult issue.

**DR. JOHN PARK:** Abe, thanks very much for that comment. If I could just make a quick announcement, Victoria. Dr. Cha has joined the panel. Thank you.

[00:54:47]

**VICTORIA KIM:** Wonderful. Thank you for joining us, Dr. Cha. Minister Yoon, I would love for you to jump in here to talk about this question of China, the challenge of China over the next decade. And Mr. Denmark mentioned that this is a conversation that may make some people on the South Korean end of things uncomfortable. What's your perspective as to what South Korea's perspective is in China's role, or the China backdrop of the US-ROK alliance over the next decade?

[00:55:22]

**YOUNG-KWAN-YOON:** Okay, thank you. Before I mention about the China factor, I would like to briefly mention about the necessity to operate our alliances too. Our alliance was created almost seven decades ago. And we are living in two or three different worlds nowadays. So I think both allies should discuss and try to develop a common vision for the future of the Korean Peninsula, and how to—I mean operate the alliance structure. And if we can, I mean, have that kind of common vision, then we would be able to reduce any possibility or misperception or policy mismatches between two allies on various pending issues.

[00:56:22]

Also, by operating our alliance system, I think we will be able to develop a common strategy to denuclearize North Korea, and building a permanent piece of the Korean Peninsula. So far, in my view, we didn't have this kind of common strategy between two allies. On the China factor, as

Dr. Denmark has already, I mean, succinctly explained, this is probably the most important challenge for our alliance, because there are some perception gaps, I mean on this issue, between two allies.

Koreans, nowadays, feel very uncomfortable about expanding this covert military target of the US-ROK alliance beyond North Korea, for quite understandable reason. As Dr. Denmark already mentioned, China brought economic sanctions to South Korea when the US forces in Korea deployed THAAD in 2017. As we know, THAAD system is a purely defensive missile system. And it was targeting only North Korea.

[00:58:09]

And that kind of Chinese response shows how China will respond if the US-ROK alliance targets China militarily under Korean Peninsula. And there are many other historical examples, when Korean people suffered a lot, because of military confrontation of big powers on the Korean Peninsula, beginning from Japanese invasion of Korean Peninsula in 1592, up to division and colonization and the Korean War, all these measurable competitions related to disaster to Korean people.

[00:59:04]

So I think how to narrow the gap between Korean perception on this matter and the Biden administration's—I mean strategy toward China, that should be an important challenge we are facing, in terms of strengthening our alliance in the future. In other words, Korean people, I think, want the US—I mean pay a close attention to the unique geopolitical situation of South Korea, when it thinks about, I mean, alliance strategy. Many people, including myself, here, recommend the US to adopt a kind of customized alliance strategy, instead of applying a one-size-fits-all kind of alliance strategy to Republic of Korea. Thank you.

**VICTORIA KIM:** Professor Yoo, I would also love your thoughts on the China conversation in the US-ROK alliance context.

[01:00:30]

**HYON JOO YOO:** I agree with what Ambassador Stephens and Minister Yoon and Mr. Denmark have mentioned. And interestingly, I also found a more common in what Mr. Denmark has mentioned. I wanted to address two major issues that can create a major challenges to the nature of the ROK-US alliances. The first is the North Korea's enhanced missile and nuclear capability. And we understand that there's sophisticated military capability North Korea has developed, create major issues for not only the United States, but also Korea, and the region in general.

[01:01:22]

And there is a growing number of people that express concerns. And because the North Korea's nuclear capacity can make the US deterrence in the Peninsula more difficult, the United States obviously has the capability to carry out the threat and create prohibitive costs to North Korea, if North Korea ever launches attack and the deterrence fails.

But the problem of the deterrence is related to US capability, I mean the credibility, whether or not the United States would be willing to carry out the threats, and use nuclear retaliation against North Korea, is unclear, given the fact that North Korea's ICBM's, with the nuclear warheads, place the major cities of the United States, the west coast, within range. So it is not clear if the United States is willing to give up its major cities to protect the South Korea.

[01:02:22]

And the problem is also related to the South Korea— North Korea's development of nuclear weapons to achieve the second strike capability. And as we have mentioned, as we have seen in January this year, that North Korea, Kim Jong Un boasted of the development of ICBM, and which means that North Korea is headed toward to achieve retaliatory capability And this type of retaliatory capability will change the nature of the nuclear program, nuclear problem in Korean Peninsula.

[01:02:53]

And then second, is the China factor. But I'm going to approach the China factor in a different—a little bit different way. Under the Biden administration, I think the United States wants to and attempts to strengthen the alliances with alliance partners, with South Korea, Japan, and secure relations with other countries. We might be able to see an increasing effort from the China side to create a wedge between the United States and the US allies, and particularly South Korea.

China's so-called wedging is likely to become more obvious as time passes, because China's increasing economic powers that can be transferred into coercive measures and incentives to preclude the US alliance partners from supporting the US strategy. South Korea is particularly vulnerable. And China believes that the weakest link of the US alliance in Asia was South Korea. And because of South Korea's increasing reliance on China's market.

[01:04:04]

As we have seen in China's economic sanctions against South Korea, South Korean companies, and the banning Chinese population traveling to South Korea after the ROK government introduced THAAD as a part of the US missile technology system, although China's sanction was not official, or was unofficial, of course, from the Chinese side. But it inflicted the harm on the South Korean economy.

So the China's wedging, vis-à-vis the alliance between the United States and South Korea, has been successful to some extent, although the alliance was not dismantled, the China obtained South Korea's accommodation after that, including South Korea's promise not to join the US missile defense system, and declare it to the Chinese side. And also, the South Korea and China signed increased defense cooperation agreement, when the discussion about the South Korea and the United States about the burden-sharing was ongoing. This created the US suspicion or increased the US suspicion about the South Korea's commitment and intention as alliance partner.

[01:05:28]

But, at the same time, for North Korea side, Korea felt disappointed by the lack in support from the United States after the THAAD was deployed, and when China economic sanctions were implemented. South Korea expected more from the US side, but the US was not able to help the South Korea out from the China coercive action. So this type of China's wedging can continue to exist targeting South Korea and other US allies. And these two major things are the major concerns. And perhaps that somehow we have to prepare for how to deal with these two issues by changing the nature or changing the structure of alliances in the future.

**VICTORIA KIM:** Thank you for those thoughts. Dr. Cha, I would love to bring you in here to get your thoughts on the China conversation the US-ROK alliance. And more broadly, we were discussing what each of the panelists view as the challenges facing the alliance in the next decade. So if you could address both of those things, that would be fantastic. Welcome.

[01:06:43]

**DR. VICTOR CHA:** Well, sure. Thank you. Thanks Victoria. It's a pleasure to be with you. And apologies to everyone, my panelists, and the audience for being late. First, let me say it's really a pleasure to be on this panel with, I look on the screen, all good friends, and a former student in Professor Yoo. It's good to see everyone.

In terms of recommendations to the alliance, the first thing I'd say is that everybody should just read Abe Denmark's new book, which I just finished. And I think it's – I highly recommend it. So I would say first, in terms of the alliance, I think looking out to the future, I have no doubt that the US-Korea alliance can, in the future, as it does today, but even more so, operate on a global level, in the sense of being able to provide public goods to the international system, whether that's on climate change or civil nuclear energy or overseas development assistance or anti-piracy, or just a broad list of things where the alliance can work together, including the new

frontiers issues that Abe talked about today, the Fourth Industrial Revolution Joint Defense Industrial Cooperation. There are many things. And I have no doubt the alliance can do that.

[01:08:08]

But I think that there are sort of three challenges to get to that point. The first is to rebuild and remind successive generations in the United States, and in Korea, about why this alliance is important to each country. You know, the US-Korea alliance is important for Americans, because it really does advance US interests. And it's important for Koreans, because it really advances Korean interest. Neither side is doing a favor to the other by being in this alliance relationship.

[01:08:44]

And that is something that everybody on this screen knows. But, as Mike Mansfield, I think it was, said a long time ago, you know, tending to an alliance is like tending to a garden. Like you have to continually upkeep it, or the weeds will grow. And you know, I think the weeds were overgrown over the past four years. And we're in the midst, now, with the new administration in the United States, of trying to remind everybody why this alliance is important to both sides. And that's something that just needs to be done generation after generation.

[01:09:16]

The second is that this North Korea problem is not going to go away—I'm talking about the nuclear problem—any time soon. And it'll be very important, going forward, if the alliance is to function on the global level, bilaterally and on the global level as it should, that there continues to be confidence in US security commitment, and confidence in US extended deterrence, nuclear deterrence guarantees. Even if North Korea achieves a survivable capability.

And one element of this is certainly on the extended deterrence side, and Abe—and I see Syd and Will here, Kathy, they've all been involved in these discussions to try to do that. The troop presence is also important. Because, as long as the United States has troops in Korea, it's going

to be very difficult to imagine that the United States security commitment could somehow be decoupled from what is happening on the Korean Peninsula. So I think that's an important element.

[01:10:17]

The third is that, while I think the alliance can operate well bilaterally, and it can operate well globally, the biggest challenge, frankly, is going to be regional. And that is for a number of reasons, the most important of which are Japan and China. The relationship between Japan and South Korea is about as bad as it's ever been. And that's not something that can continue going into the future. That's something that has to improve, not least of which because, you know, these are the prominent liberal democracies in Asia. They are key to maintaining the rules-based liberal international order that Abe talks about in his book. And they are part-and-parcel of all three countries, that is, the United States, Japan, and Korea's dealing with China, right.

[01:11:09]

I would, to my good friend Foreign Minister Yoon, I would take a slightly different view, which is to say, I agree that the United States shouldn't have a single cookie-cutter policy for its allies when it comes to China. At the same time, though, I think that a hedging strategy for South Korea, when it comes to the United States and China, is not a long-term strategy. And it's not a strategy that will benefit Korea in the end.

[01:11:42]

You know, my personal view is, I think that Korea should take a much stronger position with the United States, because the challenges posed by China, whether it's non-WTO compliant, economic coercion, or it is challenge to freedom of navigation, these are things that all threaten the liberal international rules-based order. And Korea should be part of a group of countries that want to try to shape the international liberal rules-based order, and not simply be the passive recipient of Chinese actions.

[01:12:24]

I've heard many Korean friends talk about the Fed controversy, and how the United States should have done more for Korea. And I agree with that. But at the same time, and Abe will probably remember this well, and Syd will remember this well, at the same time I think, and it's a counter-fact so we can't prove, but I think if Korea had been very clear that it was going to accept this THAAD battery without question, because it was necessary to defend against missile threats from North Korea, and did not say yes, and then say no, and then say maybe, and then do a year-long review of the policy, that left an opening for China. China saw an opportunity there. And that's when they pressed, right. That's when they pressed with the economic pressure.

[01:13:14]

So Korea historically has done its best when it has allied with the ally that is furthest away, that is the United States, historically And I still think that's an algorithm that works for South Korean grand strategy. And I think it needs to be considered, you know, with regard to the challenge coming from China. Thanks Victoria.

**VICTORIA KIM:** Thank you for those remarks. They really brought home many of the topics that we had already been discussing. I was hoping to next go to perhaps a bit of a backward-looking thought. As much as President Biden has claimed that America is back, the after-effects of the Trump administration's foreign policy will no doubt continue to reverberate. I would love some of your thoughts on the legacy, the imprint left on the US-ROK alliance, and particularly the impact of the burden-sharing negotiations which are just now resuming. And perhaps Minister Yoon, we could start with you. And if you want to respond to Dr. Cha's remarks about your comments on China, you are welcome to do that as well.

[01:14:33]

**YOUNG-KWAN-YOON:** Yes. I almost, I mean I agree with Victor's view on almost every point. I mean I hope there wouldn't be misunderstanding regarding my statement. Actually, I am not in favor of hedging strategy. That's the reason why I emphasized in previous remarks that

South Korean government should, I mean, work closely together with the United States, in terms of value alliance or value diplomacy, emphasizing the importance of democracy, or so I emphasize the importance of working closely with the United States in terms of expanding our economic cooperation toward more high-tech sectors, or new frontiers, or something like that. Also, that's, I mean why I emphasized importance of strengthening our cooperative relationship in meeting global challenges, pandemics or climate changes, et cetera, et cetera.

[01:15:58]

But the only thing I am asking my American friends to pay a more attention on, I mean, the Korean situation, is military dimension, especially military confrontation on the Korean Peninsula. Many of my friends, I mean, do not understand the history, for a long time historical experience of Korean people as a peninsula surrounded by big powers. And it is a very sensitive issue. And, I mean, again, we—I mean Koreans are ready to work with the United States, US allies, to achieve a rule-based international order, democracy-based international order, in the future, all from liberal order.

[01:17:02]

Because we could succeed and prosper in that kind of international order. And so, I mean, that's important. But on this specific issue of military confrontation, of big powers in the Korean Peninsula, I mean we need to be more sensitive to the particular geopolitical dilemma of the Korean Peninsula. For example, China intervened in the Korean War at a very difficult time, domestically, in 1950, mainly because of this concern about-- I mean the strategy concern regarding Korean Peninsula. So we need to pay attention to this particular factor, and try to develop how to overcome these difficulties, altogether, in terms of cooperating, or in the other fronts. That's my, I mean, comment on my friend Victor's view.

[01:18:16]

And on the issue of burden-sharing, the only thing I would like to mention is that, I mean, Trump administration's approach on this issue had a significantly negative impact, not just on the future

of the US-ROK alliance, but also on the US alliance with other countries too. Because President Trump's approach on this border sharing negotiation meant an important shift from the US alliances based on shared interest and values and strategies, toward a purely transactional relationship. And this will have very negative implication for all the other alliances the United States has with other countries. I'll stop there.

**VICTORIA KIM:** Mr. Denmark, perhaps you could jump in on what you see as the imprint left by the Trump administration, and particularly the burden-sharing talks.

