North Korea’s leader, Kim Jong-un, moved to ease his country’s isolation by offering to send a delegation to the Winter Olympics in South Korea next month, even as he claimed to have accomplished the ability to launch a nuclear missile at the mainland United States. Mixing the nuclear threat with an overture for easing tensions on the divided Korean Peninsula, Kim proposed immediate dialogue with South Korea to discuss the North’s participation in the Olympics. If such talks were held, they would mark the first time the two Koreas have had an official dialogue since the South’s new president, Moon Jae-in, took office in May. Moon has doggedly championed dialogue with the North, even as President Trump has threatened military action to stop the North’s nuclear weapons program. “I am willing to send a delegation and take necessary measures, and I believe that the authorities of the North and South can urgently meet to discuss the matter,” Kim said in his annual New Year’s Day speech, broadcast on North Korea’s state-run television. “We sincerely hope that the South will successfully host the Olympics.” “Above all, we must ease the acute military tensions between the North and the South,” Kim said. “The North and the South should no longer do anything that would aggravate the situation, and must exert efforts to ease military tensions and create a peaceful environment.” But Kim also reiterated that his country had mastered a state nuclear deterrent force, which he said would prevent the Trump administration from starting a war on the Korean Peninsula. “It’s not a mere threat but a reality that I have a nuclear button on the desk in my office,” he said. “All of the mainland United States is within the range of our nuclear strike.” But it has yet to demonstrate that its nuclear warhead could survive the re-entry into the Earth’s atmosphere and hit such long-range targets. He said his government would accelerate the production of nuclear warheads and rockets to launch them. Government and private analysts in South Korea have recently said that despite its claim to have achieved its nuclear ambitions, the North is likely to conduct more weapons tests to improve its nuclear and long-range ballistic missile capabilities. At the same time, they said North Korea will also seek opportunities to engage in dialogue with South Korea and the United States, hoping to use its nuclear threats as leverage to gain concessions, like easing sanctions. (Choe Sang-hun, “North Korean Leader Offers a Hand to South While Chiding the U.S.,” New York Times, January 1, 2018)
KCNA: “Respected Supreme Leader Kim Jong Un made the New Year Address for 2018. The full text of the New Year Address reads: ...The year 2017 was a year of heroic struggle and great victory, a year when we set up an indestructible milestone in the history of building a powerful socialist country with the spirit of self-reliance and self-development as the dynamic force. Last year the moves of the United States and its vassal forces to isolate and stifle our country went to extremes, and our revolution faced the harshest-ever challenges. ...An outstanding success our Party, state and people won last year was the accomplishment of the great, historic cause of perfecting the national nuclear forces. On this platform one year ago I officially made public on behalf of the Party and government that we had entered the final stage of preparation for the test launch of an intercontinental ballistic missile. In the past one year we conducted several rounds of its test launch, aimed at implementing the program, safely and transparently, thus proving before the eyes of the world its definite success. By also conducting tests of various means of nuclear delivery and super-intense thermonuclear weapon, we attained our general orientation and strategic goal with success, and our Republic has at last come to possess a powerful and reliable war deterrent, which no force and nothing can reverse. Our country's nuclear forces are capable of thwarting and countering any nuclear threats from the United States, and they constitute a powerful deterrent that prevents it from starting an adventurous war. In no way would the United States dare to ignite a war against me and our country. The whole of its mainland is within the range of our nuclear strike and the nuclear button is on my office desk all the time; the United States needs to be clearly aware that this is not merely a threat but a reality. We have realized the wish of the great leaders who devoted their lives to building the strongest national defense capability for reliably safeguarding our country's sovereignty, and we have created a mighty sword for defending peace, as desired by all our people who had to tighten their belts for long years. This great victory eloquently proves the validity and vitality of the Party's line of simultaneously conducting economic construction and building up our nuclear forces and its idea of prioritizing science, and it is a great historic achievement that has opened up bright prospects for the building of a prosperous country and inspired our service personnel and people with confidence in sure victory. I offer my noble respects to the heroic Korean people who, despite the difficult living conditions caused by life-threatening sanctions and blockade, have firmly trusted, absolutely supported and dynamically implemented our Party's line of simultaneously promoting the two fronts. ...The nuclear weapons research sector and the rocket industry should mass-produce nuclear warheads and ballistic missiles, the power and reliability of which have already been proved to the full, to give a spur to the efforts for deploying them for action. And we should always be ready for immediate nuclear counterattack to cope with the enemy's maneuvers for a nuclear war. ...Last year, too, our people made strenuous efforts to defend the peace of the country and hasten national reunification in keeping with the aspirations and demands of the nation. However, owing to the vicious sanctions and pressure by the United States and its vassal forces and their desperate maneuvers to ignite a war, all aimed at checking the reinforcement of the self-defensive nuclear deterrent by our Republic, the situation on the Korean peninsula became aggravated as never before, and greater difficulties and obstacles were put on the road of the country's reunification. Even though the conservative "regime" in south Korea, which had resorted to fascist rule and confrontation with fellow countrymen, collapsed and the ruling circles were replaced by another thanks to the massive resistance by the enraged people of all walks of life, nothing has been changed in the relations between the north and the south. On the contrary, the south Korean authorities, siding with the United States in its hostile policy towards the DPRK against the aspirations of all the fellow countrymen for national reunification, drove the situation to a tight corner, further aggravated the mistrust and confrontation between the north and the south, and brought the bilateral relations to a fix that can be hardly resolved. We can never escape the holocaust of a nuclear war forced by the outside forces, let alone achieve national reunification, unless we put an end to this abnormal situation. The prevailing situation demands that now the north and the south improve the relations between themselves and take decisive measures for achieving a breakthrough for independent reunification without being obsessed by bygone days. No one can present an honorable appearance in front of the nation if he or she ignores the urgent demands of the times. This year is significant both for the north and the south as in the north the people will greet the 70th founding anniversary of their Republic as a great, auspicious event and in the south the Winter Olympic Games will take place. In order to not
