Prospects for a Stable Transformation of the Korean Peninsula

TRANSCRIPT

Introduction...............................................................................................................................................2
  • John Walters, Chief Operating Officer, Hudson Institute

Remarks.........................................................................................................................................................3
  • Alex Wong, Deputy Special Representative for North Korea, U.S. Department of State

Panel Discussion............................................................................................................................................4
  • Patrick Cronin, Senior Fellow, Hudson Institute
  • Dr. Jina Kim, Research Fellow, Korea Institute for Defense Analyses (KIDA)
  • Dr. Patricia Kim, Senior Policy Analyst, U.S. Institute of Peace
  • Bruce Klingner, Senior Research Fellow for Northeast Asia, The Heritage Foundation
  • Dr. Seong-hyon Lee, Director of the Center for Chinese Studies, The Sejong Institute

About Hudson Institute: Founded in 1961 by strategist Herman Kahn, Hudson Institute challenges conventional thinking and helps manage strategic transitions to the future through interdisciplinary studies in defense, international relations, economics, health care, technology, culture, and law.

Hudson seeks to guide public policy makers and global leaders in government and business through a vigorous program of publications, conferences, policy briefings, and recommendations.

Please note: This transcript is based off a recording and mistranslations may appear in text. A video of the event is available: https://www.hudson.org/events/1781-prospects-for-a-stable-transformation-of-the-korean-peninsula22020
Good afternoon, and welcome to the Betsy and Walter Stern Policy Center here at Hudson Institute. I'm John Walters, chief operating officer at Hudson. The institute's mission is to promote American leadership and global engagement for secure, free, and prosperous future. We develop policy solutions that are unbounded by the usual limitations of conventional thinking, and have done so for over 50 years.

It is my pleasure to welcome you to this public discussion, looking at prospects for a stable transformation of the Korean peninsula. This conference follows remarks earlier this morning by former UN ambassador Nikki Haley, talking about the problem of peace and prosperity and capitalism as a ground of that in our world, and touching on the situation in North Korea as one of the problem areas that we all face. It is my pleasure to kick off this conference and important research that is being done by the participants. This research has been undertaken by Hudson's Asia Pacific Security Chair, Patrick Cronin, and I want to thank him especially for his work here, and is supported by the Korean Foundation.

We will be releasing a major report in the coming weeks, but we are delighted that five of the contributors will be here on stage, including Doctors Kim and Dr. Lee, who have flown in from Seoul. Thank you. From nuclear non-proliferation and alliance readiness to human rights and regional security, Hudson remains keenly interested in the evolving relationship with North Korea under the third generation, Kim Jong-Un.

And to help kick off this public discussion, we are privileged to have with us, Alex Wong, deputy special representative for North Korea and deputy assistant secretary for North Korea in the State Department's Bureau of East Asia and Pacific affairs. We’re particularly pleased that he’s here because yesterday, President Trump announced his nomination as representative of the United States for the special political affairs of the UN, with the rank of ambassador, and as alternative representative of the USA to the session of the General Assembly of the United Nations. He's also been a friend of Hudson for a long time, and I've enjoyed working with him on a variety of matters. Prior to his current appointment, Mr. Wong was deputy assistant secretary for regional and security affairs in the East Asia Pacific Affairs Bureau. And earlier, he was foreign policy advisor and general counselor to the United States Senator, Tom Cotton.

Mr. Wong was previously an attorney in Washington, D.C., the law firm of Covington & Burling. He also served as law clerk for Judge Janice Rogers Brown of the United States Court of Appeals in the D.C. circuit. He earned his BA from the University of Pennsylvania and his JD from Harvard Law School, where he was managing editor of the Law Review.

Negotiations with North Korea are sensitive and ongoing and obviously important to our country and to many countries around the world. Mr. Wong has graciously agreed to open up our forum today with some brief comments on the current state of North Korean policy. Pending nominees, as many of you know who are familiar with work in Washington, are usually not allowed to speak at all, and we recognize that making public remarks while waiting pending nomination can be a delicate matter, of course. So, we on behalf of Hudson, I want to give a special thanks to Alex for being here and to kicking off this session. Welcome, and thank you all for being here. Mr. Wong?
Alex Wong:
Good afternoon. Thank you, John, for that very nice introduction, and thank you Patrick for the invite and sending up this session on North Korea. I think it's valuable. It's always good to be with friends here at the Hudson Institute, and it's an honor to open this discussion. Over the years, I've spent my fair share of time, as John mentioned, here at the institute. I've sought the insights and counsel here on various issues that span the array of U.S. national security interests, and the conversations have always been candid and they've always been cogent and helpful. So, I'm looking forward to today's conversation, as are members of the state department's DPRK team who are sprinkled here among the audience.

At every opportunity, I always want to emphasize the worth of the vibrant academic and think tank community that we have here in Washington D.C., but I also want to recognize the parallel community that we have in South Korea. In this job, I've had the privilege of engaging with many South Korean scholars. Their perspective is very valuable and I really appreciate the detailed work that they've offered us at the state department to help us in our policy making.

I'm an attorney. I know very well the wisdom that you shouldn't be your own lawyer. My physician friends tell me that the same thing applies in their field. They shouldn't be their own doctor. And I'm sure if I talked to my barber, he'd tell me it's a bad idea to try to cut my own hair. And in the same way, government practitioners shouldn't rely solely on themselves for strategic advice and strategic analysis. With a bit of distance from a problem comes valuable perspective, comes wisdom. These outside perspectives are important to us. We need this community of scholars and analysts to provide sharp and unbiased critiques. Your observations could very well divine dangerous pitfalls for us, as well as reveal valuable opportunities that may elude those of us who are in the arena.

And in the North Korea arena, there are certainly pitfalls. We only need to look at the 30 years that we've spent trying to solve the North Korean nuclear issue to know that. The U.S. government, we're very clear-eyed about North Korea's ongoing development of weapons of mass destruction. We're very clear-eyed that their ongoing development of the means to deliver that destruction around the world. That is why we continue to work with our partners to maintain fidelity to the sanctions that were unanimously approved by the UN Security Council. These sanctions signal to the DPRK that a continuing embrace of weapons of mass destruction will only further its economic and political isolation.

But for all the pitfalls and dangers that lie in our path, we can't lose sight of the immense opportunities that we have on the peninsula. This period of diplomacy exists because of the bold decision by President Trump and Chairman Kim to meet in Singapore. That summit produced a broad vision. It produced the first leader-level, the first leader-level commitment to a transformed U.S.-DPRK relationship, to a lasting peace regime, to complete denuclearization, and to joint efforts to heal the wounds of a war that has lasted far too long.

We've come to calling these four commitments "the pillars" of the Singapore Summit. And "pillars" is an apt word because these broad commitments will undergird a comprehensive agreement and detailed roadmap that over time could turn the Korean peninsula from a locus of conflict and instability into a source of security and prosperity for the entire region. A denuclearized and peaceful peninsula will foster new cooperation along economic, security, and political lines. It can mean the opportunity to enhance connectivity throughout the Korean peninsula, more open sea lanes, more overflights, high quality infrastructure investment. It can mean new energy routes, diversified trading relationships, and rising living standards. It can
mean that our military forces will no longer need to posture themselves perpetually to fight a war; they could instead serve and cooperate to build the institutions to support a lasting peace. And if we obtained that lasting peace, if we forged the modalities of trust and dialogue, we'll reap the rewards that spring from frank discussion on the many issues that have divided the United States and North Korea for decades.