[01:19:34]

**ABRAHAM DENMARK:** It's a critical question. I think the introduction of a more transactional zero-sum approach to these negotiations was quite harmful. And I think it'll take time for us to get past it. There will always be people on both sides that I think will look at these issues in a transactional way, and [01:19:55]. But broadly speaking, I think those of us who work on the alliance, who have focused on Korea, and according to public opinion polling on both sides, I think the broader American and Korean publics recognize the tremendous value of the alliance, and that the alliance is in the interest of both countries.

[01:20:16]

And I hope, and expect that the current negotiations on host nation support would be able to be concluded relatively rapidly, with the new administration and in the US. To my mind, the latest offer from Korea that President Trump turned down, seems to me to be a good starting point as a way to get this done quickly, and a way to kind of get past that sort of issue, and move onto other issues of import.

[01:20:50]

But those sorts of challenges in our alliance, I think, the only other piece that's going to get past it, that's going to help us get past it, is time. And the demonstration from both sides that we recognize the value of the relationship, that it's not just dollars-and-cents, that we both get a lot

out of this alliance, that, I think, will do the most to heal whatever damage—or I should say repair whatever damage has been done, and get us to move past it, into focusing on more substantive issues of what our alliance is actually going to be, rather than who's going to pay for it all.

**VICTORIA KIM:** Speaking of more substantive issues, on the matter of alliance—and I would love to get to some of—We have about a half hour left to our panel. I'm not sure where the time has gone. And I would love to turn to some of the questions that have been coming in rapid-fire. Perhaps we could start with this one. We have a question from an audience member named Laura, who is addressing it to Dr. Cha. But I would also love for all the other panelists to jump in after we get some thoughts from Dr. Cha, about the benefits of the US-Korea alliance, compared with the benefits of a US-Japan-Korea tri-lateralism. And this is something that's come up a few times already in the hour. What approach should be the priority for the Biden administration? And why? Dr. Cha.

[01:22:22]

**DR. VICTOR CHA:** So thanks for the question, Laura. So I don't think it's either/or. I think that—I mean at least from a US perspective, going back to 1965, we've always looked at these two alliances as part of a strategic whole, a whole meaning w-h-o-l-e, not strategic hole, h-o-l-e, right, as part of a strategic whole. And that improvements in the US-Korea alliance are going to benefit the US-Japan alliance, vice-versa. And improvements in Korea-Japan bilateral relations is beneficial to both our bilateral alliances in Asia.

[01:23:06]

So I think the overlap of interest among these three countries is quite astounding, when you compare it to most other groupings around the world. And of course, it's a complicated relationship for other reasons. But I don't really see this as an either/or thing. I think that, you know, whether you're talking about intelligence sharing, whether you're talking about freedom of

navigation, air defense identification zones, you know, whatever you're talking about, there's a lot of overlap in what is beneficial to these three countries.

**VICTORIA KIM:** Professor Yoo, perhaps we could go to you. Dr. Cha earlier mentioned that he feels that the South Korea-Japan relationship is in the worst state it's been. Do you share that view? And what's your perspective on the US-ROK alliance in relation to the trilateral US-ROK-Japan relationship?

[01:24:13]

**HYON JOO YOO:** I agree with Dr. Cha, in that the South Korea-Japan relations hit the rock bottom. And it is really difficult to get out of this rock bottom, for the near future, I guess. It is not an easy task because of that. Having said that, it is an easy task for the United States to moderate between the two allies, and somehow put them together and patch up the differences between these two countries, and somehow move onto the next level, is somehow beyond expectation.

[01:24:52]

I tell my students that the oldest problems that South Korea and Japan have is created by the United States. The United States messed it up. [laughter] And it was influenced from the Dr. Cha—I'm kidding. So it's not—my advisor. But what I'm trying to say here is that the United States somehow is going to be the major player that can moderate between these two countries. The Obama administration attempted to bring these two countries together, and made a lot of efforts. So that these two countries led to the major agreements on the comfort women issue and the GSOMIA, the military alliance—military agreement.

[01:25:44]

But in the end, everybody knows that how these two agreements are end up, and how these two countries view each other. So as the defense white papers came out from the South Korea side, and from the Japanese side, they each country viewed the other as just a neighbor, not important

strategic partner. So it might be—it might take a lot of time for the United States to put these two countries together. But obviously, these two countries also understand there are a lot of things to share. And they have to handle these common—the threats from North Korea.

[01:26:28]

So there's still silver lining for the improvement of the ROK and Japan relationship. But it will take some time. And the United States should be mindful that if it forced these two countries to patch up the differences so abruptly, then we will see the consequences. So we have to be really—the United States has to be really careful about, in moderating these two.

[01:27:02]

So I suggest, for now, because these two countries are not easy to get along with each other, even though they understand that they have to, the US could provide opportunities for these two countries to build a confidence by participating in the multilateral security dialogues. And somehow the military exercises, not just between the two countries, or the US, South Korea, and Japan, but in other countries too, Australia, New Zealand, and Southeast Asia, perhaps, and to organize the military exercises including not only these two countries, but also other countries too.

**VICTORIA KIM:** Ambassador Stephens, perhaps you could add to that. I would imagine that you have some thoughts on the US's delicate role in this relationship.

[01:28:04]

**KATHLEEN STEPHENS:** Yeah. I mean I would concur with most of what's been said so far. I mean the Japan-South Korea relationship has always been, in modern times, a fraught one, and one that I think the US has, with varied success and failure, tried to mediate, modulate, strengthen. I mean to some extent, it's been in such bad shape, I think it's kind of a matter, if you're a hole, stop digging. And maybe the new Biden administration coming into office, and both Tokyo and Seoul having their own interests, and trying to get off to a good start with the

Biden administration, I take it as a good sign if, as reported, it's true that President Biden mentioned his interest in seeing a better relationship between Seoul and Tokyo, both in his initial telephone conversation with Prime Minister Suga, as well as with President Moon, then I hope that will give a little bit of impetus to see if, say, we can start to move in a positive direction.

[01:29:09]

I know there's great interest in Seoul and in the Tokyo Olympics, of course as a possible venue for something vis-à-vis North Korea. And it is a reminder, I think also, to the Moon administration, that to the extent that, you know, as the North Korea policy review looks at a greater sort of regional context, rather than a pure US-DPRK context for North Korea policy, Japan is going to be a part of that too. That some of that will give some items on the agenda that will be important for the two countries, and the three countries, to begin to talk about a little bit more closely.

[01:29:49]

But the only other point I would make is, I think that it's so clear that it's—I mean Victor was saying that the alliance between the US and South Korea is clearly in both countries' interests. Well, good relationships between Tokyo and Seoul are clearly in both countries' interests, I say as an outsider. And you know, they're both middle powers with so much to offer, and so much to do. So I'm glad they're both in RCEP. I'm glad they're both, if you like, on their own, doing a lot of really positive things in values, diplomacy, and overseas development, and creating this kind of framework within the region, that we think is a positive one, that reflects our values.

[01:30:25]

So, if there is a broader ad hoc kind of multilateral basis on which they can work together, I don't think it always has to be purely—I mean, now clearly in the military area, there are some trilateral areas where we do need to coordinate closely. That's very important. But more broadly, I hope the United States can be encouraging of Seoul and Tokyo to begin to find away. And

again, it takes political will at the top, as we said about an earlier issue, but political will at the top, to work, at least in parallel, if not totally in coordination, on what are clearly shared goals.

**VICTORIA KIM:** Minister Yoon, perhaps you could offer some thoughts from the Seoul perspective on the Korea-Japan relationship in the US-ROK alliance context.

[01:31:20]

**YOUNG-KWAN-YOON:** Yes. I agree with Ambassador Stephens and Professor Yoo's point, that it is desirable for the US government to continue, I mean to its effort to improve bilateral relationship between South Korea and Japan. And even for South Korea's own strategy perspective, it is much more desirable to improve our relationship with Japan. Because it will strengthen our, I mean, diplomatic position, vis-à-vis neighboring countries, for neighboring countries. If our relationship with Japan becomes too bad, I think the South Korea can be, I mean isolated [?], I mean from neighboring countries than before.

[01:32:18]

So, from strategy point of view, it is in South Korea's interest to improve our relationship with Japan. Also, as long as the strength of North Korea's strength is there, without disappearing, it is essential to cooperate between Japan and South Korea. South Korea has been forefront of Korea confrontation. And, I mean, Japan was [01:32:52]. It is very unnatural and inefficient, I mean not to cooperate between those two, I mean the forefront and [01:33:03] something like that.

[01:33:05]

And I think it is important for both Japan and South Korea to try to restore the long-time tradition of separating history issues from economic and security issues in managing bilateral relationship. This long-time tradition was broken a few years ago. And it is very much regrettable. Before that, I think both countries managed to keep their kind of principles in a constructive way, even, I mean, when their relationship was not good.

[01:33:52]

And I think, in a matter of months or years, I think bilateral relationship will improve, because there was power transition in Japan from Abe to Suga, and recently the Moon Jae-in government in South Korea began to shift his Japan policy toward a more, I mean, favorable direction. And there are increasing high-level officials visits between two countries these days. For example, recently, Director of National Intelligence Service, Mr. Park Jie-won, visited Tokyo and discussed how to improve bilateral relationship, et cetera. So I think I'm a little bit optimistic. Thank you.

**VICTORIA KIM:** Thank you for those thoughts. We have a question from Jie-su in Seoul, who asks, the Biden administration has stated that US foreign policy must directly benefit the American middle class. In your assessment, how does the ROK-US alliance do so? Perhaps Mr. Denmark you could tackle this question.

[01:35:18]

**ABRAHAM DENMARK:** Sure. And I think the key here is that we need to be clear on how these arrangements, how our alliance benefits the United States broadly, that we need to be able to articulate the value of this alliance, as Victor mentioned, that these are not just assumptions going in, but they're something that need to be spelled out. And it's one of the reasons I wrote a book on alliances and partnerships in Asia, is to talk about those things, and talk about why it's important.

[01:35:50]

To my mind, two answers come to mind initially. First is, I think if you look at economically, our economic relationship with Korea is very strong, very robust, and I think benefits the middle class, in terms of being able to share our economic future with them, in terms of the joint investment between Korea and Japan, if you look at Korean auto manufacturing, if you look at other industries on the high tech sphere, there's a lot of engagement on finance, that I think

benefits the American economy, and benefits American consumers, and brings jobs into the United States. And I think that case can certainly be made.

[01:36:37]

Beyond that, on the security sphere, I think that most of the American middle class would not want to see North Korea on the rampage, would not want to see South Korea again under attack from the North. And they, I think they see the value of an alliance that maintains deterrence and stability in the Korean Peninsula and across the Indo-Pacific. And that preventing war, preventing conflict, preventing instability, maintaining prosperity, is in the deep interest of the American middle class. But beyond that, I think in the interest of the United States more broadly.

[01:37:19]

And if you look at opinion polling, I'd say both countries, but especially in the United States, support for the US-ROK alliance is strong. And I think that speaks to the value that Americans see broadly in alliances in America around the world, but also a misalliance, that America, seeing that the United States positive role in the world, that we are supporting democracies, that we're countering authoritarian regimes, that we're countering regimes as problematic and evil as that in North Korea. I think that's something that the American middle class supports as well.

[01:37:59]

So to me, the case for the American middle class, of the ROK alliance, is quite robust. And I think we just need to be able to make the case, in a clear way, that the American people and their representatives in Congress can understand.

**VICTORIA KIM:** And Dr. Cha, perhaps you could also address this, since you mentioned the importance of driving home the value of the alliance continually. What would be your pitch to the American middle class as to the value of the alliance?

[01:38:30]

**DR. VICTOR CHA:** So it's difficult to say something new to what's already been said thus far. I mean, you know, I think there are a couple of things, I guess. The first is, and I think most Americans, at least based on polling, believe this, that the United States is stronger as a country when we have allies, right. I mean it's just, it's just true. I mean we've been through four years where we got a different narrative, that these allies were actually power liabilities, that they sapped and drained US power, is a completely different way of thinking.

[01:39:10]

But at least the polling suggests that most Americans do believe that allies are power assets. It helps to make the United States strong. And it helps the United States to maintain the liberal rules-based international order, which has created prosperity around the world for lots of people, including many Americans

[01:39:33]

Second, I would say that not only are allies power assets, loyal allies are about the most precious thing that the United States can find around anywhere. And South Korea is one of those loyal allies. South Korea stood with the United States in every conflict since the Korean War. And there are not a lot of countries that have done that.

[01:39:55]

Third, on the jobs prospect, which is more material and on the ground, I mean China-- South Korea trades—The lines crossed, I think, in 2004, I think it was. Kathy is that right, when total trade with China surpassed total trade with South Korea? Something like 2004, or something like that. But as one of my close colleagues, Mike Green once said, trade is like dating. But foreign direct investment is like marriage, right. And South Korea has huge foreign direct investment in the United States. It's one of the biggest employers—and Kathy knows this well, because I learned all of this when I listened to Kathy speak as ambassador at different conferences she was the lecture speaker. And she can recite these better than I.

[01:40:51]

But Korea, you know, because of Korean foreign direct investment, South Korea is one of the largest employers at several states in the United States. And you know, there is now talk that—it's just talk, but there's talk that South Korean companies may start building chip—investing in chip plants, microchip plants in the United States. So you can just imagine, I mean, if the United States has things like a secure and transparent supply of these critical products, with a trusted ally, as opposed to a country that is not a trusted ally, that's beneficial to everyone. So both at the high politics level, and also at the material level, this alliance is important to Americans

**VICTORIA KIM:** Thank you for those thoughts. We have many questions piling in, and it's probably my feeling that we probably won't be able to get to all of them. But we have a question from Hun Bin Cho addressed to Minister Yoon. And perhaps this is, if it ends up being our final question, maybe this is it a perennial one that would be good to go out on. You mentioned the importance of a common vision for the alliance, and a common strategy in denuclearizing North Korea. How do you assess the prospects of President Moon and President Biden, moving forward, with a common and effective strategy for denuclearizing North Korea? Minister Yoon.

