

June 28, 2017

President Donald J. Trump
The White House
1600 Pennsylvania Ave. NW
Washington, DC 20500

Dear President Trump,

As experts with decades of military, political, and technical involvement with North Korean issues, we strongly urge your administration to begin discussions with North Korea in the near future. In our view, this is the only realistic option to reduce dangers resulting from the current high state of tensions and prevent North Korea's ongoing development and potential use of nuclear weapons.

Talking is not a reward or a concession to Pyongyang and should not be construed as signaling acceptance of a nuclear-armed North Korea. It is a necessary step to establishing communication to avoid a nuclear catastrophe. The key danger today is not that North Korea would launch a surprise nuclear attack. Kim Jong Un is not irrational and highly values preserving his regime. Instead the primary danger is a miscalculation or mistake that could lead to war.

This effort should begin with informal bilateral talks—with no preconditions—to explore options for more formal negotiations.

To show good faith and jump-start talks, the United States could send a high-level presidential envoy to North Korea. Washington should make clear that the United States does not have hostile intentions toward North Korea and wants to explore peaceful paths forward. In return, Pyongyang could announce a freeze on tests of ballistic missiles and nuclear weapons. We expect China would support such talks and help to bring them about.

The initial goal of talks should be to reduce tensions and cap North Korea's arsenal. They will hopefully also lay the groundwork for longer term negotiations to roll back its arsenal and eventually denuclearize the peninsula.

There is no guarantee diplomacy will work. But there are no good military options, and a North Korean response to a US attack could devastate South Korea and Japan. Tightening sanctions can be useful in increasing pressure on North Korea, but sanctions alone will not solve the problem. Pyongyang has shown it can make progress on missile and nuclear technology despite its isolation. Without a diplomatic effort to stop its progress, there is little doubt that it will develop a long-range missile capable of carrying a nuclear warhead to the United States.

Today there is a window of opportunity to stop these programs, and it may be the last chance before North Korea acquires long-range capability.

Time is not on our side. We urge you to put diplomacy at the top of the list of options on the table.

Respectfully,

Robert L. Gallucci
Georgetown University

Siegfried S. Hecker
Center for International Security and Cooperation
Stanford University

Richard G. Lugar
President, The Lugar Center
US Senator (Ret.)

William J. Perry
19th US Secretary of Defense
William J. Perry Project, www.wjperryproject.org

Governor Bill Richardson

George P. Shultz
60th US Secretary of State
Distinguished Fellow, Hoover Institution, Stanford University

Cc: Rex Tillerson, Secretary of State
James Mattis, Secretary of Defense
H.R. McMaster, National Security Advisor