These are the immense opportunities that President Trump sees. And after two summits and a leader-level meeting in Panmunjom, we have more than a sense that Chairman Kim sees these opportunities as well. But to seize these opportunities, it's not just the leaders that have to meet; our negotiating teams have to meet as well. We have to do the hard and detailed work of crafting a balanced roadmap, one that meets the interests of both the United States and the DPRK. We have to engage intensively, close off the space for miscommunication and suspicion, drum up a rhythm of talks that will give momentum to the diplomacy begun by President Trump and Chairman Kim that warm day in Singapore.

The United States has an experienced and deep interagency negotiating team. I have to say it's an absolute joy to work with all of them. The DPRK has its own negotiating team. When they're ready to set in motion the necessary talks, when they're ready to seize the opportunities that we have before us, our team will be ready as well. Thank you very much, and I wish you a very productive discussion today.

Patrick Cronin:
Well, after those framing remarks from Alex Wong, and obviously, he's sounding more and more like an ambassador every day. He's much more interesting in private in terms of his ability to be candid, as you can imagine.

I'm Patrick Cronin. I'm the Asia Pacific security chair. It's a great delight to bring you four of the authors of another... There are another four who couldn't fit on stage, and cost too much for the budget as well to bring them from Korea. But we have four South Korean authors, four American authors, looking at four different issues about the prospects for stable transformation on the Korean peninsula.

So, when I conceived of this project after the Singapore summit, it looked like change was possible. Maybe not likely, Bob Manning, here in the front row. But it looked more plausible in 2018 than it sort of has since in many ways. And the question is change will come.

There have been transformations on the Korean peninsula in the last 75 years that have been profound. I mean, starting with the liberation of the Korean peninsula. The Korean War was maybe the first post-World War Two major transformation. I think South Korea's amazing economic rise and the democratization would be a second major transformation that has happened. That's only been shared on the southern part of the peninsula, but becoming a top 12 economy in the world, number 11 in the world, is a major accomplishment. And then the third major transformation probably has been North Korea's successful, slow buildup of nuclear weapons, that we're going to hear from Bruce Klingner and Dr. Jina Kim from the Korean Institute for Defense Analyses in just a minute.

And now, the question arose, especially in 2018, "Could there, with Kim Jong-Un, with Moon Jae-in, with President Trump, could there be some kind of a breakthrough that would keep the peninsula still stable but it'd start to transform it to something more peaceful, a longer-term
peace?” Again, very, very ambitious. It was never likely to come to quick fruition. And it's been right, it's not come to quick fruition, but they're still holding out hope. And China will be playing a big role no matter what happens. And that's why we have Patricia Kim from the U.S. Institute of Peace and Dr. Lee from the Sejong Institute here to share with us some of the views of their chapter looking at China.

We also had two other big questions in this study that we won't be talking as much about. One of them, very critically, the future of the U.S.-South Korean alliance, because how do you keep a stable, strong alliance while you're negotiating with North Korea, whether you're making progress or dealing with provocation? And as we see, and I'm sure as Bruce and others will talk about, this has been a challenge. It’s a challenge every day. And the final issue is the idea that maybe responds to what President Trump's called the Brighter Future Plan for North Korea. That is, "What exactly would North Korea's development look like? How would that take place from a North Korean perspective, from a South Korean perspective, from a U.S/China perspective, from the perspective of Japan and Russia and other powers in the region?"

Very important issues. We invite you to read them all online or get a hard copy of the volume that will be released here in a couple of weeks. In the meantime, we're not going to be restricted just to the chapters that are written. We're going to really just talk in general about the state of North Korean negotiations and their nuclear weapons program.

Bruce Klingner was just testifying before the Senate yesterday with Sue Mi Terry. Excellent testimony. And I'm sure he'll share a few of those thoughts here today. We're going to start with Bruce Klingner from the Heritage Foundation. And we're going to stay seated here and just offer up to 10-minutes remarks, and then have a conversation here the next time. And then we'll go to Dr. Jina Kim next, and then Patty Kim, and then Dr. Lee. So, Bruce.

**Bruce Klingner:**
All right. Well, thank you very much, Patrick, and thank you for the opportunity to be here. The title of my chapter in the forthcoming book is "Reducing the Nuclear Threat: A U.S. View," which is convenient since I am indeed an American. One of the things I think of... My first thought was when we do this kind of panel, where we're not behind a dais, is "I hope I picked matching socks when I got dressed this morning." And I'll pause because at least half the audience will be checking.

One of the things I mentioned in the testimony yesterday, to start it off, was that the U.S.-North Korean denuclearization talks are indeed stalled. But special envoys, Steve Biegun and Alex Wong and others, like their predecessors, have tried valiantly to engage with their North Korean counterparts, only to be repeatedly rebuffed. So, often when people say, "Why doesn't the U.S. talk to North Korea?," the fault has been mostly on Pyongyang's doorstep. So, Pyongyang has publicly declared it's not interested in working-level talks, which they term "disgusting negotiations." And they've also said they're not interested in another summit with the U.S. unless basically, Washington capitulates. So, once again, it's North Korea that's rejecting diplomacy and negotiations.

So, what we've seen is the euphoric claims of success and breakthrough after the Singapore Summit were premature. Contrary to the claims of success, the Trump administration is no further along on the denuclearization path than its predecessors. But Trump's willingness to meet with Kim Jong-Un did test the hypothesis that many had put forward, that if only the U.S.
leader would deign to meet with the North Korean leader, we’d solve everything. Well, we found that this Kim, like his predecessors, was no more willing to give up his arsenal than his father and his grandfather.

So, the two sides remain very far apart, even on seemingly simple terms, such as denuclearization or what entails the Korean peninsula. The U.S. doesn’t think it includes Guam and other surrounding areas. And North Korea even refuses in negotiations to define what it means by a security guarantee or define an end of war declaration.

So, instead, North Korea continues to nuclearize. Their nuclear missile programs continue unabated. They’ve continued to produce fissile materials in Singapore, perhaps for six to eight or more nuclear weapons. They’ve continued to expand and refine the production facilities for missiles, mobile missile launchers, warheads, and reentry vehicles. And in 2019, they launched 26 missiles. That’s the highest number of UN violations in a single year by the regime ever. And they also unveiled five new short-range missile systems that threaten South Korea, Japan, as well as U.S. forces and civilians over there. So, while the U.S. officials are waiting by the phone for Pyongyang to call, they’re also waiting for the other shoe to drop. And by that, I mean the next provocation.

So, as we saw, Kim said at the end of the year that their patience has now expired, they no longer feel bound by the promise to President Trump of no ICBM or nuclear tests. That promise was always irrelevant because North Korea’s required under 11 UN resolutions not to do any nuclear tests or missile test of any range. And instead, they’ve threatened to demonstrate a new promising strategic weapons system. So, North Korea may go up the escalation ladder incrementally with medium range, intermediate range, space launch vehicles, or they may just jump immediately to crossing President Trump’s red line of nuclear tests or an ICBM test.

So, what is it that North Korea wants? An adage amongst Korea watchers is that something is important to Pyongyang until it isn’t, and it isn’t until it is. And by that, it’s we’ve seen sort of a Rolodex of demands that North Korea has, but the list itself is quite extensive. It's diplomatic. It's economic. It's security. It's even societal, demanding the end of anti-North Korean articles and demonstrations in South Korea. And as the U.S. negotiators are trying to respond to North Korea’s demands, we saw in 2019, North Korea sort of dismissed each of the things that they had previously said was the single biggest impediment to progress and denuclearization talks.

So, over the decades of negotiations with North Korea, the U.S., as well as other members of the international community, have offered economic benefits, developmental assistance, humanitarian assistance, diplomatic recognition, declarations of non-hostility, turning a blind eye to violations of UN resolutions, non-enforcement of U.S. laws, and reducing allied defenses, all to no avail. Now, what could be tried? There’s a good debate amongst Korea watchers, perhaps an end of war declaration or a freeze. And we can get into sort of the details of that, and the pros and cons perhaps in Q & A.