[01:42:21]

**YOUNG-KWAN-YOON:** I tend to be a little optimistic, cautiously optimistic, because both South Korean government and American government have a common experience, not so successful negotiation in the past three decades. So I think both governments might have learned a lot. And there may be some kind of convergence between two approaches, between the United States and South Korea.

For example, South Korean government tended to think that, I mean, denuclearize first, and then we will lift the sanctions. That kind of approach will not be able to work. And I think the American government policymakers, by now, I think that's the case. And probably may adopt a kind of simultaneous, I mean phased approach, simultaneous action and phased approach. So I think there is more room for convergence between two countries, North Korea policy.

[01:43:54]

Also, I mean the Biden administration, I guess, probably makes suggestion, adopt one real multilateral format in resolving North Korea—I mean in handling North Korean nuclearization. And I think probably South Korean government will welcome that idea. I don't know how North Korea and China will respond to that. But I think that's a reasonable approach, because the United States alone cannot provide a whole—I mean economic assistance, and situated guarantee in return for North Korea's denuclearization. Neighboring countries should be involved in one way or another. So I think there is some room for cooperation and developing a common strategy between two allies.

**VICTORIA KIM:** Professor Yoo, do you have anything to add to the assessment of the possibility of an effective strategy in the North Korea problem?

[01:45:21]

**HYON JOO YOO:** In terms of the North Korea problem, there are going to be—I am a little bit pessimistic in contrast to what Minister Yoon has said. I'm a little bit pessimistic about the discussions between the United States and South Korea under Biden administration and under Moon Jae-in government in South Korea. Perhaps because of, as I mentioned before, the current Moon Jae-in administration focuses on the promoting or promoting the peaceful relations within the Korean Peninsula. And his speech in the beginning of the year included that he is willing to talk about North Korea in a variety of issues, even including the security alliance related with the alliance with the United States.

And that can create a major concerns to the United States side. And if is going to be—If the South Korea will continue to stick with this type of foreign policy, then, you know, create some major disagreement with the United States, and how these military exercises can be addressed between the South Korea and North Korea, and how the South Korea can take advantage of this—or take advantage of the military exercises to improve the relations with the North Korea.

And, on the other hand, this could disrupt the relationship between South Korea and the United States. So I think there is going to be some major discussions between South Korea and the United States in the future, if South Korea tries to or stick with this type of position.

**VICTORIA KIM:** Ambassador Stephens, perhaps you could have the final word on this matter, and whether you're the optimism that you mentioned that you hold, as a former diplomat, extends to this prospect of an effective strategy in denuclearizing North Korea.

[01:48:07]

**KATHLEEN STEPHENS:** Yeah. Well, if you're going to give me the last word, let me be very brief and say, with respect to the development of a Biden administration, and coordinated strategy with Seoul on North Korea policy, I don't think it's going to be easy. I do have some worries and concerns about it, because I think there are different political imperatives, different priorities in both capitals, and a lot happening.

[01:48:36]

But I think it is absolutely essential, I guess, that we find some common ground in an approach on the denuclearization issue, combined with, I think, a Biden recognition that there is an inter-Korean/peace process element to this too. And as was already mentioned, a multilateral element to—a multilateral element as well. And that early on, the two allies be able to at least publicly speak with one voice, and try to get something going. Not wait too long. I think that's very important.

[01:49:07]

But if you're going to give me the last word, I'm going to go back to this, you know, how do you sell the alliance to—the middle class? And those are great answers. And I think sometimes the middle class, it implies, is all about economics. But, you know, I spend a lot of time outside of Washington, or I used to when I could travel. And you know, one thing—And over the decades, as someone who's come back from many, many countries, one really fundamental change I see in

the US-South Korea relationship is the perception and understanding of South Korea in the United States. And there are lots of reasons for it. We've talked about some of them.

[01:49:42]

But, you know, it's just—It is so transformed. And yes, there is enormous investment by South Korean firms and manufacturing plants and cutting-edge technology all over the United States. And that does change the profile. There is a Korean-American community which did not exist in the way it does now, when I first came back from Korea in the 1970s, or even the 1980s, when it was all about Korea-gate and bribing congressmen.

I just watched a movie called *Minari* the other night, which will soon be coming to all of your local streaming systems. You know, a Korean family in Arkansas. These things may seem like four Korean-Americans in the Congress, three of whom are women. None of these things directly pertain to all the kind of specific issues we're talking about today.

[01:50:30]

But I think in this context, which is so important to the Biden administration, of how do you make these relationships resonate with the American public, you have all of that, on top of the fact that South Korea is a nice story to talk about, despite all the problems. It's a place where we can look and say, as Victor was saying, look and see what has been accomplished. And much to the credit of the South Korean people themselves, of course, but Americans can take some pride and satisfaction in that.

[01:51:02]

So this is a great strength of the alliance. It doesn't mean that it solves all of these very naughty issues that we've talked about today and over the last couple of days. But it is an incredibly strong and resilient platform, which did not exist, you know, even a decade ago in this same way. And which really gives us, of course, a lot of the problems we have now didn't exist a decade ago, or we didn't know about them yet. But it gives us a platform, I think, to build on.

**VICTORIA KIM:** That is such a wonderful note to end on. Thank you, thank you Ambassador Stephens, thank you everybody, for tuning in, and to all the panelists. And thank you, John, for organizing this wonderful conference. Back to you.

[01:51:40]

**DR. JOHN PARK:** Thank you, Victoria. Amazing job moderating an awesome panel here. We covered a lot of ground, and in such an expert and professional manner. I think it's only this type of panel that we'd be able to cover that breadth and scope of issues. And a special thanks to Dr. Victor Cha for joining as well.

So with this, we're going to transition now to our break. We're going to take a very short break, and reconvene at 5:30 PM. And with that, we'll have our keynote address by Syd Seiler. Thank you very much. We'll see you shortly. Thank you panel. Thank you very much.

[BREAK]

**KEYNOTE ADDRESS: SYDNEY SEILER**

[02:00:24]

**DR. JOHN PARK:** Our thanks once again to Panel 1, our great speakers, Ambassador Kathleen Stephens, Dr. Victor Cha, Abe Denmark, Professor Hyong Joo Yoo, and former Foreign Minister Yoon Young-Kwan. And a special thanks to Victoria Kim for moderating.

It's my pleasure to welcome you to the Keynote Address section of the Second Harvard Korean Security Summit. And it's also my pleasure to introduce our good friend, Syd Seiler. Syd is the National Intelligence Officer for North Korea at the National Intelligence Council and the Office of the Director of National Intelligence. Previously, he was US Forces Korea Senior Analyst and Senior Defense Intelligence Expert for North Korea. In these roles, he served as a principal

advisor and senior expert on Korean Peninsula security issues to the US-FK Commander and the US Defense Intelligence Enterprise.

[02:01:13]

Syd served as a US special envoy for the Six Party Talks, where he coordinated US diplomacy and policy on the DPRK, and led negotiations with North Korea. Prior to that, he served as the Director for Korea on the National Intelligence—the National Security Council at the White House. A member of the Senior Intelligence Service, Syd has over 37 years of experience focusing on Korean Peninsula affairs and a range of roles with the Office of the Director of National Intelligence, the Central Intelligence Agency, and the National Security Agency.

Thanks so much for joining us today. Over to you, Syd.

[02:01:47]

SYDNEY SEILER: John, thank you so very much, not only for the gracious introduction, but the opportunity to speak here today before such a distinguished and, you know, deeply seeped in this issue audience. Having listened to parts of yesterday's session and parts of today's session, I come here for the keynote with a degree of intimidation, hope, and urgency.

[02:02:14]

Intimidation, you know, with wondering what more I can say beyond what has already been said by the distinguished panelists over the past two days. Hope, though, that having looked at this issue somewhat uniquely, I would say, from the academic perspective, from the intelligence community, having been a policymaker, and having had negotiations with North Korea going back to the Six Party Talks with the Bush administration. And then, having been in key positions for every Presidential transition, going back to 2001, hopefully, I can have something unique to say.

[02:02:53]

A sense of urgency, because I don't know how I do this in 15 short minutes. But we will plow forward and see how it goes. You know, John and I had a great discussion early on about his expectations for today's session. And you know, part of it is to kind of help shape how we can think about North Korea, what type of approach we should have on such a challenging issue, a challenging issue to resolve, a challenging issue to follow.

[02:03:25]

But I would posit that there's opportunities. There's—We have an ability, we should not, you know, declare defeat. And done smartly, we can do very well. So what I hope to do today is present a framework for understanding North Korea, explore some of the implications going forward about based upon what we know and where we are today, how we got here, and then close, perhaps, with a challenge that will dovetail well into the next session.

[02:03:55]

You know, perhaps the most provocative claim I often make when I speak is a somewhat, you know, perhaps apparently arrogant claim that North Korea is strategically understandable, even if it's tactically surprising. Because the question you get is, how can North Korea be understandable? We don't know much about what's going on inside the system. We don't know how decisions are made in leadership. And a lot of the complications we face today was the events of 2016 to 2017, the missile-a-month mania, as I like to call it, brought a lot of new observers to this issue.

[02:04:33]

And it also brought a lot of politicization to the discussion of North Korea. It was impossible to have a really good assessment of what the North was doing, what was motivating it to act, and how the US was responding, without it being caught up in a larger discussion that was largely politically driven, not objectively looking at the facts at hand.

[02:04:55]

And I remind people that, you know, we've been looking at North Korea for some 70 years now. I just got back from four and a half years out with US forces, Korea, where, you know, since the commencement of the Korean War, and certainly throughout Armistice, we have had a laser-focus on North Korea. Look at the 70 years of watching its behavior, how it reacts, how it acts, what motivates it, what doesn't.

[02:05:24]

We also, in addition to that 70 years, now have some 30 years of negotiations with North Korea. You know, I listened to some of the discussion yesterday, and I think you know, what really struck me was, you know, the lessons learned ever since we first made the engagements with North Korea. And we concluded the agreed framework. You know, at Six Party Talks, under Bush term one, Bush term two, efforts under the Obama administration, finally efforts under the Trump administration, we have taken many attempts at trying to resolve this issue through negotiations, we've learned a lot along the way, great women, great men behind those efforts. It wasn't certainly because of a lack of understanding of North Korea, or a lack of effort on the part of the United States, we haven't solved this issue.

[02:06:11]

And finally, ten. So 70, 30, ten, the ten-year rule, which is, we've been looking at Kim Jong Un for ten years. You know, we have been—I have watched, through the transition from his father, up until today. And I think we can state, with some degree of confidence, that in broad policy-relevant terms, in other words, there's a lot we don't know. But when it comes to what is necessary for good policy, there's a lot we know about North Korea. There's a lot we know about Kim Jong Un.

[02:06:43]

We know what Kim Jong Un fears. He fears North Korea meeting the same fate as every other socialist autocratic regime of the Cold War, after the Cold War collapsed. We know what he thinks. He thinks the best way to maintain control is through the systems he's created, and

isolation from the outside world, and what he wants. I mean if we don't know what he wants after 30 years of negotiations with North Korea, most recently the Hanoi experience, we're somewhat under—I think we're underestimating our understanding of this regime.

[02:07:20]

So why am I so confident? Well, you know, I'd like to propose today a framework in order to kind of understand how we begin to move from either an epistemological nihilism, that this regime is unknowable, we don't have enough information, we simply are trying to find our way in the dark, or the other extreme, delusional arrogance, that somehow we've created these images of Kim and what he's trying to do.

[02:07:51]

But look at the available empirical evidence. Learn the basics of North Korea. Identify some trends. Gain some understanding. And then estimate potential courses of actions that they might take. This is pretty much—This is not unique to the North Korean card. But I think when we take this approach, we look at the various observables available to us, we begin to think about diagnosticity of those variables. In other words, the actions North Korea take, and what it tells us about their strategic goals and their tactical machinations, whether it's been preceded or unprecedented, whether the step is reversible or irreversible. And then, you know, as any good scholar, any good intelligence analyst knows, to course-correct on our assessment if necessary.

[02:08:42]

I take a four-fold model in approaching North Korea. And the first thing, the departure point is its world view and its identity narrative. The second area is the strategic goals that North Korea pursues, because of that world view, because of that identity, because of that strategic narrative. The tactics that they use in the pursuit of those strategic goals. And then finally, the people and processes.

[02:09:11]

When it comes to world view and identity, this is an area in which North Korea is remarkably transparent. I've spent many years as a media analysis reading [02:09:21], reading translations of television, translations watching television. And the North Korean world view is pretty discernible from it. It is largely a victim narrative that the history of the Korean Peninsula is marked by invasion after invasion. Certainly, the Japanese and the United States are the more recent examples of that.

[02:09:46]

And then finally, that the Clapps [?] or the socialist bloc itself leaves North Korea as one of the soul defenders of socialism in a hostile world, a hostile world that only the Dear Leader can protect it from, perpetuating a myth of external threats, Kim and the elites maintain their power through suppression and fear in a near-constant state of mobilization, of some type of speed battle underway, some type of combat. It's a highly militaristic society. It's a highly militaristic system.

[02:10:22]

And these strategic goal—And then, from this world view, derives strategic goals. If you look at the strategic goals, they've been particularly consistent over the last three decades. And I kind of pull out the last three decades, because it is the pulse Cold War environment, under which North Korea's existence radically was transformed by the loss of traditional benefactors, the acceleration of the political, economic, and yes, military strength of the Republic of Korea. And North Korea's increasing anachronistic unique position, trying to resist these types of changes.

[02:11:03]

And the strategic goals over this time have been pretty consistent, as I said. First of all, on the domestic side, to do what is possible, to avoid political, economic, or social change that would put the regime at risk, to explore kind of tweaks to systems in order to muddle through, but not anything that would radically transform or threaten the regime with the same demands for change, for example, the former socialist states led to their collapse.

[02:11:38]

On the inter-Korean side, to develop a capability to intimidate and dominate South Korea militarily and politically, kind of compensating for the loss of that advantage that they somewhat enjoyed in the '50s, '60s, and '70s, began to erode in the 1980s. And then finally, externally, to secure the military means to defend the family regime from any challenges to its monopoly on power, that if there were ever an internal stability situation that may require the intervention of outside forces, that North Korea would have the capability to defend itself from that.

[02:12:19]

How certain can we be about that? Well, I urge, you know, students new to this issue, or others who haven't read it, to go back and read the readout of the Eighth Party Congress, or you know, go back a year, to the readout of the Fifth Plenum of the Seventh Party Congress, this laying out of this world view and threat perception that the North has, the military capabilities that it needs to secure, and the future programs and plans, are all more or less captured in there. And they're not, again, that entirely difficult to ascertain from that.

[02:12:56]

So we have the world view. You have the strategic goals. And then you have the tactics, the tactics that North Korea employs in pursuit of those longer-range strategic goals. The tactics are easier to understand when you have this overarching framework. You know, people were shocked, for example, at the move from missile-a-month mania of 2016 and 2017, to that, you know, return to the table in 2018. It is nothing we had not seen previously. It was not unique.

[02:13:30]

And, of course, the tactics that North Korea employed in both raising the tensions and then lowering the tension, using dialogue to mitigate the pressure resulting from their previous actions, again, are all easy to understand and deconflict when you look at the overall arching strategic goals, and you understand how they support that. Again, North Korea has a long history

of moving back and forth between periods of intentionally creating tension, and periods of peace offenses to buy time, mitigate pressure, advance capabilities, and use the threat of returning to tension as negotiating leverage.

[02:14:12]

There will be variety in the provocations. But usually, in a way that North Korea maintains escalation control. And there will be a variety in the charm. But usually, in a way that results in maybe some high visibility diplomacy, some abstractly worded agreements. But gradually, North Korea loses interest, and disengages, returning to its rising tensions.

[02:14:36]

And finally, the fourth area is people and processes. It's a relatively quick because, you know, as an analyst, this is what we love. You know, the ups and downs of Kim Jong Un, what's the latest Politburo reshuffle? But, when you look at the continuity of strategic goals, when you look at the continuity of world view, and you understand that the tactics are all kind of describable and understandable within past North Korean behavior, you find that the people and processes are much less important, again, in terms of what is sufficient in understanding necessary for good policy?

[02:15:14]

So where does that leave us going forward? You know, where are we? Again, I urge people to read the readout of the Eighth Party Congress, the readout of the Fifth Plenum of the Seventh Party Congress, North Korea's portrayal of its security environment being one of an arduous struggle, seeking self-reliance, no delusions of help from the outside, no delusions of sanctions relief, and committed, however, in spite of all the hardships and the isolation it's suffering, to continued expansion of its WMD and conventional capabilities, in their own words.

[02:15:55]

And so, you know, the question that I often get, then, “Okay, so what? What do we do going forward? Where can we begin to have some estimative understanding of where North Korea might be?” Because, you know, while we're troubled by the capabilities as they grow, if we don't really consider the intent, then we lack that motivation to really kind of explore the options that are necessary And in particular, in preparation for the next panel, where we look at deterrence, you know, what will be necessary if we face a situation in which, for a certain amount of time, we have a non-denuclearizing North Korea?

[02:16:35]

So I posit three “R's.” They're not particularly new and unique, in terms of looking at options. But again, as you look at North Korea, and you begin to envision its options that its capabilities are providing, you know, the first one would be, the most troubling would be what I call a revisionist North Korea. And Brad Roberts, for those of you who knew Brad, know Brad, he's an excellent scholar on this. He's written of this *Red Theory of Victory*. You know, he posits the idea that Kim, encouraged by his successful growth of his program, feels greater freedom to move more aggressively in the conventional realm, maybe even moving into—using the threat of WMD in order to secure long-standing strategic goals on the Peninsula, of compelling Seoul to accept a reset of armistice conditions, to drive the US off the Peninsula, to force a rupture in the US-ROK alliance. And that Kim may believe that his capabilities go far beyond just a mere defensive weapon, but they allowed him to redefine the balance of power on the Peninsula.

[02:17:47]

You know, the second possibility is one of a rogue North Korea, where North Korea, similar to the North Korea we've observed during the years of armistice, engages in intimidation, provocations, coercion, you know, sinking of ROK corvette's, the Cheonan, in 2010, shelling of islands. The continued use of conventional capabilities to coerce and cower the South and inflict punishment on it, backed by a nuclear capability.

[02:18:21]

For those who have studied deterrence theory, and you're familiar with the stability/instability paradox, this is exactly where it fits in, right, that now that there's a nuclear deterrent, the North feels it has, it feels more freedom to operate in that realm of rogue behavior. And finally, would be a responsible nuclear North Korea. Interestingly, this is a real significant challenge for us, because so often, there's a default conclusion that a responsible nuclear North Korea is possible, if we just leave it alone, address our legitimate security concerns, maybe engage in arms control. But if left alone, North Korea will leave us alone. This is, of course, the language of their own propaganda that seeks to justify why they developed their program like they have, and why they should be accepted as a nuclear North Korea.

[02:19:19]

Let me quickly—And, of course, that third R, revisionist, rogue, and then responsible, is when some people dismiss out of hand, that a nuclear North Korea never could act responsibly. Because the mere fact that they're not denuclearizing is evidence that they're not a responsible member of the international community. And so we have to consider that argument as well.

[02:19:42]

Let me make a few closing comments. You know, what I have laid out here are not mutually exclusive possibilities A rogue nuclear North Korea may engage in periods of charm, such as we saw in 2018, in periods of threat, such as we saw later in 2020. And although, and the second point is, in all three, whatever path the North may go down, or whatever variation on those, the challenge for us is the same, that it's been for 68 years of armistice, deterrence. You know, the challenge for the alliance is not new. The alliance has shown remarkable flexibility and resiliency over these 68 years of armistice. And there's no reason for us to lose confidence in that.

[02:20:32]

The second thing I'd like to say is, you know, to give a warning to North Korea watchers, and it's kind of this. Epistemological confidence is better than epistemological nihilism. But it must not

become deterministic arrogance. We must never say never, either when it comes to North Korea never maybe using nuclear weapons, or never engaging in military activities that would bring on the full force of the US and ROK. Nor should we say never—Nor should we never say never to the idea that North Korea one day may get serious at the negotiating table, and then begin to make the right choices for its country.

[02:21:09]

And my final entreaty to all in the audience is, you know, everybody is very familiar with the maxim, deterrence works, until it doesn't. I think the same goes for appeasement. Appeasement works with North Korea until it doesn't. So sorry for laying a little bit over time. And I hope this will be helpful as we move into our next panel, where you're able to dive into these issues more deeply.

[02:21:40]

**DR. JOHN PARK:** Syd, thank you so much. Terrific comments, and great glimpses into your trade craft, and very succinct summation there with your three R's. It provides us with a lot of food for thought as we transition into our second panel on deterrence. And we'll remain engaged. We'll have lots more in terms of Korea Project activities later this spring semester. Thank you again, Syd.

SYD SEILER: Thank you very much, John. Good luck.

**PANEL 2: DETERRING A NUCLEAR NORTH KOREA—WHAT'S OLD? WHAT'S NEW?**

[02:22:04]

**DR. JOHN PARK:** Thank you. I invite our panel members for Panel 2 to turn on their video and remain muted. Thank you. Welcome, all, to our second panel, our Grand Finale. We'll be examining what's new and what's old in deterring a nuclear North Korea. We have a terrific

lineup to explore these questions in depth, during a time where the Biden administration is rapidly moving forward with its nuclear—its North Korea policy review.

[02:22:30]

Our moderator will be the *New York Times'* David Sanger, who will also be introducing our panel speakers. David is National Security Correspondent at the *New York Times* and is senior writer. In his 36-year reporting career for the *New York Times*, he has been on three teams that have won Pulitzer Prizes. His newest book, *The Perfect Weapon: War, Sabotage, and Fear in the Cyber Age*, examines the emergence of cyber conflict as a primary way large and small countries are competing and undercutting each other, thereby changing the nature of global power.

[02:23:01]

Earlier in his career, David wrote many of the first articles on North Korea's nascent nuclear weapons program. A graduate of Harvard College, David is the inaugural Senior Fellow in the Press and National Security at the Belfer Center. With Professor Graham Allison, he co-teaches one of Harvard Kennedy School's most popular courses, titled Central Challenges in American National Security, Strategy, and the Press. Thanks very much for joining today, David. Over to you.

[02:23:32]

**DAVID SANGER:** Thanks to you, John, and thanks for running this—another year. It's a great, a great session last year. And those parts of it I've been able to tune into this year have been equally good, though I understand that coronavirus has not only kept us separate, it's lowered the bar tab of taking all of us out to dinner. So I appreciate the fact that we're going to have to come back live to you next year, and resume our dinner all together.

[02:24:10]

We have a really terrific panel for you today. Let me briefly introduce them to you. But their biographies are all available to you in the agenda. We're starting with my co-teacher, Graham

Allison, the Douglas Dillon Professor of Government at Harvard. Graham and I, in central challenges, have made North Korea usually the first case that students have to go deal with, because we want something hard enough that will make a good proportion of them flee, and head back to courses other than us and reducing the number of papers we have to go grade. But it makes us, we think, the North Korea dilemma, and its changes each and every year. And I hope we'll be doing that today.

[02:25:05]

Vince Brooks is joining us. Of course he's a Senior Fellow at the Belfer Center, and was the Commander of US Forces Korea. And I always find one of the most interesting and provocative on the topic of what makes the North Koreans tick here. And it's all great to have him back as well.

[02:25:30]

We have Oriana Skylar Mastro, from Stanford. Oriana, it's great to have you joining us here. And I look forward to your comments as well. Sue Mi Terry, a Senior Fellow and the Korean Chair at CSIS. And of course long history working on North Korea issues for the US government. And back when we had offices, Will Tobey, my office mate down the way, Senior Fellow at the Belfer Center. And was the Deputy Administrator of the National Nuclear Security Administration, and has thought about these issues hard. So I'm really glad to have all of you here.

[02:26:16]

Let me start with this. The Biden administration says it will reconsider the North Korea strategy. But I don't think they're going to reconsider it in a terribly big hurry. They have got shorter deadlines on Iran, where they have to decide whether they're going to try to reenter the Iran nuclear agreement before the June elections. There's a huge push on to do a big review on China. And we think that the first conversation between President Biden and Xi Jinping is likely to

happen in the next few hours, if it hasn't happened already. They are engaged in trying to rebuild alliances.

[02:27:04]

And I get the impression that they're in no hurry to go try to untie the knot of what they do with North Korea after President Trump's summits, his great promises that all of this would solve the issue, his over-enthusiasm, I think in some ways, for the power of his own persuasion. After the first summit in Singapore, while we were in Singapore, the President said to me, and this was two and a half years ago, "David, just you watch. Within six months you'll see that they're beginning to give up weapons." And, when they didn't begin to give up weapons, he went pretty silent on North Korea, and barely said anything about it in the last year, other than to occasionally be angered when we would run, or our competitors would run stories about how the arsenal was building up.

[02:28:01]

So let me take you, then, to the first question that we have coming out of all of this, which is to try to tell us what long-term effects, if any, come out of the diplomacy that the Trump administration did? The administration argued, at the end, that while they didn't give up weapons, the very fact that we got a leader to leader engagement was, itself, a huge accomplishment, and one that, if it didn't have deterrent effect, at least would reduce the tension levels. And that they note that the North Koreans stopped doing the missile tests that Syd had referred to before. And they considered that, by itself, to be a significant improvement.

So Vince, let me start with you on that question When you look back at these past four years, is there anything for President Biden to build upon there?

[02:29:05]

**GENERAL VINCENT BROOKS:** Well thanks, David. And it's great to be on with everybody. And of course, it's always a challenge following Syd Seiler. I did that many times. We always led with Syd whenever we have large groups to come and meet with us.

**DAVID SANGER:** It's always a little dangerous, isn't it?

[02:29:16]

**GENERAL VINCENT BROOKS:** It's always dangerous. But you can see why. He's compelling and extraordinarily insightful. So Syd, it's great to see you again, too. But I'm honored to be on the panel with everyone. I think there are several things that came out of the past administration, as has been the case with preceding administrations. There's always something that remains that is of value, and should not be swept away.

[02:29:37]

In my view, the top-down engagement was necessary and should remain. It's not a traditional approach. Kim Jong Un is not a traditional leader. And given the lack of trust that he has for those around him, there will always have to be a centrality to the discussion, including Kim Jong Un. So I think that has to be retained.

Candidly, from a military perspective, we made a great deal of progress. And I think of things like, from where we were with the missile-a-month mania, as Syd referred to it, to actually seeing the door open the dialogue. And that wasn't without military activity that was involved in an intimate way, connected to efforts to achieve a diplomatic opening of some sort, to create that traction.

[02:30:23]

The Conference of Military Agreement is one of those outcomes, the only fulfillment from Singapore which was the repatriation of human remains, that successful operation that occurred into North Korea in the summer of 2018. And the numbers, by the way, rise on that, 55

containers. We never said 55 veterans, 55 fallen, because we weren't sure what was in there. And it is well over 170 individuals at this point in time, a huge, huge return.

[02:30:55]

And so there are many things like that. There is dialogue. The hot-line is still being answered by North Korea. There's not any engagement between UN Command and the North Korea People's Army beyond that. But for years, there was not even an answer, and there is now. So there are many things, I think, that have been reset, and put into a different position than before. Without a doubt, tension has been reduced. There is tension, nevertheless, and it will change forms. But I think that that can be carried into the current administration.

**DAVID SANGER:** And just let me ask you just one follow-up to that, since the focus of this panel is really on deterrence. Was the United States able to use that time, those four years and that diplomacy, to increase our deterrent capability, while Kim was using that time to increase the size of his arsenal and the amount of fissile material he had?