But when I talk often about "What should the U.S. do?", some will say "We’ve failed with all previous negotiations with the North. We’ve had eight failed international agreements that either North Korea didn’t fulfill or they cheated on." But I still feel we should keep the door open for diplomacy. We should still continue trying. That’s what we have diplomats for. However, the Trump administration should resist the entreaties to lower the negotiating bar to achieve perceived progress. President Trump should reject calls for relaxing tensions in return for only a partial flawed agreement that does not include a clearly defined end point of North Korean
abandonment of its nuclear and missile arsenals. And it also has to include rigorous verification protocols, such as we had in the arms control treaties with the Soviet Union.

In response to North Korean intransigence and continued defiance of the international community, the U.S. should renounce... or should announce it's resuming allied military exercises. We've canceled at least 13 so far, as well as imposed constraints on additional exercises. Though we've seen this week that the U.S. and South Korea may say they need to continue reducing or constraining them because of the Coronavirus so that the health of our forces and of our allies has to take precedent, but we'll be lowering the bar on allied deterrence and defense capabilities from an already reduced level. The self-imposed restrictions we've put on our exercises didn't lead to any diplomatic progress, nor any change in North Korea's military posture or the North Korean military threat. We've canceled or we've reduced the size, the scope, the volume, and frequency of additional exercises. And doing so either has or risks degrading ally deterrence capability. The exercises are quite important for ensuring the interoperability and integration of allied military operations.

The Trump administration should also end its self-imposed constraints on enforcing UN resolutions and U.S. laws. There is a lot of a sub rosa sanctions enforcement going on with U.S. officials, state and treasury and others, but it can't substitute really for a full enforcement of our laws and the resolutions. So, the Trump administration, for all its declarations of maximum pressure, has only anemically enforced sanctions since the Singapore Summit, and maximum pressure has never been maximum.

President Trump announced in 2018 he wasn't sanctioning 300 North Korean entities. Those would be entities violating U.S. law, most likely in the U.S. financial system. There was also reports that the Treasury Department deferred enforcement of three dozen Russian and Chinese entities violating U.S. law. The White House has taken no action against the dozen Chinese firm... or Chinese banks that Congress feels that there's evidence of money laundering in the financial system. And in March of 2019, President Trump criticized Treasury Department's very minimalist enforcement of sanctions against two of the many Chinese shipping firms we know are violating UN resolutions. So, Washington must also uphold human rights principles. Downplaying the human rights violations and embracing a purveyor of crimes against humanity runs counter to U.S. values.

And finally, the U.S. should end its demands for exorbitant increases from our allies in cost-sharing negotiations, The Special Measures Agreement. Excessive demands that are presented in a combative manner are needlessly straining relations with allies at a time when we should be standing shoulder to shoulder in the face of common threats. And alliances are not valued in dollars and cents, and they shouldn't be seen as money-making operations for the United States. Excessive monetary demands degrade alliances, which are based on common values and common principles and shared strategic objectives into mere transactional relationships. And America's men and women in uniform, including my son, a United States Marine, currently serving his second tour in Afghanistan, are not mercenaries. And the enduring motto of combined forces command is "katchi kapshida," which means "we go together." It must never become "we go together if we're paid enough." Thank you very much.

**Patrick Cronin:**
Bruce, thank you. Well done. I just want to ask you one question before we move on here about the fact that we are in an election year. So, politics aside though, our democracy does seem to be affected by this. There's very, I think, narrowed scope for the President of the United States
to negotiate with an adversary like Kim Jong-Un, especially when Kim Jong-Un is not giving us any apparent concessions that we're after. So, in terms of the scope that the U.S. has during this election year, for either dialing back up the pressure and ratcheting up back toward the direction of maximum pressure, or trying to make some kind of deal, even a small deal, I mean, is that scope... do you agree that the scope is very limited, I mean, for negotiation right now, this year?

Bruce Klingner:
Well, I would think regardless of an election year, it's very narrow right now because North Korea's refusing to talk. So, some would feel that the president has to have a deal to get reelected. I don't think the election is going to revolve around whether we do or don't have a deal with North Korea. And if we don't have a deal, the president can depict it, as he did after the Hanoi Summit, of "Isn't no deal better than a bad deal?" So, the election's not going to pivot on this issue.

The thing is, though, I think North Korea may feel it has a lot of leverage because it is an election year. They've commented several times in 2019 about the election and, I may be wrong, but I don't remember them talking about U.S. elections in the past. So, I think they feel that they have more leverage than they actually do, sort of a "Nice campaign you got there, Mr. President. A shame if something were to break." So, they may feel that they have the U.S. over a barrel, and that if sort of once the coronavirus is dealt with and the weather improves, because North Korea usually does very few missile launches in the winter, then they may feel emboldened to do something, whether it's incrementally or suddenly, thinking that that will force the U.S. back to the table in sort of a capitulation mode.

Patrick Cronin:
Great. I want to jump over to Dr. Jina Kim from KIDA. And she's written a great chapter. She also has an excellent article that's related in the latest issue of Survival, where there's a much... it's a more optimistic set of options. I mean, at least there's an optimistic option in terms of negotiation, as well as a more pessimistic and a more status quo. The whole idea of getting to kind of cooperative threat reduction with an adversary is something that we have a history on, and that seems to be the basis for some of your analysis. But I won't put words in your mouth right now, Dr. Kim. Why don't you offer your thoughts about the nuclear issue?

Dr. Jina Kim:
Okay, thank you. I thank Huston Institute for inviting me to this important event, and having me as part of this discussion today. Well, after North Korea's planner meeting, held by the Central Committee of the Workers' Party, well, after that, it becomes more clearer than before that North Korea's not ready to seriously talk about denuclearization because there are two things. First of all, North Korea certainly realize the reality finally there is no chance for relaxing the pressure campaign against the regime. Second of all, North Korea emphasize internal capability, rather than seeking external help, to boost this economy.

Well, I think this kind of situation can create lots of problems for South Korea and the U.S. at the same time because it becomes much easier for North Korea to shift the blame to the U.S. by saying that, "Well, the deadlocked situation is caused by the U.S. for not having serious talk with the DPRK." And by doing so, North Korea can actually secure time to develop its weapon system to offset the balance of power on the Korean peninsula. And it is possible, and North Korean can possibly drive a wedge between the allies by creating such a debates whether to contain the North Korean problem for the time being or deal with the situation right now before it gets worse in the future.
Well, the problem that I see about the status quo situation that we have right now is the following. First of all, well, the current dialogue, the current negotiation with the DPRK does not cover R&D, research and development, of the weapon system. It has just a frozen the test of missiles and nuclear weapons. And second of all, it seems to me that North Korea issue is not U.S. priority. And while the geopolitics around the Korean peninsula is going to worsen the situation because well, it becomes, especially after the U.S. withdrawal from the INF Treaty, it becomes China and Russia's interest to engage in military arms race in this region, and it becomes North Korea's interest to piggyback on China and Russia. That kind of situation may lead North Korea to avoid any serious dialogue on denuclearization. And fourth, I'm personally worried about stability and instability paradox situation on the Korean peninsula because, on the one hand, North Korea may feel more confident in its deterrence against the United States or South Korea if it engages in developing asymmetric weapons capability. Well, on the other hand, it may feel more emboldened to make some low level provocation because of that kind of confidence in dealing with the Alliance on the Korean peninsula. Right now, I think what North Korea has in mind is possibly two level game. Well, North Korea is not a democratic country, but a lot of literature in international relations also show that no democratic country can have a two level game because of the consideration of domestic audience problem.