[02:31:51]

**GENERAL VINCENT BROOKS:** Well, there's a balance in that. And I would say yes and no. So it certainly, in the 2016-'17-'18 era, there wasn't an improvement in our deterrent capability, particularly some of the, what I call changing of the rules of the game in terms of how the alliance would respond militarily, to try to put at risk Kim Jong Un's assessment that he could, indeed, control escalation. We wanted to signal that maybe you can't, because we're not going to respond the same way we always did with military instruments.

[02:32:24]

We did see an increase in deterrence from the active signaling of extended deterrence capabilities, for example, bombers, submarines, the exposures of that did, I believe, elevate deterrence, if not also elevated risk. But at the behest of the summitry of 2018, and a specific set of asks by the South Korean government, those signals have been removed. And so there have

not been strategic assets brought back to the Peninsula since 2018 militarily. There's an equilibrium that happens in here somewhere, until such time as it's disrupted. But for right now, I believe that there is an equilibrium. Some gain and some loss of deterrent capability and credibility.

[02:33:12]

Now whether it's equal to what it is in North Korea's demonstrated in recent years, I'm not so sure. I mean North Korea really has advanced their arsenal, especially their conventional arsenal, even as they swing shiny objects in the long-range missiles and inter-continental ballistic missiles. So we shouldn't lose sight of the conventional capability. South Korea and the United States also advanced their conventional capability. So in that regard, I think there's still a deterrent balance that's in place.

**DAVID SANGER:** So Sue Mi, let me ask you sort of the same question. If you were in your old jobs, or even from your new one, tell us how you think the strategic balance here has changed. And do you agree with Vince that you would hold onto the leader-to-leader model here? Which I'm betting Biden is going to be reluctant to do, because he's going to want to think that he needs to get something from the North Koreans in return for the reward of meeting another American President. Which, of course, was the complaint about how President Trump went about this, that he didn't get at least a cessation of the manufacturing new fissile material in return for the summit.

[02:34:33]

**DR. SUE MI TERRY:** So I think in theory, meeting, you know, at that level, I don't have a problem with that, in theory. But President Trump met with Kim Jong Un three times. So it's clear that not much has been accomplished, in terms of North Korea taking steps towards denuclearization, right. General Brooks just talked about tensions haven't been reduced. I agree with that. You know, many things that we said. And I agree that many points that he has made,

North Korea has at least not conducted long-range missile tests, nuclear tests since 2017. And that's a good thing.

[02:35:07]

Of course, North Korea could revert back to a testing campaign shortly. But that's a good thing. But I would say, you know, the latter point that General Brooks made, and I want to sort of focus on that, North Korea's missile technology, the improvement that they have made in the last few years, since Singapore Summit, those tests and those advancements have made portions of the US mainland more vulnerable, right. So the past several years, we have seen North Korea successfully fly testing ballistic missiles, capable of delivering nuclear payloads to the United States, right. We saw an October 10<sup>th</sup> parade, North Korea showcasing what appears to be the largest liquid propelled [02:35:56] ICBM, not only in North Korea, but anywhere in the world, right, potentially with the capacity to launch multiple independent reentry [?] vehicles and so on, which would improve North Korea's ability to evade ballistic missile defenses, and further advance their credibility and reliability of their capability to strike the United States.

[02:36:16]

So in my mind, where we are today, you know, with the impressive progress that North Korea has made in their nuclear missile program, it means the Biden administration, I think, will find itself, when they're conducting this whole North Korea review that they are doing, with less bargaining power. So there, I might disagree a little bit. I think we have less bargaining power in some sense, than even the Trump administration enjoyed.

[02:36:42]

Yesterday during the panels, this concept of time came up, whether time is on the side of the United States or time is on the side of North Korea. Kim Jong Un himself said, in his speech, that time is on the side of North Korea. So I am concerned that, after three summits, all the summitry and diplomacy, while there is some reduction of tensions and no testing, fundamentally, where

we are today, is not at a good place. And I think Biden administration will feel that sense of urgency because of the investment that North Korea has made.

[02:37:17]

**DAVID SANGER:** Let me press you on this thought about Kim's argument that time is on his side. If you believe that, then you think his best strategy with Biden was the same strategy he pursued with Obama and that he went back to with Trump after the summits didn't yield what he wanted, which is, just keep quietly building. Most of the estimates now is there are probably closer to 50 nuclear weapons than they are to the 20 or 30 when Trump first came in. And, at some point soon, they're going to have a Pakistan-level arsenal. And that the United States will conclude, even if it won't publicly admit, that this is just an arms control discussion. It's no longer about disarmament. No American President has taken the position that North Korea keep its weapons as long as they were well-controlled and well-protected. Are we headed that way?

[02:38:28]

**DR. SUE MI TERRY:** I think so. I think, look. What Syd Seiler talked about the strategic continuity, right. North Korea has long maintained same strategic goal. That has not changed. That remains the same, right. Securing international acceptance of North Korea as a legitimate nuclear weapons power. They seek region survival, region security, international recognition, prestige. That comes with nuclear weapons

Where are we today? You heard all our Korean experts yesterday and today, just last several days, and increasingly, most all of the Korea watchers are now talking about arms control. Let's get to a practical solution, a realistic solution. North Korea is never going to give up their nuclear weapons. China is not the answer. You know, like we got to get into a—Let's open our eyes. Let's get the practical solutions.

[02:39:19]

So what are they talking about? They're talking about freezing—freezing or capping or an interim deal. And that's fine. I'm not, in theory, against that at all. But that will recognize North Korea as a responsible nuclear weapons power. So that's where we are headed. So I think if North Korea's goal is that, is gaining and securing international acceptance of North Korea as a nuclear weapons power, they are going to achieve that goal. They are headed in that direction. And if our goal is denuclearization, we're not anywhere near there.

**DAVID SANGER:** So Will, would you sign on to Sue Mi's argument here that we're sort of at the point where we have to accept reality, and to get in and argue about disarmament is not a terribly useful thing, that we can deter even if they hold onto their weapons. But that would certainly not be the position you were familiar with when you were looking at these kind of issues back in the Energy Department, back in the Bush era.

[02:40:27]

**WILLIAM TOBEY:** So I do think that, at least over the near term, the right policy is deterrence and containment for North Korea, toward North Korea. Developments over the last several years have made the problem more complicated. You talked about the number of nuclear weapons that the North has. The relative abundance of fissile material, now versus what it was 10 years ago, changes the equation in key ways. It will lead to a more aggressive force posture by North Korea, perhaps even with day-to-day deployment of nuclear weapons. It makes the chances of sales of fissile material, or even weapons, greater. It puts those forces, by putting those forces on alert, it increases the chance of accidental or unauthorized launches. It makes the theft of nuclear material more likely as well.

[02:41:22]

And so those are all real challenges that come from changes on the ground. And I would underscore what General Brooks and Dr. Terry said about the conventional force balance changes. Up until very recently, North Korea had no ability to attack [02:41:42] in the South.

They could hold Seoul [02:41:48] large artillery force. But their Air Force is effectively powerful, between ROK and US Air Forces. With increased accuracy of a ballistic missile force, now North Korea can hold targets in the South at risk with conventional warheads. And that hasn't changed in the military balance

**DAVID SANGER:** So if you were advising the Biden team on how to maximize our deterrent capability right now, how would you tell them that the dynamic has changed? And what changes would you advance [?] ?

[02:42:31]

**WILLIAM TOBEY:** I think deterrence has always been a combination of actual capabilities and messaging. And I think a lot of the messaging has been relatively consistent from the United States across administrations. The last one may be an exception to that. But we've made clear, in announcing the start of this conference, Ash Carter said, "I know what the outcome of another Korean War would be. It would be painful, but I know who would win." And I think he's right about that. And I think we need to continue to make that clear.

[02:43:11]

I think also, doing some things to rebuild the alliance, as Victor has talked about, Victor and others in earlier session, would be important, so that there could be no doubt about the US commitment of the alliance. Those would be places I would start. And finally, I would note that an important missile defense test took place last November. An SM-3 missile intercepted an ICBM class target from a US Navy ship. There were more than 50 such ships in the US inventory. It's going to rise to 70. We have hundreds, if not thousands, of those interceptors. That's an important potential increase in US ballistic missile defense capability.

**DAVID SANGER:** Great. Oriana, so you've heard this interesting discussion here about what part of the dynamic has stayed the same in deterrence, and Will made a good argument here for maintaining the kind of lead we had in what Ash pointed out would be the ultimate end if we

actually got into a real conflict. But you'd kill a few million people on your way to getting there, probably, or at least put them at risk. And then you've heard this argument about how the dynamic has changed on both sides. More conventional capability on the part of the North Koreans, some more capability on our anti-missile side, as Will has pointed out. But we haven't tested that against the significant barrage. We've been doing these sort of one at a time. So we're not entirely sure how that would work out.

When you weigh these changes, has the past four years led to an advantage of one side over the other?

[02:45:19]

**DR. ORIANA SKYLAR MASTRO:** Well, I hate to pull the, you know, answer different question than the one that you just asked, David. But one thing I think that's the most significant change, that has not been brought up, is our great power competition with China. We're talking about this North Korea issue in a vacuum. But in reality, strategy requires trade-offs. So, for example, as Ash Carter said, we know who would win that war. But guess who's going to lose that great power competition, if the United States is fighting a major war on the Korean Peninsula. We cannot do both, right. We have severe military challenges vis-à-vis deterring China. And if we are fighting a major war on the Korean Peninsula, the Chinese are going to emerge as the political victor of that conflict.

[02:46:03]

And so, from my viewpoint, we have to think about this. China has thought about this issue as part of the geopolitical competition, for a very long time. We have to think about it in the same way. What are our priorities? Continuity was mentioned. You know, North Korea has not given up these nuclear capabilities. I always—It's telling to me, and maybe the Zoom also puts years, makes me look a lot older. But I wrote my undergraduate thesis on the fact that North Korea was never going to give up its nuclear capabilities. And that was decades ago.

[02:46:33]

And the fact that we're still kind of talking about this issue suggests, you know, I agree with Dr. Terry, we have to move forward. North Korea is going to maintain their nuclear weapons. So the question is, what can the Biden administration do to enhance US security in the face of this? And in my mind, a key aspect of any arms control agreement has to be that they do not have the ability to deliver these weapons to the United States. The ICBM program has to go.

[02:47:01]

And so I think, you know, that would be something that this administration has to accept. And the Biden administration wants to do a review, one of the big takeaways for me of the Trump administration's policies is that the credible threat is what brought the North Koreans to the table. But deterrence requires credible assurance and credible threat. And in my viewpoint, President Obama was very good at the assurance side, right, building relationships, the credibility reliability of the United States. But he was not as good at the credible threat side.

[02:47:31]

President Trump was very good at the credible threat side, you know. I think the North Koreans and the Chinese, in particular, thought the United States was going to go to war on the Korean Peninsula. But there wasn't that assurance side. There wasn't the assurance that the United States would not start a war if North Korea actually gave up their weapons. So we have to find something in between. And even though China is not going to solve this issue for us, the Chinese have to be onboard with whatever is agreed.

[02:47:56]

And so I would suggest, you know, any rethinking of policy, which North Korea always decides when this is going to happen, I would be surprised if the Biden administration gets to determine when they rethink this policy, when they respond. I mean March in general tends to be a very heavy testing month. So I think they're probably going to be forced into it.

[02:48:15]

But we have to rethink everything that we do. We have a lot of these like Cold War style policies, like for example, cutting off engagement with countries we don't like, that theoretically has no basis. Why isn't it the case that we engage more with countries we don't like? Right. So, in a lot of cases, we're losing our influence, and our impact, and our negotiating power, by doing things a certain way.

[02:48:36]

So I would maintain those high level leadership engagements. I would move towards, you know, arms control, specifically maintaining the level of weapons they have now, and eliminating their delivery capabilities for long ranges. Now I know our allies and partners in the region, like South Korea and Japan, would still be under the nuclear threat.

[02:48:54]

But if I were in a leadership position, I would articulate to those allies and partners, as part of the assurance campaign, that the United States is so much more likely, the extended deterrent is so much stronger, because the United States is immune, right. Because we don't have to risk absorbing a nuclear attack, we are much more likely to respond with nuclear weapons. And so I do think that rethinking has to happen. There's something about continuity that leads to change, right, because the continuity is, the increased progression of this issue that has now changed the strategic environment.

[02:49:25]

And I think we have to kind of admit that this is not a problem that's going to be solved. And deterring North Korea from using nuclear weapons in peacetime, sure. But if the regime is at risk, can we really say we don't think there's going to be some sort of last-ditch effort? That's where I think, you know, the Chinese, in a matter of a day or two, have the capabilities to seize North Korea nuclear facilities.

[02:49:49]

I don't think China is a military partner with us in any other contingency. But this is one of them. The only way we would prevent nuclear use is if we allow for our planning to include a Chinese role on the Peninsula in a contingency.

**DAVID SANGER:** So that's been long been discussed, Oriana. And you may remember that part of the Wikileaks probe a decade ago were memos we published that recalled conversations between Kathy Stephens, who was speaking yesterday, and the then-Deputy National Security Adviser, about what you'd allow China to go do. But I couldn't say that a decade later, we've got a much better understanding with Beijing about what that role would be. And if we did, our deterrent position might be better, wouldn't it?

[02:50:41]

**DR. ORIANA SKYLAR MASTRO:** Well first of all, just as a side note of what has changed is, that the Chinese military had no capability, in many different scenarios, 10 years ago. So in my discussion with the Chinese military now, you know, they have separated—Their main concern 10 years ago was the refugee issue. Now they have People's Armed Police, which is separated from their military. They have tens of thousands of them stationed on the border. They will deal with the refugees. And the army's main goal is an extensive military intervention on the Peninsula. That is a relatively new phenomenon.

[02:51:13]

And their weapon—their capabilities to deal with weapons of mass destruction, they also just set up certain training and units to kind of deal with the elimination, safeguarding, [02:51:25] weapons. And so part of the issue was, ten years ago, you know, China didn't have the military capabilities to do a lot of the things that they can do today. And they were also, you know, under Hu Jintao, much more cautious, power, which Xi Jinping wants a more internationalist role.

[02:51:39]

So now the position of the Chinese government and the Chinese military is, if there's a conflict on the Peninsula, China 100 percent is going to be there. Now to get their involvement, their main concern is about the future of the Peninsula. They're not going to help the United States if it means a consolidation or expansion of the US-ROK alliance. And so, in my view, we have to make that promise to the Chinese, that in the case of reunification, which Xi Jinping has said is the ultimate goal, is reunification of the Peninsula, under South Korean control, that that would be beneficial to China.

[02:52:12]

Now his viewpoint is, that's a South Korea leaning towards China. But they're not against a future without North Korea in it. They're just against a future with Korea not existing, and then the United States consolidating its military presence on the Peninsula. So we have to have some of those very direct dialogues with the Chinese. The problem is, you know, the United States doesn't negotiate national security of our allies with other countries, right. The South Koreans are not going to be happy with us talking to the Chinese about our forced posture on the Korean Peninsula. But this is a very serious issue. And so I think we have to, you know, address it in maybe different ways that are not as politically acceptable as we would like.

**DAVID SANGER:** Graham, there's a reason that I left you for cleanup here, because I wanted you to hear all of this, and I knew that you would give us a good contrarian answer. So my recollection is, that on the day that President Trump announced his fire and fury line, when he said that the North Koreans would face fire and fury like the world had never seen, you and I and Joe Nye [?] were headed out on a fishing boat in Alaska. And we had a debate about whether we had a better chance of staying alive in a nuclear exchange from fishing in Alaska, or from being back on the East Coast. And we survived that. We caught a few fish. But I'm wondering whether, when you think about fire and fury with the current moment, where do you come down on this interesting divide that we've heard within the panel about whether we simply say, "Okay. We're going to essentially give up, except rhetorically, getting them to give up their weapons, and focus

on an arms control/reality based position.” Usually the issue that divides our class when they go off to do the North Korea case. So how do you answer your own case here?

[02:54:20]

**GRAHAM ALLISON:** Well, let me first say it's a pleasure to be on such an excellent panel. And I found a huge amount to agree with in each of the commenters' comments. A lot of new things. So I think that's the good news. So I think that a few just, if I could make tick points here. So the first is, North Korea has been pursuing its nuclear weapons for God knows, more than 30 years. The US has been saying, “This couldn't happen.” They've crossed every red line that we have drawn. Indeed, at one stage, Steve Hadley said, you know, “Gee. When we draw a red line, they just come out, come up and step across it. So we'll just quit drawing red lines.” So they basically have been on a path. And that's had a little pause here and a little pause there. But that's theory one.

[02:55:16]

Theory two—or point two. The US and South Korea have deterred the thing that we don't want the most on the Peninsula, which is war, by threatening what Ash said, that at the end of that war, North Korea is defeated, and Kim Jong Un is dead, and the regime is changed. And that would be the outcome of the war, either the conventional war or a nuclear war. So that's important for him to remember, that if there's a general war, that's the end of North Korea, period. Period.

[02:55:50]

In fact, I remember when Colin Powell explained this to a Chinese colleague, said, “Tell him that if a nuclear weapon were to explode on the soil of an American base or an ally, we're going to, in the same hour, turn North Korea into a charcoal biscuit.” That's pretty ruthless, but I would vote for it. So he needs to believe that. And I think he does. So that's the big picture for deterring war.

[02:56:23]

And I think on the next point that you're making, should we accept the North Korea as a nuclear weapons state, I continue to believe the answer is no. I think we can have our cake and eat it. If we're planning for war with North Korea, or thinking about deterring North Korea, it's a fact that they have nuclear weapons. And it's a fact that they have some capabilities to deliver nuclear weapons. And I think Oriana's point about being able to reach a lot further than they were able to do before, or as Vince said. It's also the case that, thanks to Vince's work on deterrence there, especially, there are a number of things we can do to them, that are different than what we used to do. So there's a competition of that sort going on.

[02:57:12]

But an agreement with them to stop where they are, to eliminate the ICBMs or other such elements, would be cast as a step on the road to denuclearization. And I think the reason for maintaining what some might call a degree of hypocrisy about this, is that the belief that if North Korea became a recognized nuclear weapons state, to the extent that India or Pakistan have done, that would become a visible fact in the life of South Korea and Japan, in a manner that would produce [interference in audio] [02:57:54] for them to-- for them to acquire nuclear weapons themselves. I don't think it's automatic at all. But I think that it would create a powerful force.

[02:58:10]

Finally, if I just make one other point, which I think this picks up what was said by several of the panelists, I think it's very significant, very significant that North Korea not have a credible, reliable capability to strike the America homeland with nuclear weapons. I know that they can credibly strike bases in South Korea. I believe they can credibly threaten to strike perhaps even Guam with some more uncertainty.

[02:58:46]

But, as we work on our defenses, and we work on every other element in this, including some of the ones that Vince advanced, including left of launch, they should believe, to the best of our ability, and the best way to make it is to make sure it's true, and to communicate it, that they

cannot strike the American homeland reliably. And if they were seen to be even trying to do, charcoal biscuits So there is for them.

[02:59:21]

And similarly, with respect even to their threats to be able to deliver their short-range and medium-range weapons to the South, the more we can do to make them insecure about that, so they're less confident about that, the stronger we make our deterrent, and the less likely we make it. So I think there's been this continuous development in both sides. And while North Korea has certainly made some progress with their short and medium-range reach and reliability, we've made some significant advances, too, in our defensive capabilities and the other things that Vince mentioned.

[03:00:03]

And, as to their ICBMs, I know there's a big debate about that. And some of my colleagues here, even at the Belfer Center, say we should just simply accept the fact that, since they had one launch that could have conceivably come here, they have a capability to explode a bomb at one of the American target. I don't believe that at all. I think that the absence of the further set of tests that stopped in November '17, in substantial part, because they thought they would be attacked if they continued them.

[03:00:40]

And I think the absence of any appropriate tests of [03:00:47] which is also a very big, big challenge, for having the credible capability, is sufficient for me to say to them, "You should not have any confidence, whatever, that if you were to launch one or ten missiles at the US, either they would ever get here on their own, or they would be intercepted in the meantime" I'm sorry, that's wrong. But that's, I think, to try to comment on several of the points that others made.

**DAVID SANGER:** That's great. And I think people will remember your charcoal briquette analogy.

[03:01:25]

**GRAHAM ALLISON:** That's Colin's, yeah.

**DAVID SANGER:** So we have about a half an hour left before we go to questions. So I'm going to ask you guys some fairly brief questions, and hope that we, now that we've sort of established where everyone's positions are, get some fairly brief answers so we can go through some of this fairly efficiently. And then at seven o'clock, we're going to start taking about 20 minutes worth of questions for all of this.

So Vince, let me go back to you here. So during your time as the Commander of the US Forces Korea, you worked pretty hard on some deterrence innovations. You came up with this sort of micro-deterrence signaling, which you used during the 2017 crisis. So tell us a little bit about what the elements of that were, and then tell us whether you think it's one of those concepts that works once until the North Koreans figure it out, or whether you think it's something that President Biden and his new commander, and his Asia team could use again.

[03:02:47]

**GENERAL VINCENT BROOKS:** All great comments from the panel, by the way. Let me just say, that I think that this idea of micro-deterrence signaling is really adapting the broader idea of what deterrence is all about, the doing things at a level less than war, using a variety of instruments, including military instruments, to affect the decision calculus of, in this case, Kim Jong Un. And before, it was about changing his decision about his pursuit of nuclear weapons as part of his Pyongyang policy, and if that would be a way to enhance his economy, would get him onto the world stage in a way that others would acknowledge and recognize.

[03:03:29]

And we wanted to put that at risk, especially as it is fundamentally driven by a belief that North Korea understood how the alliance would respond, based on those many, many decades of

provocation and response cycles. And there's a consistent pattern to it. North Korea has engaged in actions that have led to the deaths of many Americans and many South Koreans and some others from UN commands from earlier years.

[03:03:58]

The alliance has, on very few occasions, engaged in lethal action against North Korea. And so there's always going to be a limit, a self-restraining limit that the alliance will impose, to prevent escalation or resumption of war. And in the meantime, it sometimes brings the real [03:04:21] dialogue table. Sometimes it creates a cold period, but it does change the stasis somewhat, and North Korea usually gets away with it. They knew that.

[03:04:29]

And so this signaling was all about showing that, well maybe it's not going to be that way anymore. For example, instead of bringing bombers in, and having them fly from east to west across the Korean Peninsula, and then out to the South, what happens if you fly them from South to North and continue to proceed well beyond the extension of the military demarcation line, in international waters, and international air space? Instead of saying that we protest loudly, and we're going to bring a bomber in three days, when North Korea fires a missile, what happens if we fire a missile while their missile is in the air, and do it in such a way that the type of missile, with its range, could go to the point of launch, and would land before the North Korean missile would reach its target, given its trajectory?

[03:05:16]

These are examples of signaling. But there are also examples of trying to always, of course, being intimately tied to the diplomatic effort, to create traction. So if we need to raise tension, raise uncertainty, to cause Kim Jong Un to decide, it's probably better for me to have a conversation with Secretary Tillis [?] than with Secretary Mattis and his capabilities. That if that's what we want to do, then we have to make sure that we are regulating that, and not just engaging in a cycle of continuous escalation, a tit-for-tat sort of thing, but rather sending a new

signal, seeking an understanding of the response to that signal, and then adjusting from there, diplomatically, when opportunities occur.

[03:05:58]

That's really what the cycle of the summer of '17 to really February of 2018, looked like. And is that something that should be carried forward? Yeah, I'd say—I'd say so. It needs to be part of the approach that the United States and South Korea take to North Korea. North Korea understands the duality of harshness and cooperation. And we should communicate to them, in their language, of harshness and cooperation. And they should be joined together. We should signal things that say, we're absolutely, we're willing to have dialogue with you. And we're also not going to tolerate this, and that, and that. And the opportunities you had three years ago, you have fewer of them now.

[03:06:39]

And I think creating a different pressure dynamic is necessary, and that should be carried forward with some of these micro-deterrence signals.

**GRAHAM ALLISON:** David, can I make a small footnote?

**DAVID SANGER:** Sure.

[03:06:50]

**GRAHAM ALLISON:** I think having studied and thought about and written about deterrence for more decades than I like to remember, I think Vince's micro-deterrence as we're calling it, is actually an advance, one of the few advances in a topic that's been worked over and over and over, in which, rather than simply thinking about the big picture, and which meant, if you attack me, I have both the capability and the credible commitment to destroy you, or to impose on you out of sight, so don't think about it—to underneath that, to look at the smaller actions and smaller provocations that North Korea had been, in effect, getting away with, and finding ways to

impose costs and risks [?] to try to basically persuade them that it's not worth undertaking those activities. And I think he's developing, or he's writing a piece about this, which I think will actually be an add to the conversation among the strategists, not only in the North Korean space, but more broadly.

[03:08:09]

**DR. ORIANA SKYLAR MASTRO:** If I can just add a two-finger in that, too, just about deterrence in general—and I'm not a North Korea specialist, I'm more of a China specialist. But you know, what's interesting to me, is deterrence is in the eye of the target, right. And so the United States, we see these, you know, these displays of force, as signaling are deterrent. But the Chinese have always seen them as the opposite, a sign that the United States actually doesn't want to do anything. The way they see it is, if the United States doesn't actually want to do anything, so they lack the resolve or capability, then they'll do some sort of show of something. They'll fly something somewhere, maybe do an exercise somewhere.

[03:08:47]

So we, for decades, have kind of seen this. And again, it's about the perceptions of the other side. So it worked in the Cold War. But I would suspect that the North Koreans kind of see it in the same way, of like, you know, the United States doing exactly what we suspect, right. If we do exactly what the other side already took into account when they took an action, it is, in no way, going to change their calculus. And that's why we have to be a bit more innovative, and absolutely increasing the risk is so important, because the viewpoint is that the United States is so risk-averse. And so, if we actually took things that manipulate risk in that part of the deterrent, I think it would be much more effective.

[03:09:25]

**GENERAL VINCENT BROOKS:** Yeah. And if I can just say, that's exactly what the calculation was for our side, creating a series of responses, at varying degrees of risk to the alliance, risk-provoking an actual attack by North Korea, risk to the geopolitical dynamic, each

one of those options had some degree of risk associated with it, and had some variables associated with it.

[03:09:46]

And creating that table of options was the key. But it was all about the effect in the eyes of the beholder. And that included China. Because remember, there was an effort to try to compel China to engage in a much more fulsome way, internationally and locally, with North Korea. And the signals had to be threatening to them also, not such that we would attack them, but that they would not be able to control the determination of the circumstances.

**DAVID SANGER:** Sue Mi, when you hear this, is there a difference in your mind between deterring North Korea and deterring Kim Jong Un?

[03:10:23]

**DR. SUE MI TERRY:** First, no, because I mean, we know that Kim Jong Un is absolute dictator of North Korea. North Korea is Kim Jong Un, and Kim Jong Un is North Korea. But when I say North Korea, I mean the elites, I mean the regime, not the public, of course. Because the elites have the best—same interest as Kim, in keeping this system going. So no, I don't see the difference in there.

[03:10:46]

But could I also just comment on this fascinating conversation that is taking place right now? Because I do think that all this time, you know, while we were able to deter North Korea on high level, from high level threats, from stopping North Korea from invading South Korea, and so on, but we have not successfully deterred them in terms of lower level threats. And we have a long history, we can spend hours talking about that, or preventive [?] strategy.

[03:11:18]

And we said, okay, they have not proliferated, you know, nuclear weapons or fissile material. But they proliferated everything else besides nuclear weapons, ballistic missile cooperation, Iran, Syria, conventional military provocation, Cheonan, Yeonpyeong Do [?]. So I think it's really important of this conversation. So I just want to echo that, because I think North Korea has also successfully put in place capability to deter alliance military responses. So that's been the dynamic, frankly speaking. So I do think this is a very important conversation.