Well, in Pyongyang, at this point, may have to think about a very creative strategy to deal with the U.S. for several reasons. Well, the best strategy for North Korea is to show that it's win-set, the range of options that can be ratified internally and negotiated with its counterpart is very, very rigid and there is no change of it. The second strategy that North Korea may think of is increasing the internal support to take a very strong position on this negotiation on denuclearization while changing the domestic audience in the US become more heterogeneous by creating lots of debates on how to deal with North Korea. And the third strategy that North Korea may think is showing the US that the no deal situation at this point is not really serious a problem for the regime in Pyongyang.

And what we are seeing at this point is exactly what North Korea is doing, and North Korea's actually taking this kind of strategy so far. Well, why North Korea is doing this, I have a list of three scenarios. I pointed out three scenarios in my chapter as part of this project. First of all, perhaps North Korea has a dilemma of nuclear disarmament because on the one hand, North Korea has to keep up its nuclear weapons capability if there is a negotiation between the DPRK and the US. But at the same time North Korea has to rely on other types of weapons system with some asymmetry capability vis a vis this Alliance. So well in that kind of situation, there is a security anxiety going on. And what we can see in this situation is it's a modest development of North Korea's nuclear and missile development. And how can we deal with this is probably military confidence building measures to be offered.

The second scenario that I could think of was the possibility that North Korea is trying to seek every chance to increase its asymmetry capability to shift the balance on the Korean peninsula. In this situation there will be very deliberate efforts to increase its deterrence against the ROK-US Alliance by seeking the loopholes, utilizing the existing loopholes within the export control regime, because there is certainly a sanctions busting mechanism in place held by some of the countries that have interest in trading of strategic items with the DPRK. The third scenario that I could imagine was North Korea is possibly trying to gain the upper hand in the future negotiation, the negotiation not just on denuclearization but also on the disarmament overall on the Korean peninsula by changing the nature possibly of the ROK-US alliance. In this situation,
what we should do is strengthening our coordination mechanism between the two allies and work more on extended deterrence.

In my chapter, I proposed the three different options. First one was a CTR cooperative threat reduction program because it can be an incentive and it can also increase some transparency, and also it can invite many other players to denuclearize North Korea. And CTR program has some legal basis. It is based upon US secure counsel resolutions including 1540, and also global partnership efforts are also included. And it covers not only nuclear weapons program but also other type of asymmetry capability like biochemical weapons and missiles as well. And this kind of mechanism deals with not only dismantling the facilities or equipment, but also helping North Korea to transport and store all the destructed materials for a while and also training the people who once were involved in missile and nuclear program. And also it can help North Korea to environmentally to... To destruct its program in an environmentally safe way.

So there can be some incentive to North Korea to positively rethink about this kind of option in the future for a sustainable development in the long run. The second option that I offered in my chapter was strengthening of course extended deterrence by the ROK-US alliance because well, we currently have a concept, four D concept, detect, disrupt, defend and deter North Korea. But we don't have an operational plan indeed. So we have to develop a more operational level plan to deal with so called gray area threats. On the one hand, North Korea may believe in this of course if leveraged against the ROK-US Alliance and initiate many provocations just below the level of nuclear exchange. So we have to deal with that kind of gray area situation.

And the third option that I offered was strengthening the strategy export control to cut the strategy trade between the DPRK and the rest of the world because North Korea can continue R&D activities, but mass production of new systems is a different issue. So I think it is very, very important to make sure that there is no sanctions busting offered by other countries, unfortunately including China, because what I can tell you is there is a jewel at the, there is a trade of [inaudible 00:07:56] item that can be possibly used for developing nuclear and missile programming in the North. So well I think strengthening the export control at a global level is very, very important through outreach and assistance program. Thank you.

Patrick Cronin:
Dr. Kim, again, just a quick question before we move on. At the end of December, it appeared that Kim Jong Un was preparing to launch a space rocket or an ICBM test or otherwise cross a red line from a US perspective on the freeze on missile and nuclear tests. And we're two months into the new year, nothing's happened. What is the view and what's your view at least about the view in Seoul as to why we haven't seen more of a provocation from Kim Jong Un?

Dr. Jina Kim:
Well, I was one of those who argued that North Korea will not fire ICBM in December because every provocation has to have a reason to believe that there will a political gain out of it. But I didn't see any benefit that North Korea can get at that point at least. And well if North Korea fires ICBM, it can antagonize its relations with China and Russia of course, and it can worsen its relations with South Korea as well. And it is possible that president Trump will take hits as a personal challenge. So if North Korea really wants to have the option for a negotiation opening in the future, I think it's better for North Korea to not to have a serious provocation at this point. I told you that the best strategy for North Korea is to buy time to develop more weapons system in the future in order to have an upper hand in future negotiation. That's what I believed.
**Patrick Cronin:**
We'll come back to analyzing buying time. I want to turn now to Dr. Patricia Kim from the US Institute of Peace because along with Dr. Lee, we're looking very much at China. And I would guess that China was a very big factor in Kim Jong Un's thinking about not testing something because why alienate now your closest friend at the moment, China, and not really receive any benefit? But Patty, go ahead and offer your thoughts about how China fits into US diplomacy with North Korea.

**Dr. Patricia Kim:**
Well thank you Patrick. It's really a honor and pleasure to be here on this panel, and I appreciate you including me in this great volume coming out. And so let me start first with going over some of the reasons why North Korea is not at the top of China's agenda at the moment, and why Beijing is unlikely to play a leading role on North Korea in the near term. So first of all, as everyone here in the room knows, China's full attention at this point is on the Coronavirus. And while there are reports that the transition or transmission of the virus has slowed, China is very much still struggling with the outbreak and bracing for the deep economic impact that this virus will have. Chinese leaders are facing great anger and criticism from their citizens despite the fact that they're trying to manage the narrative. And anytime the Chinese communist party's legitimacy is at stake, managing that problem becomes Beijing's number one priority.

So for that reason, I don't think North Korea is anywhere near the top of the minds of leaders in Beijing. But having said that, even before the Coronavirus hit, Chinese leaders were already very much consumed the last year with the US-China trade war, with protests in Hong Kong, with the criticism that it's facing for Xinjiang and so on. So it's been a very rough year for Beijing on many fronts, which explains why China has largely taken a back seat on nuclear negotiations with North Korea. Another reason why China hasn't taken an active role on North Korea in recent months is because there's simply been no momentum in the US-North Korea negotiations. So the most recent efforts, and it's really hard to call them efforts really, that China made at the end of last year, was to propose with Russia at the UNSC to roll back sanctions on North Korea. I mean, obviously this proposal didn't go anywhere and I don't think the Chinese pushed very hard on this.

**Dr. Patricia Kim:**
And so this may have been one sort of way to try to persuade Kim Jong Un not to deliver his so-called Christmas gift that we were all waiting for. But again, this wasn't really much of an initiative. So my sense is that Beijing currently is relatively comfortable with the fact that the United States and North Korea haven't officially abandoned diplomacy. Both sides have criticized the process, but there's still a nominal commitment to diplomacy. However, its level of comfort could quickly decrease if the impasse continues, and especially if North Korea decides to engage in a nuclear or ICBM test that provokes a response from the United States. Now, what can we expect from China going forward? Well, I think it's important to remember that just because Beijing hasn't been interested in this issue in recent months doesn't mean that Beijing doesn't care about the Korean peninsula any longer. China has a very strong interest in what goes on in the Korean peninsula, and this will not change in the foreseeable future.