**DAVID SANGER:** So let's think about March for a bit, okay. So you're Biden. You're wrapped in a China review that's going to take until at least summer. You've held so many meetings about how to get the Iranians together on reconstituting JCPOA, and do those first, and not that you don't think you'll ever emerge from the situation. And as discussed here, before the North Koreans see March as a really fine testing period. And they always want to send a marker to a new President, right. They did it to Obama. They did it to Trump. If you create the crisis, you get into the predictable cycle, that Vince referred to before.

So they dust off one of these missiles, either the submarine launch solid, or that mega missile that Sue Mi noted, that they put into the parade. They shoot it off. Graham calls me up and tries to figure out, again, whether we're safer on the East Coast or Alaska. And what do you do then? Where, in other words, your effort to go put the policy together gets interrupted in managing an event where it's pretty clear, from Biden's speech last week at the State Department, that he wants to portray himself as a tougher, non-rollable version of the past two administrations. I'm going to start on that with you, Will.

[03:14:00]

**WILLIAM TOBEY:** Sorry. So I think you're right to be asking this question. I think it was Dr. Mastro who said that Biden, President Biden may prefer to work on Iran first, but that might not be his choice to make. And I think North Korea typically does watch what goes on elsewhere, and does elbow its way into the conversation. I think that it's probably correct to try and dissuade them from further missile testing or nuclear weapons testing. But if you look at the remarks at

the Eighth Party Congress, Kim Jong Un called for an increased nuclear capability for greater missile capability, both of which, if he's serious about attaining, will require more testing. And so I wouldn't be surprised if we do see more of that. And those will be tests, both of the weapons systems, and the new administration. It will be difficult.

**DAVID SANGER:** Graham, what would you advise, particularly if that missile test establishes one of the two things they haven't really established yet? One of them is, they could flatten the curve, to use the favorite phrase of 2020, and reach just about any city in the United States. Or second, that they've solved the problem of a reentry vehicle, right. The two things that we just haven't seen them demonstrate yet, and the two things that various administrations have said, either publicly or privately, they could never allow to have happened.

[03:15:46]

**GRAHAM ALLISON:** I think, this is a [03:15:49]. And so I think that everything that's been said is exactly right. I think it's quite conceivable that something like this could happen in March. There's a reason why, when President Obama handed the baton to President-elect Trump, he told him, "Your most significant challenge is going to be North Korea, because they moved in on a path to acquire this reliable capability to strike the American homeland." And I think Trump's version of what nuclear strategists called a mad-man theory, which he made pretty credible, played a very significant role in Kim Jong Un stopping.

[03:16:38]

In fact, I think most of us have now discounted that. But one of the most interesting sort of footnotes or paragraphs in the Woodward book is that Trump certainly persuaded Mattis, who was his Secretary of Defense, that he was about to attack North Korea. Because Mattis would sleep in his sweatpants every night, whether at the Pentagon or at home. Then he'd go to the sit room, and 15 minutes to go.

[03:17:12]

So I think, I don't think Biden can do that. I think that Oriana's point is absolutely not one that should be advertised publicly, but is so true that you can't deny it, that the US fighting another Korean War that we win, for the next year or two, while we're trying to manage not just a great power competition, but a real [03:17:46] rivalry with a China that's rising, and we're distracted in a war, doesn't sound very credible. So I think it's a serious problem.

[03:17:58]

And I think I would try to prevent it. And now the question is, how we would manage to do that. And other than a credible threat to attack the launch pads, to prevent them. If we had other means to do that, including cyber and/or covert, I would work on those. But I think that—I think that unfortunately, if you were betting it, if they were to do that, and we don't have any significant capability to do much about it, I think you will see a quick retreat, the same way we've seen the last 10 times North Korea crossed one of these red lines, that Bush or somebody else said could never happen. And we'll say, “Well, we'll just shore up our deterrents, and we'll defend the next line.”

[03:19:03]

**DAVID SANGER:** I will step briefly out of my moderator role, to make a point. And Will, I'll go to you in just a sec with your two-finger, that three months into the Trump administration, we published a story that described a very advanced US cyber and electronic warfare program, which went into effect in the Obama administration, that basically sabotaged the North Korean launches. And it was successful with older style missiles that the North Koreans were launching. But Kim got rid of that missile system in October of 2016, while we were wrapped up in the Presidential election that was there.

[03:19:50]

And it's not notable that we've been all that successful since. But I think you're right, Graham. I think what any President would try to go reach for, would be a way to try to disable the weapons

without hitting the launchpads kinetically, to make that work. Will, you had a point to make there?

[03:20:08]

**WILLIAM TOBEY:** Yeah. On the assumption that the North Koreans haven't successfully tested a reentry vehicle, I don't think we have perfect knowledge, at least not in public, but I would point out that the thermal and G-force stresses from a highly lofted test like the ones they conducted, are actually more demanding than a test to full range.

**DAVID SANGER:** They are more demanding, but they are less symbolically powerful.

[03:20:36]

**WILLIAM TOBEY:** Well, but they know whether their warheads survived or not.

**DAVID SANGER:** Yep, that's right. That's right. Oriana.

[03:20:46]

**DR. ORIANA SKYLAR MASTRO:** Yeah, I just—I wanted to jump in on this sort of issue. The first thing I will say is, if I were advising the Biden administration, I would say that they have to come up with something before this happens, right. For deterrence to be in any way useful, that threat has to be issued very clearly before sort of the March testing season, right, versus saying something afterwards.

[03:21:08]

Now it kind of depends on the risk acceptance, risk aversion of this current administration. But I'm with, you know, Graham on this issue. Like we cannot let them successfully test. And successful, I know what Will was saying, in terms of scientifically, they might know it's successful. But for deterrence purposes, the most important thing is, that they know that they

have signaled to us credibly that it's successful, that we now believe that they have that capability.

[03:21:34]

And so the administration should come up with something saying, like, you know, they are hoping to continue this pathway of high level or bilateral whatever, kind of diplomacy. But they can accept no tests while they build the framework necessary to continue that diplomacy. And therefore, the United States reserves the right, if they see any preparations for testing, to undermine those preparations with whatever means we see at our disposal.

[03:22:02]

Now I will just say that there is this—I don't know if it's a disconnect. People see the kinetic option versus cyber and other options differently. We think cyber is less escalatory. But you know, I think that if we told the North Koreans, “If you're going to test this ICBM or reentry vehicle or whatever, we're going to take out that launch pad.” And we take it out with kinetic means, I don't see that as like the beginning of a war. I mean the North Koreans know why we did it. They know our aims are limited. Unless they see some sort of strategic benefit to fighting a full-out war with the United States that day, I don't think they're going to—I think they're just going to kind of let it be.

[03:22:46]

And the problem with cyber means, even if we have it, is with battle, you know, damage assessments, it's just hard for us to tell with fidelity whether or not— [simultaneous conversation]

**DAVID SANGER:** And even in the case that we revealed in those stories in 2017, we know that 88 percent of the Korean missiles that were fired failed, went into the ocean, whatever. But no one could tell us what percentage of those failed because of our cyber or on account of

warfare activities, versus the number that failed because they had bad parts, they made a mistake, it was a bad design, so forth and so on.

At the same time, if we were going to take out the pad, Vince, what do you want to—go call the Chinese first, and sort of tell them--

[03:23:41]

**DR. ORIANA SKYLAR MASTRO:** Oh yeah, you would definitely tell the Chinese first. And then tell the Chinese to stop it.

**DAVID SANGER:** [simultaneous conversation] you're going to see a pad disappear in North Korea in about 20 minutes.

[03:23:51]

**GENERAL VINCENT BROOKS:** No, I would not do that.

**DAVID SANGER:** You wouldn't?

[03:23:54]

**GENERAL VINCENT BROOKS:** No, I would advise significantly against that. So here's why I would say so. Item (1) you hand the dialogue over to the Chinese. Item (2) you leave the pace with North Korea to test you and find that you are impotent on what you said you were going to do, all right. So the reality of what starts a war is something that is not predictable. It is, as [03:24:17] would say, and just to make a point, Dr. Mastro, it might be accepted as North Korea wouldn't see that as casus belli. And they would understand why we did it.

[03:24:31]

But they might say the same thing about any testing that's done, so the SN3 testing was done, would we have not seen a casus belli if they had attacked that ship? It didn't directly threaten

North Korea but it was testing a capability that is related to North Korea. Therefore, they reserved the right. I mean if you reverse that, you'll find that it's not so predictable as to how it would be accepted or not.

[03:24:53]

Now, having said that, I would submit to you that the March dialogue you ought to be into, the March Madness that will come this year, very likely, has it has in transitions of administrations before, is often driven by the upcoming military exercises that happen in March and April. North Korea uses that as an excuse to do what it is they were waiting to do anyway. North Korea is going to do that this year. They will use the exercises as an excuse. They've already signaled that they're concerned about exercises, when they really are not. The exercises really do not matter to North Korea.

[03:25:30]

And so it'd be my view, the maneuver is not one of kinetic or cybernetic activity. It is one of diplomatic maneuver. The call for dialogue needs to happen in February, during the period of evaluation of the relationship. The signal is that it isn't a hostile relationship, that we're going to move forward from the dialogue that happened and was disrupted in 2018-'19. And that we are open to the dialogue. And that should be made very clear by the new administration.

[03:26:05]

That must occur in February. The response to it, then, is what North Korea's action in March becomes. So if North Korea wants to move away from a hostile policy, and they want the US to move away from a hostile policy, can they engage in a provocation in March? Well yes, if they use the exercise as an excuse. But that'll be it. And I'm not suggesting we touch the exercises. I submit to you the exercise should be silent and done for the purpose of readiness, less about deterrence, and less about reassurance.

**DAVID SANGER:** Vince, so you say this should come in February. By my look at the calendar, we're at the 10<sup>th</sup>. They've got 18 days left to go do this. But let's assume for a minute that my amazing Karnac act that I did at the beginning was right, and that Biden talks to Xi tonight. What does he tell him about North Korea along those lines?

[03:27:04]

**GENERAL VINCENT BROOKS:** Well, we're hoping it would be—We've got to move together on this. This is in our interest both to cause us to continue to move—We cannot undermine one another on this. And then diplomacy takes its normal course, and both countries will begin to undermine each other. But that's what the dialogue should be about in the first place, to try to create at least some sense of common concern and common interest.

[03:27:25]

But China has been impacting the narrative. They've already been maneuvering with North Korea. They've already been making promises to what happens in the aftermath from North Korea. They're already trying to secure their influence into the future. And I believe, from a geopolitical standpoint, that is not something that we should accept. We shouldn't yield that to China. In fact, there is an opportunity for a geopolitical tectonic plate shift that's afoot here, if the approach to North Korea is done the right way. And it may drift them away from China, under whose control they wish not to be.

[03:28:00]

And so I think that we've got to think about it in a different way. Don't yield it to China. Disrupt China's ability to influence it, and cause North Korea to begin to maneuver on what its deeper interests are. Things like missiles threatening the United States, being acknowledged internationally, I don't believe those are their deep interests. I believe that those are means to an end. Their deeper interest is about economic security and security of the regime headquarters.

[03:28:28]

How do you address those, then? And economic security will not come through an extended relationship with China.

**DAVID SANGER:** So Sue Mi and Graham, we're down to just a few minutes before we take questions. Let me ask you both the same question here. Vince makes a really good case that, if you're the North Koreans, you don't want to be over-dependent on China. And certainly, we have seen the North Koreans, in recent times, open up a second internet channel that runs through Russia, not through China, which, you know, tells you a little bit about this. But it's easier to open a second internet channel than it is to put together a new gas supply, the way the Chinese operate. Or replace the amount of Chinese goods that are coming across that border.

So if you are on that phone call between Biden and Xi tonight, or you're advising the President how to handle it, does he seek to have the Chinese cut back early, and signal to the North Koreans, “Don't do your usual March Madness”? Or is the message different? Sue Mi.

[03:29:51]

**DR. SUE MI TERRY:** You know, for three decades, we've been focused on this. And we thought China could help us. And China did not help us. At the one time that we actually saw China implementing sanctions, and doing more on the North Korea front, was actually in the middle of the fire and fury phase in the fall of 2017, where everybody was actually surprised that China was actually implementing sanctions and doing more. But why was that? Because there was this whole fire and fury rhetoric. There was this whole “Rocketman” on a suicide mission and where we were headed.

[03:30:23]

This earlier talk about, you know, I think you guys—was it General Brooks who talked about, you know, somebody talked about taking out a pact. There was an actual danger in the fall of 2017. That was the only time that China actually did something that actually surprised us. I think, at this point, between—particularly with the US-China relationship what it is, I think it's

like we can't expect China to help us on North Korea. You know, we can talk all we want, I mean, yeah, sure. Biden should say whatever he needs to say. General Brooks recommended the right language. But I don't think the expectation is that China is going to help us on North Korea.

**DAVID SANGER:** Graham?

[03:31:07]

**DR. SUE MI TERRY:** Can I just one comment, since I'm talking about that limited strike thing that came up a little bit earlier? Just coming from intelligence background, I would just say one thing. This is one thing we do not know. So we cannot assume that Kim Jong Un will act one way or another. Regime intention is something we just don't know. And we do not know how he will see, you know, how he feel existentially threatened. You know, he's very rational but still paranoid. In all the previous regime change operations the US conducted really strengthened field for the Kim regime.

[03:31:42]

So I will just—I will just very caution against thinking that we know how the North Korean regime going to act if we just take out a missile.

**DAVID SANGER:** Graham?

[03:31:52]

**GRAHAM ALLISON:** Oh, I agree with Sue Mi that we do—Our understanding of Kim Jong Un is limited. And we don't know how they will react to one thing or the other. But I also agree with her strongly that Trump's fire and fury and mad man act managed to register, and it seems to me we saw that both in what he said to some other people, and in terms of his own behavior. I think it's also the case that, as we know from the summits, like the Singapore Summit, when he and his sister saw the world, they were shocked and were surprised, and would prefer a wealthier North Korea rather than the mess that they had.