So zooming back a little bit, China's primary objectives and interests on the Korean peninsula include maintaining stability, preventing war in the near term, and gradually rolling back the United States presence while integrating North and South Korea into its own economic orbit. China sees North Korea as a necessary ally despite their very rocky and rough relationship over the last 70 years. And it will continue to keep Pyongyang closely aligned by shielding it from
international pressure, and it won't stand by if negotiations pick up speed for instance, and especially if North Korea were to seemingly gravitate towards the United States or South Korea.

So the most recent example of Beijing's determination to stay involved in the Korean peninsula can be seen when Kim Jong Un began his diplomatic outreach in early 2018 and started to express his interest in talking with Trump and meeting with Moon Jae In. And so having ignored Kim for years and downplayed the China-North Korea Alliance and signed on to increasingly tougher sanctions on North Korea from 2016 to 2017, you saw a complete 180 in Beijing's rhetoric towards North Korea. And there was a lot of attention paid to Kim Jong Un.

So president Xi Jinping met with Kim a total of five times between 2018 and 2019, and all of these meetings were timed to come right before and after Kim's summits with president Trump and president Moon. And again, the media began to play up the importance of the China North Korea relationship and talk about how they are blood allies and so on. All of this rhetoric had disappeared in the early days of Xi Jinping's tenure, but came back. Now again, the attention towards North Korea has cooled over the last year for the various reasons that I laid out. But China's fundamental interest in having a hand in the future and current order of the Korean peninsula has not changed. So what can we expect from China going forward? So I think having negotiations breakdown is clearly not in China's interests. And if North Korea were to engage in a provocation that was serious enough to spur or to have the white house threaten military action in response, again, this would bring instability to China's doorstep. And this is precisely what Beijing wants to avoid.

But even if we were weren't to see such a dramatic deterioration in the situation and negotiations were to indefinitely stall, I don't think such a situation would be in China's strategic interests as well. And this is because in such a scenario, we would see greater efforts by the United States, South Korea and Japan to increase their own defensive capabilities given the reality that North Korea's nuclear and missile threats are not receding anytime soon. We would most likely see moves by Washington and Seoul to scale up military exercises that have either been postponed or scaled down in the past two years. We would see efforts between the United States, ROK and Japan to boost their individual and collective capabilities in missile defense. And you would hear growing calls in Seoul and in Tokyo for indigenous nuclear capabilities. And none of these sorts of developments would be in China's strategic interests.

Beijing in turn would perceive such moves as undermining its own security interests and altering the balance of power in the region in a matter that is unfavorable to itself. And there's a large chance or there's a high likelihood that it would actually, rather than focusing on bringing North Korea back to the negotiating table, Beijing would choose to focus instead on pressuring South Korea to reduce its cooperation with the United States just as it did during the whole conflict over the deployment of the missile system known as THAAD onto South Korean territory. Now this would in turn generate pressure and also indecision within the South Korean policy-making community and thus within the US-ROK Alliance and perhaps to a lesser extent in Japan. But these are all the types of dynamics that we should keep an eye on and be worried about. And also there's a dilemma here, and the dilemma is if North Korea continues to resist giving up its nuclear weapons, the US and its allies will need to take measures to strengthen their own defensive capabilities.

But at the same time, it'll be even more urgent to secure China's cooperation to bring North Korea to the negotiating table. And so how to balance between these two demands is something that we will really need to keep an eye on and manage. And I think managing this
dilemma, the key to managing the dilemma will be demonstrating inner alliance resolve and coordination, and convincing Beijing that working with Washington, Seoul, and Tokyo to rein in North Korea will be a faster and more effective route to safeguarding its own security interests. I think that's the message that needs to be channeled to Beijing. But coordinating between the United States and its allies and coordinating our message will be difficult. Even at the best of times, it's difficult, but I think it'll be difficult even more so now with the United States and South Korea locked in contentious negotiations over burden sharing, the US and Japan facing similar negotiations very soon and with this growing sense of unease among us allies about the United States commitments to its alliances.

Now on the flip side, I don't think this scenario is as likely, but if negotiations were to somehow pick up momentum and we had progress towards a peace agreement, this again would open up opportunities for China to try to favorably shift the balance of power in the region. For instance, if North Korea were to offer to curtail its nuclear program, it would most likely demand some modifications to the US-ROK alliance, such as the permanent suspension of certain types of military exercises, perhaps a reduction in US troop presence on the peninsula as well as a reduction in military assets as well as a dismantlement of United Nations command and other various components of the alliance. And North Korea and certain groups within South Korea may try to nudge the Korean peninsula into a more neutral, non-aligned position which Beijing would see as a win, especially if South Korea could no longer be counted on to stand with the United States in various contingencies involving China in the region.

China as well as South Korea and Russia could also push forward on economic development with North Korea as soon as there's momentum on nuclear negotiations. So Beijing's ultimate vision for North Korea is to serve as its model and its conduit for economic development and integration into the region. And while North Korea has yet to be integrated into Beijing's belt and road initiative, as soon as there's room for these sorts of developments, you know that China will be pushing in this way. And I think this would align well with South Korea's effort as well to look into jump-starting infrastructure projects and creating economic corridors that could connect the Korean peninsula to the rest of Asia and Europe. And again, this fits well into the ROK government's new Northern policy, which is kind of sitting there stalled.

But again, if there was an opportunity to advance this, we would see this. And all of these would fit well with China's own desire to stimulate growth in its North Eastern provinces that border along North Korea, and to encourage North Korea through economic development and regional connectivity. Now, what's important to know is that these economic blueprints do not include a major role for the United States. It could marginalize Washington's relevance in the region in the future. And so this is something that we really need to keep an eye on and think hard about here in DC. But these are some of the longer term concerns to keep in mind. And for the near term, to sum up, I'm not expecting any dramatic proposals from China to come out on North Korea for the reasons that I outlined in the beginning.

Patrick Cronin:
Well, Patty thank you. On the current situation with the Coronavirus and of course even reading state owned media out of China, they talk about the political virus that's grabbed the United States because we're competing with China so much and we're accusing them of mishandling the early information flow over the coronavirus. If you get into a situation where the Coronavirus is identified in North Korea, where there's really no healthcare system to speak of outside of the elite, do you see this as part of the US China cooperation or competition? And how does North Korea maybe receive assistance? The United States has been proactive in offering, showing a
willingness to have waivers, but I imagine China would want to be in there maybe even sooner. But how do you see the Coronavirus potentially becoming an issue over North Korea policy?

**Dr. Patricia Kim:**
Yeah, I mean I think ultimately it will hinge on how North Korea responds. As you mentioned, the US state department has indicated that we're willing to work on this issue with North Korea. We want to help in any way we can, do humanitarian assistance or at least waivers so that NGOs could get in and do the job that they need to do. So I think it'll depend on who North Korea opens its doors to. Right now it's sealed the border with China, so it's taken very draconian measures to try to stem this Coronavirus given, just as you mentioned, the poor facilities that they have and just the lack of capacity that they have to deal with this sort of outbreak.

I imagine that South Korea would also want to get in on this and extend help as well. But I think right now we're just waiting to see how North Korea responds and depending on that, we'll see how the dynamic plays out. But I would say this is one place where competition should not be the main factor. I mean obviously there's a huge humanitarian crisis in the region, and so addressing that perhaps could open opportunities for all of these interested players to work together.

**Patrick Cronin:**
And it stretches credulity to think that China, Japan, and Korea are all suffering Coronavirus and North Korea has zero cases. I mean this is going to be a, it's a contagious disease. So it's going to spread somehow. We're going to move on. I want to invite anybody watching that they can send in questions through events@hudson.org because after Dr. Seong-hyon Lee finishes his remarks on China and the North Korean issue, we're going to go to questions from the audience and from online. And Dr. Lee, I know you've written extensively about how there's been kind of a mindset change in how China looks at helping the United States or working with the United States or North Korea because of the onset of growing competition between Beijing and Washington. And I know that's at the center of a lot of discussion, but please your remarks and thoughts on China and North Korea policy.

**Dr. Seong-hyon Lee:**
Well thank you for having me. I know many of you have some complex feelings toward your president, president Trump, but there is one thing that I like about him when it comes to North Korea. Trump said that for the last 25 years of effort to resolve North Korean issue was a failure. Trump said that I'm going to do a plan B. I admire that. I like that because logically speaking, when plan A does not work, you should move to plan B. So Trump said that I'm going solve the North Korean issue in a different way. So Trump sat down with Kim Jong Un personally in Singapore, top level solution. I know right now we're in a stalemate, but then philosophically speaking, methodologically speaking, the approach itself makes sense because when you think about this North Korean intrigue, you get negotiations between North Korea and the United States for the last 17 years.

Six party talks started in 2003. Six party talks means that China is playing the leading role, hosting the six party talks. So it's a way of US try to solve the North Korea issue through Beijing because Beijing is important as many people said. Because North Korea's 92% of economy outbound trade depends on China. China is supposed to have a tremendous, probably the largest influence in North Korea. But then for the last 17 years of this Beijing gateway, you go through Beijing to solve the North Korean issue, did not work. That was a plan B. Going through Beijing was a plan B, but then when Trump said that I'm going to meet with Kim Jong Un in
Singapore, that means that I don't need the intermediary. I don't need a China to resolve North Korea issue. I'll go straight and meet with Kim Jung Un to solve the North Korean issue.

So that was plan B. And I think that made sense. And even though we are in a stalemate, I think there is an art to negotiations that we need to come up with creative solutions, those solutions that I will offer if you invite me next time, one more time.

Patrick Cronin:
Yes. And just to clarify, going through Beijing would be plan A, going directly to Kim is plan B?

Dr. Seong-hyon Lee:
Yes. So the plan B is that we don't have to go through China. Because it's a do-over for directly reach out in North Pyongyang because if you remember for the last, 26 years of the negotiations, North Korea has been constantly trying to ooh, not Beijing, but Washington, North Korea wanted to become a darling of Washington. It was actually not North Korea rejecting Washington. If you think about the big picture, actually it was Washington that rejected Pyongyang in a way. I know it's a controversial statement, but in a way. Because North Korea is a dictatorship. North Korea is poor, North Korea is a socialist country. It's not worthwhile for Washington to become friends with a poorer country. But then I think when it comes to dealing with the North Korean issue for the last 26 years, North Korea has a very constant strategy to ooh Washington to resolve this issue.

Meanwhile, China, particularly coming into the Xi Jinping era, in the past, North Korean issue used to be the area of cooperation between Washington and Beijing, but when it comes to particularly the second term of Xi Jinping, North Korean issue becomes the area of competition between US and China. Because China also knows that competition and rivalry and mistrust with the United States takes time. It's going to be a mid term and long term process. That means that socialist [inaudible 00:59:26] as China needs North Korea, have North Korea on China's side. That means that North Korea, whether you like North Korea or not, North Korea's strategy [inaudible 00:59:38] toward China naturally increases when China is in midterm and longterm competition and rivalry with United States for the last at least 30 years or more. That means that China is unlikely to cooperate with Washington, because many Chinese people suspect that it is Washington's gimmick to use China's hand to destroy North Korea, and then Washington will destroy China. To borrow a hand of China to kill another socialist brother, and then China itself will be the next. So China thinks that it sees through Washington's game. So China is, for example, unlikely to really cooperate when it comes to the UN mandated economic sanctions against North Korea. So I think that working on North Korea without China is viable. China is important, so we always think about when it comes to solving North Korea, we always say, oh, we have a North Korean issue and it does not work, then we always call China.

But it's time for us to think more creatively. Maybe our preconceived obsessions and thinking that whenever we think about North Korean issue, we call for China, but probably we should think twice. We should think about alternative. That is that maybe it's possible when the plan A doesn't work, we should go for plan B and work with ally, and come up with the most strategic approach in dealing with North Korea. That is my probably very much simplified explanation about what I wrote in my chapter.

Patrick Cronin:
Indeed. You have a lot more in your chapter, Dr. Lee. Among other things, you talk about the return of the lips and teeth relationship, which is a reference to the old Mao Zedong attributed
Chinese aphorism about the interconnection between, in this case, China and North Korea being inseparable. But what about China's designs on a relationship with the future of South Korea? See, this to me is where the competition between the United States and China pushes some potential tension in the future between Seoul and Washington, because from Seoul's perspective, and correct me if I'm wrong, give me your view after this, United States cannot replace the Chinese economic trading position that China serves, but we're still invaluable and indispensable on the security side, at least for the moment. So how does the growing U.S., China competition affect China's South Korean relations? So, not just dealing with North Korea but basically China, everything that happens that's meaningful on the future of the peninsula, Beijing would like for it to go through Beijing anyhow.

Dr. Seong-hyon Lee:
Okay, let me answer the China, North Korea future plan and then I'll deal with China, South Korea future plan. I think we should pay attention to Xi Jinping and Kim Jong-Un having held the five times of summits, the last one in Pyongyang. But I think I showed particular attention to the second meeting in Dalian, Chinese city of Dalian. At the time, Xi Jinping promised to Kim Jong-Un two things, I care about your desire to develop your economy and I also sympathize, I also feel your legitimate concerns of your security. So, security concerns and economic development. Think about what North Korea has been negotiating with United States for the last 26 years, and what North Korea wanted to achieve is exactly these two items, security guarantee, economic development. And in the city of Dalian, what Xi Jinping was telling to Kim Jong-Un is that, "I'm going to give you security guarantee. I'm going to give you your economic development." What that means that China could be a viable replacement.

So you don't have to rely on negotiations within the United States, because I, China, could give you what you are seeking from the United States. So this is what they call [foreign language 00:04:29], Chinese solution to the North Korean issue. I have to give a more detailed explanation, but I think, briefly speaking, this is Xi Jinping is, deep down in heart, truly believes in socialism. And Trump, who mentioned that North Korea has tremendous economic potential, and I think Trump probably wanted to transform North Korea, where North Korea keeps nuclear weapons, probably build Trump tower in Pyongyang, and help North Korea to transform into a prosperous democratic country. Just like Washington has succeeded in helping South Korea transform in a prosperous democratic country. But I think Xi Jinping's plan is to help North Korea to transform into prosperous socialist country, just like China.

So this is what I think is, given the deepening and anticipated longterm rivalry between China and the United States, this is China's vision for future of North Korea. And when it comes to South Korea, you're right, that given the deepening economic relations and also China's economic [inaudible 01:05:55], not just South Korea, but other countries, that it made many countries to think twice, at least economic wise, about the role of China, and also it increases the country's expectations about China. So, in that sense, for China, when it comes to rivalry with the United States, North Korea used to be the... What do you call it? What is it? The join between China and the United States. But I think that given the deepening relations between China and North Korea, China gained the confidence to, or South Korea is also coming close to the China, so China plans to transform entire Korean peninsula as a buffer zone between China and the States. In the past, North Korea used to be the buffer zone, but China is thinking that South Korea and entire Korean peninsula could be the buffer zone in between China and the United States.
I think this is wishful thinking on the part of China. And I think that, given my experience living in Beijing for the last 11 years, you're right, economic development is important. Economic cooperation is important, but I think that at the end of the day, there will be an ultimate limitation of cooperation between China and Seoul. And the biggest obstacle is I think the political system. South Korea being a democratic society, China being a socialist state, I think there will be an increasing tension in the future between, and also that will be the limitation of cooperation between Beijing and Seoul.