[03:32:37]

So I think that I'm trying to understand what's moving in difficult. With respect to the Chinese, I think not likely to get much help. So I agree with Sue Mi. and I think, I agree strongly with Vince's idea, that if I were advising, I would say the US should communicate clearly to Kim Jong Un that we're eager to have a continuation of the high level conversation after a period. And I would say perhaps by the summer. But not if the relationship is spoiled by his going ahead with March Madness testing. And indeed, I would probably make some adjustments in our exercises if that were relevant for giving him something so that he felt like he was doing something and we were doing something.

[03:33:37]

But I think that would be hard to communicate, because we don't have a very good channel of communication with North Korea at this space, at this point, as far as I know. And I think you can see, as you said, David, rightly, the folks that are in the new administration are drinking from many fire hydrants at the same time. And North Korea is not one of their—is not in the front of the line. But I think if they don't attend to it, Kim Jong Un will create events that will lead them to have to do something.

**DAVID SANGER:** Okay.

[03:34:13]

**DR. ORIANA SKYLAR MASTRO:** If I could just jump in on China real quick, because—So, just to put a little bit more nuance behind the point I was trying to make before, I think if you told the Chinese on this phone call with Xi that you will not allow this testing to happen, this goes back to, I think, the point Dr. Terry made, that if the Chinese believe the United States is going to take this action, then they will work hard to keep North Korea from doing this.

[03:34:37]

The Chinese have never had this mentality of helping the United States. They don't do anything to do us any favors. It's all about the geopolitical competition with the United States. And so if we want to try to convince them that it's in their interest, that they should care about a nuclear North Korea, that does not work. But if you went to the Chinese, and you either said that the United States was going to take some drastic action that was not in their favor, they would put more pressure on North Korea. Or, if you went to the Chinese with a more conciliatory proposal, promising, for example, that if North Korea no longer existed, the United States military would no longer be on the Peninsula, I am 100 percent confident that you would see a China take out North Korea, that nuclear threat on their own.

[03:35:21]

Now I get the point that people don't want to concede that influence to China. But these are the situations we're dealing with. And I think we have to be reasonable that the Chinese will do what's in their best interest. The question is, are we willing to create the incentives to push them in the direction on the Korean Peninsula that is to our best interest?

**DAVID SANGER:** We've only got about 15 minutes left. And I promised John that I would keep us on time. So let me throw out a couple questions here. We've seen a bunch in the Q and A section, if people want to add to those, do. But know that we've already got a pretty long line. Robert Petry raises a good question that Sieg Hecker has proposed a “Three Noes” policy, proposed this more than a decade ago. No new nukes, no better nukes, no proliferation. So he asks the question, is it time now to adopt this position again, and combine it with a new version of the Six Party talks, given how North Korea has only improved its current capabilities after Obama's strategic patience, and after Trump's maximum pressure, and the summit meetings? I have a funny feeling that Bob Gates, if he was on our panel, would say we'd be buying the same horse all over again to do the six party talks. But who wants to grab that?

[03:36:52]

**GRAHAM ALLISON:** I think the six party talks were activity in the absence of strategy or any possibility of consequences. So I would not go down that road.

**DAVID SANGER:** Anybody else? Vince, useful? Not useful? Been there before?

[03:37:11]

**GENERAL VINCENT BROOKS:** Well, Sieg Hecker's insights are always useful. And so I think that the Three Noes could be a useful start point. The challenge, of course, as he knows better than anybody, is how you inspect and verify that, and the challenges of doing so. So it would be an idealistic establishment of policy that has to, at some point, be followed by different type of action. And that action will not open without the other aspects of the North Korea-US and North Korea-South Korea relationship advancing. So say that, pursue that, but move on the pattern of different relationships.

**DAVID SANGER:** Okay, anybody else on that one? Will.

[03:37:54]

**WILLIAM TOBEY:** So I would say that the September 2005 joint statement from the Six Party Talks effectively embodied most of what Sieg is suggesting. And I admire Sieg. But unfortunately, North Korea didn't abide by it. It joined the list of, a long list of agreements that North Korea has violated. And you know, while it would be great to achieve that outcome, it's a lot easier said than done.

**DAVID SANGER:** I do recall that on the day that that was announced in 2005, we wrote—I wrote a really skeptical story about whether they would comply. And a very senior administration official in the Trump administration, a friend of many of you on the panel here, called me up and chewed me out for being too negative on it. And we made a dinner—a dinner bet on it, because I've learned from Graham that you always have to establish some stakes here. And I collected on the dinner, which, by the way, is better than I've ever done with the bet that

Graham had, that there would be use of nuclear weapons and anger within 10 years. And I think we made the bet 15 years ago. He maintains that I've lost my piece of paper on this one.

[03:39:15]

**WILLIAM TOBEY:** Some people had visions of Nobel Prizes. [simultaneous conversation]

**DAVID SANGER:** Another question that we've gotten along the way here, for General Brooks. Mentioned that the military signaling. How confident are we that the North Koreans perceive those US military signals as we intend them? Do their radars—are we certain they've picked up the bombers flying off their borders in that direction you discussed? Do we have to supplement the signals with public press releases, announcements? And what does that tell you?

[03:39:58]

**GENERAL VINCENT BROOKS:** Yeah, it's an uncertainty, as is always the case with deterrents. So did the message, the signal reach the intended target, and with the intended effect? That's an unknown. There were some indications, during our time in 2017, that North Korea was noticing the actions that were taken, and actually made some adjustments in their military dispositions. And I'll be general about that.

[03:40:29]

So there's some indication of it. But the other ones, you know, the rest of your question has to do with, how do you make sure? How do you increase your chances of it reaching? And that's coupling it with other things, with other actions. The missile launches, for example, that the United States and South Korea conducted, all were connected to an imaging plan, and a rapid release to news organizations, so that that would be seen. Because there was evidence that North Korea knows what is being shown on South Korean, Japanese, and United States, and European news sources. There was some evidence of that.

[03:41:05]

So it's important to show that that's happening in those media outlets. I think that a combination of physical action and information action, followed by diplomacy, whether it's directly to North Korea or with like-minded nations who can begin to congeal internationally, to create a broader set of pressure, that combination punch is what works best.

**DAVID SANGER:** So we have two questions that have come in on my favorite topic of cyber. One of them asks, is it plausible that one day US deterrents toolkit might rely less centrally on nuclear weapons, and thinking more about relying on cyber? And then another question, sort of the flip-side of that, came in from Mark Sola, who asks, a North Korean cyber attack on the US seems more likely than a nuclear attack. Is there a way to reduce that risk by deterrence or negotiations?

I remember noting to the Trump administration, in Hanoi, during their briefings, that while they complained that when we negotiated with Iran on nukes, we didn't include missiles, but when we were negotiating with North Korea, I pointed out, we weren't including cyber, which is something that they have used against, not only Sony, but our banks, the international banking system. So who wants to take that?

[03:42:39]

**GRAHAM ALLISON:** Well David, just the short line is the role that we use in class, from Michael Solmeijer [?] who used to be at Belfer, and is now at NSA.

**DAVID SANGER:** Was at NSA. He's now at the White House.

[03:42:52]

**GRAHAM ALLISON:** Yep. But he said that the US has the biggest rocks, and we live in the glassiest house. So I don't think we're soon going to be ourselves living in anything other than a free and open society that, therefore, offers so many targets of opportunity, that we are likely to

switch our nuclear reliance, or that's our trump card, to cyber. Though I think it'll be part of the spectrum as it is.

**DAVID SANGER:** Anybody else on this one? Oriana?

[03:43:32]

**DR. ORIANA SKYLAR MASTRO:** I would just jump in, since Graham mentioned kind of the civilian open society part. Also, on the military part, you know, the United States is so reliant on like information systems to fight, in a way that many of our adversaries are not. So China is a perfect example. The problem with deterrence in some of these domains, like cyber, is that, you know, if China disrupts some of our connectivity, then it has a really significant impact on our operational effectiveness. But if we do the same to China, it does not have the same impact.

[03:44:07]

And that kind of asymmetry makes it hard for the United States to use something like cyber in a deterrent capacity, because we would have to threaten, basically, it's impossible to figure out what we could threaten China with, to keep them from using those cyber means that would also be credible, right. Because any level of risk or cost that would deter them is also incredible. You know, we could say, "We'll nuke you if you use a cyber attack." No one's going to believe that.

[03:44:35]

So cyber is a very difficult realm on its own to deter those types of attacks. And I think, given the US position of being in that very glass house, also on the military side, it makes it very hard to think about a world in which we rely more on those types of means for deterrence than nuclear or conventional military capability.

**DAVID SANGER:** I would agree with that, and you know, I argued in *The Perfect Weapon*, that deterrence to cyber is so much harder than deterrence with nuclear. Because you've got issues of deniability. You have issues with the fact that it's so cheap, which makes it so appealing

to the North Koreans as a weapon. You've got Graham's good point on the glassy house, and so forth. But I would carve one exception out to that, that I think the Biden administration is going to have to get their arms around, which is, if you believe the forthcoming UN report coming out, the North Koreans, in the past three months, have stolen about \$300 billion dollars—I'm sorry, \$300 million dollars in cryptocurrencies. And they use a lot of this to go finance the nuclear program. Or, at least, if you believe that cash is fungible, it helps it.

And they're a lot more skilled now at raising funds using cyber to clean out central banks and cryptocurrency wallets than they ever were at printing \$100 dollar bills, which is messy, and slow, and gets your hands full of ink, and so forth. And if we don't get our arms around this, they're going to have a continuing way to go finance a lot of this.

Another question that comes in, this one's from Alexander Komprat [?]. I hope I pronounced that right, a Belfer Fellow. Says, we've seen a large number of full range ballistic missile tests and mid ranges, in the summer of 2019, by the North Koreans. The last one was last March. Each one of them a breach of UN resolutions. The Trump administration didn't respond to these tests. They condemned them sort of in an off-hand way. So assuming that the North wouldn't want to go big to begin with, but would start out in March in a smaller way to get Biden's attention, should the US respond very differently? Vince.

[03:47:20]

**GENERAL VINCENT BROOKS:** Yeah. This is actually connected, also, to the cyber question. So I'm going to bridge the two of these. But let me just say, first, a selective, very selective use of cyber, with a perception of cyber capability that is unknown and uncertain, is far more effective as a deterrent, as part of a deterrent package, than a frequent use of cyber capability. Not the least of which is the loss of intelligence value that comes from that. Before you do a cyber attack, you will have had very, very good intelligence. And that intelligence has to be traded off when you engage in attacks.

[03:47:55]

So I would say that's something that should be very sparingly used, not as an alternative to the rest of the deterrent's structure, but as a portion of the deterrent's structure, including the perception of capability. Now having said that, as we go into the question that Alexander Komprat asked, I think that the reality of testing is, we have to first recognize that it's testing. It's North Korea trying to see if their capability is where they want it to be.

[03:48:26]

It is, secondarily, messaging. And how one responds to the message can be a message unto itself. So I am glad that the Trump administration didn't overreact. Because I think that that's the kind of thing they might see in March. They want to see, are you hostile or not? And their efforts to provoke hostility need to fall flat, which then disrupts their decision cycle. It removes some of their excuses for subsequent actions that they would take.

[03:48:57]

What was missing in this case, and what I would certainly encourage the Biden administration to contemplate, is what did that mean to South Korea and to Japan? And so there has to be a recognition that those short-range missiles are about an improved arsenal that threatens the South Korean and Japanese body politic, and our US presence there. And we can't ignore it entirely. We've got to talk about reassurance when we see something like that, not about deterrence. So the message that was missed in both categories, and I would encourage the Biden administration to think more about reassurance.

**DAVID SANGER:** Well thank you all. This has been a great conversation. I wish we could take it on some more. But I promised John that I would get all of you back to the tasks at hand, which may also include like feeding children, by 7:20. And we are at the magic hour. I can't say that we have solved all of this, but we have certainly illuminated it. So I wanted to thank you Oriana, Will, General Brooks, thanks to you, Sue Mi, Graham, we'll continue this argument in front of our class in the fall. And John, back to you.

[03:50:13]

**DR. JOHN PARK:** Thank you so much. This panel discussion was truly a treat. And it was a classic. We will be recording all of our sessions, and editing them, and posting them later. And this definitely has all the hallmarks of a classic discussion. So thank you all.

We now move to our closing remarks section. Over the past three days, our speakers have been generous with their insights. They provided great examples of how Korea as an oracle of global trends. From COVID-19 lessons on how the two Koreas are dealing with this public health crisis, to how the Korean regime is having a greater global footprint through cyber means, to how North Korea's expanding nuclear arsenal is triggering second-order effects, we can clearly see how this oracle is growing.

[03:50:55]

We at the Korea Project have found that we gain powerful insights about the international community when we combine Korea and diverse functional disciplines. As our Policy Research Laboratory grows, we seek to create new insights and engage new partners. The Korea Project is in a growth phase. Inspired by the work of our Belfer colleagues in the cyber project, as well as great books like *The Perfect Weapon* and *The Hacker and the State*, we recently launched a new Korea Project initiative, focusing on Korea and technology. Spanning cyber hacking operations to the growth of cryptocurrency, this new initiative brings together a new generation of talented researchers. We'll be sending an event invitation next month.

As a final note, our thanks to the Korea Foundation for their generous support of the Korea Project. I'd like to thank Alex O'Neill, our new Korea Project coordinator, who just joined last week. In a very short period of time, Alex has hit the ground sprinting, and was instrumental in convening the summit. I'd also like to thank Julie Belise [?] on the Belfer Communications Team and Trevor and Martin on the IT Team.

[03:52:02]

Next year we look forward to bringing you another terrific cast of experts, and engaging them on their trade craft derived wisdom. Thank you all very much for joining over the past three days.

We look forward to seeing you next year for a third Harvard Korean Security Summit.

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