**Patrick Cronin:**
Great. In the interest of time, I want to turn to the audience for questions. We have some handheld microphones. If you just please briefly identify yourself, and if you want to address one or more of the panelists specifically, by all means. Yes sir.

**Audience Member:**
The wonder of all this to me is that when you look at Victor Chan's 2010 estimate that the prison camps have killed over a million people, and here we are 10 years later, we're dealing with four or five atomic bombs worth of dead human beings, but where's our negotiation? It's to get rid of a weapon that can't be used and leaving in place a weapon of mass destruction that is used every single day. Does this make sense to anybody in this room? Can't we put something on the agenda which says no more prison camps or 10,000 prisoners are going to be released to South Korea every year? Something other than just chasing this useless weapon?

**Patrick Cronin:**
Well, we just had a discussion with the administration. Human rights is definitely still on the table. Next week, by the way, here at Hudson, I'll be hosting two military defectors out of North Korea for public session where we'll be talking specifically about the human rights issue, but your point is well taken. There are many more issues beyond the nuclear issue, but nonetheless, denuclearization has become a focal point for diplomacy. But it's not been the only issue on the agenda. As you see, even with the assistance on the coronavirus, on humanitarian assistance, there've been a lot of lines in the water with North Korea. And they've been coming first from Moon Jae In. I mean it was president Moon, I know we credited president Trump, but it was president Moon of South Korea who was pushing all out on anything to break the ice with Kim Jong Un in 2017. And it wasn't until the very end of that year after fire and fury and more tests that that ice was broken. So we're trying to seize that opportunity, but not neglect the human rights issue. But any comments Bruce, on this?

**Bruce Klingner:**
Yeah, I mean there's sort of been a decades long debate about sort of this which is more important human rights or security issues. And it's never been resolved. Under this administration, the president gave three very strong, very moving speeches that strongly criticized North Korean human rights. And I think the state of the union with Otto Warmbier's parents was particularly moving. Since Singapore, we've seen that fall off. We now have the president embracing a purveyor of crimes against humanity as honorable, courageous, loves his people, et cetera. So we've seen a backing away from it. In December of last year, the US impeded the UN discussion of human rights. A year earlier, vice president Pence was to give a speech, which was canceled, that was to be critical of North Korean human rights. We've seen very few sanctions since Singapore, including against North Korea's human rights and censorship activities.

In sections 401 and 402 of the North Korea sanctions and policy enhancement act, there are requirements including on human rights before the US is allowed to either suspend for one year
or permanently remove US sanctions. So there are provisions that require activities with the political prison camps. I think many people have been critical that it seems since Singapore, that the president's earlier strong criticism of human rights has just evaporated. So I think it is something and many others think it has to be a component of US foreign policy because it's consistent with our values and it's not something we can just abandon in the quest of trying to get a security agreement.

**Patrick Cronin:**
So is part of this just the timing? I mean in terms of trying to make a breakthrough on diplomacy with nuclear weapons and then get back to the human rights basket. And how do others see this as well?

**Bruce Klingner:**
Well, I think there's a good debate. People will say, look, that's an internal affair. We need to focus on the things that are threatening our own security, which is nuclear weapons and missiles and conventional forces, et cetera. And that puts human rights in the backseat. Others will, as you depicted it, see it as, this is something that is killing people today, so we need to have that either in the forefront or in conjunction. I mean the US created the North Korean ambassador for human rights as a way of trying to ensure that it was included in US negotiations. The fact that the position has been unfilled for I think three years doesn't reflect well on the prioritization of North Korean human rights.

**Patrick Cronin:**
I wonder if we get a view from Dr. Jina Kim or Dr. Lee. From South Korean perspective, I mean we have a progressive government in South Korea, a human rights lawyer by all accounts, and yet where is the human rights agenda in South Korean policy toward North Korea right now?

**Dr. Jina Kim:**
Well I can say, well there are also continuous efforts to address human rights issues within South Korea. There are lots of NGOs and human rights organizations addressing human rights situation in North Korea of course. And at the UN level, we are also very active in working on this issue with other UN member states, so it is not forgotten, but we are trying to see the right timing of addressing this issue because well there can be some steps in the long run. Because once North Korea become part of the international community, it becomes quite natural for North Koreans to hear the global standards in the life of the other people in on earth. So it becomes quite natural for the international community to get information to be flown into the society, engage with the people. But the starting point is denuclearization process. And based upon that, we can open up the society and engage more with North Korea for confidence building. So we should take some step by step approach on this issue, I think.

**Patrick Cronin:**
Let me just add though, and you may respond to this as well, because the more that the negotiations with North Korea are perceived as at a stalemate, it seems like the human rights issues have to come back to the floor, that we have to revert back... Because those are real issues that are going on and if we're not making any progress, don't we have to deal with these issues as democracies concerned about these issues? Go ahead Dr. Lee.

**Dr. Seong-hyon Lee:**
I really think that there is a tremendous misunderstanding about South Korea's, particularly this government, does not care about human rights. They really do care. But then the former CIA acting director Michael Morell said we distrust North Korea but Michael Morell said that North
Prospects for a Stable Transformation of the Korean Peninsula | February 26, 2020

Korea also quite distrusts United States. The funny thing is that North Koreans also distrust South Koreans either. So there is, as she said, the confidence building measures during the 1980s when South Koreans, North Koreans met in Southeast Asian secret meetings for three days because of North Korea's mistrust. They drank for 30 days and then at the end of 30 days of binge drinking, probably North Korea is opening up their heart, and now they are beginning to talk a little bit more, more, more.

But then when you bring up the human rights, North Korea gets so sensitive, so that no other negotiations proceed from that very moment because it's a part of the system. So I think human rights is very important, South Korea knows about it, but when you negotiate, and it's I think a technical issue, at the level of a negotiation to induce North Korean action, opening up North Korea's heart, you intentionally, you know it, but for the sake of negotiations, you put it aside. But then I think it's important that human rights issue is not forgotten by South Korea.

Patrick Cronin:
And I don't think we were suggesting they didn't care about it. Just the question was how were they approaching the human rights issue because it's not on the surface of policy right now. We have another question.

Audience Member:
Oh, thank you. I have a question. If we didn't have this, we can't even bring them to the table, what would it be? That's my question. On the flip side, if we had this one, maybe negotiation can be going smooth. What would it be?

Patrick Cronin:
Sure. I mean just be a little more specific about what, for instance, just give me an example of if we had what?

Audience Member:
For example, this is thrown on the side. Because of desk, we can't bring it to the table.

Patrick Cronin:
It's a bit too mysterious though. Give me a specific idea and...

Audience Member:
What is the, let's say because of China doing this or providing this or that, then maybe it can go smooth. What would it be? It's just hypothetical question.

Patrick Cronin:
Well that sounds like a tough question. I mean I'll just start there, and maybe people can respond to me rather than... I mean I think right now we are going to muddle through in 2020 with no tangible progress. That's my expectation. We can always have deviations. The black swan of the coronavirus, who knows what happens there. The need for a red line being crossed by Kim Jong Un or a perceived red line. A space launch from a US perspective is probably still a red line, even if it's not technically an ICBM from Pyongyang's narrative. And I think at some point Kim Jong Un may decide, although he didn't decide in December, 2019, he may decide, despite Dr. Jina Kim's excellent reasoning, that now he has an opportunity to boss president Trump's election year, an August surprise, an October surprise, and show that the president has failed at diplomacy and cost...
Not that this will be the major issue, but it would be an unwelcome issue in an election year. I agree with Bruce. I think Kim Jong Un's probably likely to miscalculate the value of that, but it doesn't mean he won't do it. That's different. And from China's perspective, they're happy with the status quo as far as I can tell. I mean we have stability. We don't have missile and nuclear tests. We don't have the United States talking fire and fury. Hey, what's not to like about this picture? We have an economic crisis. We have a political legitimacy crisis. We have a Coronavirus crisis. So I can see the status quo really being with us for a while. The question is what breaks this eventually? And does it not break until 2021? Does it not break until after the election when Kim Jong Un says, you know what, I can deal with president Sanders because he wants so much economic welfare?

You will not be on the peninsula for more than a few more months after he gets done with that economic package. I'm sorry, I don't mean to be political, but the point is who knows what Kim Jong Un will think after our next election? And if president Trump's reelected, you'll think, you know what, this is the guy I have to deal with. I'm not going to get a better deal. I'll take the little deal. I'll ask for as much sanctions relief as I can get. I'll give them Yongbyon, it'll take them years to find out the mess we've made there. I'll keep building my R&D program on nuclear weapons and so on. But anyway, these scholars will have better answers. And Bruce, we'll just go right down the road here and also for final comments.

Bruce Klingner:
Yeah, there's no magic Rubik's cube combination that will solve North Korea. A lot of smart people have been focusing on the issue for decades. There's not going to be North Korea saying, okay, yeah, 300,000 tons a week, 200,000 tons of rice, that was it. If you'd of given us that in 1985, we never would have built these things. It's not going to happen. So we've seen since the 1960s when they started this program, maybe late '50s, they've been relentless in pursuing nuclear weapons. So we've tried diplomacy, I listed some of the things that we've tried. They've lied about it. They've obfuscated about it. And it's also the problem is one, if they won't talk to you, that's a problem. And then even when negotiators are talking to them, or when I've talked to them in track 1.5 meetings, and it's like, okay, you say it's the hostile policy, we've got a long list of the things you've complained about over the decades. But what is it? What is it you want? And they evade it.

They don't want to be pinned down. And then if you say, okay, at one point you wanted a security guarantee, you've gotten over 20 of those. That didn't work. But what is it you mean? And they don't want to be tied down on what that means. And a war declaration, what do you mean? They don't want to be tied down. So if they won't talk to you or even when they're in the same room with you, they won't define what it is you want, it's like, we're trying to do something here. And then often when they do say what it is they want, it's like, well that's just a bridge too far or a price too high. But having them in the same room would be helpful because everyone of us have written tomes about, and others have written tomes about, okay, this is what a verification package should look like. This is what a freeze would look like. Or a big deal or a small deal, but it's kind of hard to just sit there at the table by yourself and not have them facing you.

Patrick Cronin:
Indeed. And on that, it was Geneva on Monday, by the way, where the North Korean ambassador was saying, we need you to end your hostile policy towards us before we can sit down. Just to Bruce's point that it's a never ending list of demands and they don't even specify what they mean by that. But we're going to go right down the line here. Patty, you're next.
Dr. Patricia Kim:
Well, I think you know Patrick and Bruce, you laid out all the reasons that are holding up these negotiations. I think it comes down to the fact that they're not engaging at the working level, and that's where the most work needs to be done. And so if they were to come to the working level negotiations, work on a roadmap, I think that's what the US has been insisting this whole time. And that's where we hope things will go. But they're not engaging. And so that's the problem. And so maybe this Coronavirus may provide some sort of opportunity in the midst of tragedy, who knows, or some other event.

But I think the North Koreans are probably sitting at home racking their brains too, of how they can use all of these situations to their advantage. And there is no clear answer. I mean, how can they take advantage? It's hard to tell what's going to happen with the elections. I don't think they're going to completely ruin the relationship that they have with president Trump because there's no guarantee that that would lead to productive outcomes for them in the case of a second Trump administration or in a democratic administration if one were to come in 2021. And so I think they're racking their brain too, trying to figure out how to leverage the situation. But we are probably most likely to muddle through, as Patrick said. That's my prediction.

Patrick Cronin:
Dr. Kim.

Dr. Jina Kim:
Well, what we are dealing with is actually structural problem, structural problem indeed. North Korea criticizes hostile policy, which is very, very comprehensive in nature. And I don't think China even can give a security guarantee to North Korea. If that happens, what can come next is South Korea is asking for changing the missile guideline to extend the missile range and also integrating its defense system to theater defense system led by the US, et cetera. So we are going to see a huge effort in regional arms race. That's not, I think China's interest.

So the next step that North Korea can, at this point and this year, is probably subdividing steps into very smaller ones by showing off its continuing efforts to develop ICBMs or SLBM and make some critical statement made by high level officials, et cetera. So what can happen is interaction, very negative interactions between the DPRK and the ROK-US alliance. So that can possibly change the course in the future. And we have to be very, very careful not to make North Korea to have a miscalculation about our intention of managing the future scenario on the Korean peninsula.

Patrick Cronin:
Dr. Lee, you're going to have the final word today.

Dr. Seong-hyon Lee:
Is it right? Let us pray. I think this year, let's say that this is the break, I mean the negotiation break because coronavirus, we have elections this year. So this year, we don't have a political will to robustly deal with the North Korean issue. [inaudible 01:25:40] But then when you cannot solve the North Korean issue, then at least you should manage the crisis, particularly North Korea from provoking or miscalculating. How do you do that? I think there are two things you require. One is the confidence building as many people mentioned here. Secondly is signal diplomacy. What kind of signal are you going to send to Kim Jong Un? Otherwise because Kim Jong Un might miscalculate and conduct provocation. I think at this time of the year, probably the cheapest way for signal diplomacy is for Trump to use his Twitter, "Hello, Chairman Kim. Is
there anything that I can help with the coronavirus? If you need any help, let me know.” Send that tweet.

I think North Korea will appreciate it. In April of ’15, North Korea found Kim Jong's grandfather's birthday, congratulations on your grandfather's birthday, if there is anything gift that you want from me, let me know. Okay. It's just no cost statement just to manage, console and the let Kim Jong know that Trump has not forgotten about him. Let him know that Trump continues to pay attention to him. Once in a while, say hello to Kim Jong Un until the elections are over so that...

And when the elections are over, chairman Kim, we [inaudible 01:27:15] in our housekeeping. We have elections, but I hope to see you after we clear about these elections. I really look forward to seeing you probably next year. Give him some signal. Give him some assurance so that North Korea will not miscalculate.

Patrick Cronin:
Well, this has been a great discussion. I really invite you to read, when it's available in the coming weeks, the excellent essays they've written as well as four other authors and my own contribution in this volume. I do want to just say back to thanking Alex Wong for appearing today because it was an awkward time for him to be appearing in public. I think he was castigated a bit back when Bruce was testifying yesterday [inaudible 00:28:02]. There were some comments made that they weren't happy that the state department wasn't showing up, but very, very difficult position for a nominee to be subjected to an interrogation in effect in public when any word you utter could be used against you for your nomination.

So very, very difficult. I will just say from our own private conversations with the state department, I see no letting up on the part of the US government or the South Korean government for that matter in our discussions this past week. I just see a problem with North Korea. I see a problem that North Korea is just not interested right now. Maybe that will change after the Coronavirus, after the continued shakeup of the administration in Pyongyang that transpired with the the new year. Maybe there'll be some opening. Don't think it's likely, but I think it's possible, and I think our governments need to be ready for that as well as other contingencies. But please just join me in thanking our panelists here today. Thank you.