only celebrate these great national events in a splendid manner but also demonstrate the dignity and spirit of the nation at home and abroad, we should improve the frozen inter-Korean relations and glorify this meaningful year as an eventful one noteworthy in the history of the nation. First of all, we should work together to ease the acute military tension between the north and the south and create a peaceful environment on the Korean peninsula. As long as this unstable situation, which is neither wartime nor peacetime, persists, the north and the south cannot ensure the success of the scheduled events, nor can they sit face to face to have a sincere discussion over the issue of improving bilateral relations, nor will they advance straight ahead towards the goal of national reunification. The north and the south should desist from doing anything that might aggravate the situation, and they should make concerted efforts to defuse military tension and create a peaceful environment. The south Korean authorities should respond positively to our sincere efforts for a detente, instead of inducing the exacerbation of the situation by joining the United States in its reckless moves for a north-targeted nuclear war that threatens the destiny of the entire nation as well as peace and stability on this land. They should discontinue all the nuclear war drills they stage with outside forces, as these drills will engulf this land in flames and lead to bloodshed on our sacred territory. They should also refrain from any acts of bringing in nuclear armaments and aggressive forces from the United States. Even though the United States is wielding the nuclear stick and going wild for another war, it will not dare to invade us because we currently have a powerful nuclear deterrent. And when the north and the south are determined, they can surely prevent the outbreak of war and ease tension on the Korean peninsula. A climate favorable for national reconciliation and reunification should be established. The improvement of inter-Korean relations is a pressing matter of concern not only to the authorities but to all other Koreans, and it is a crucial task to be carried out through a concerted effort by the entire nation. The north and the south should promote bilateral contact, travel, cooperation and exchange on a broad scale to remove mutual misunderstanding and distrust, and fulfill their responsibility and role as the motive force of national reunification.

We will open our doors to anyone from south Korea, including the ruling party and opposition parties, organizations and individual personages of all backgrounds, for dialogue, contact and travel, if they sincerely wish national concord and unity. A definite end should be put to the acts that might offend the other party and incite discord and hostility between fellow countrymen. The south Korean authorities should not try, as the previous conservative "regime" did, to block contact and travel by people of different social strata and suppress the atmosphere for reunification through alliance with the north, under absurd pretexts and by invoking legal and institutional mechanisms; instead, they should direct efforts to creating conditions and environment conducive to national concord and unity. To improve inter-Korean relations as soon as possible, the authorities of the north and the south should raise the banner of national independence higher than ever before, and fulfill their responsibility and role they have assumed for the times and the nation. Inter-Korean relations are, to all intents and purposes, an internal matter of our nation, which the north and the south should resolve on their own responsibility. Therefore, they should acquire a steadfast stand and viewpoint that they will resolve all the issues arising in bilateral relations on the principle of By Our Nation Itself. The south Korean authorities need to know that they will gain nothing from touring foreign countries to solicit their help on the issue of inter-Korean relations, and that such behavior will give the outside forces, who pursue dishonest objectives, an excuse for their interference and complicate matters further. Now it is not time for the north and the south to turn their backs on each other and merely express their respective standpoints; it is time that they sit face to face with a view to holding sincere discussions over the issue of improving inter-Korean relations by our nation itself and seek a way out for its settlement in a bold manner. As for the Winter Olympic Games to be held soon in south Korea, it will serve as a good occasion for demonstrating our nation's prestige and we earnestly wish the Olympic Games a success. From this point of view we are willing to dispatch our delegation and adopt other necessary measures; with regard to this matter, the authorities of the north and the south may meet together soon. Since we are compatriots of the same blood as south Koreans, it is natural for us to share their pleasure over the auspicious event and help them. We will, in the future, too, resolve all issues by the efforts of our nation itself under the unfurled banner of national independence and frustrate the schemes by anti-reunification forces within and without on the strength of national unity, thereby opening up a new history of national reunification. Availing
myself of this opportunity, I extend warm New Year greetings once again to all Korean compatriots at home and abroad, and I sincerely wish that in this significant year everything would go well both in the north and in the south. Comrades, The international situation we witnessed last year was clear proof that our Party and our state were absolutely correct in their strategic judgement and decision that when we are confronting the imperialist forces of aggression who are attempting to wreck global peace and security and make mankind suffer a nuclear holocaust, our only recourse is the power of justice. As a responsible, peace-loving nuclear power, our country will neither have recourse to nuclear weapons unless hostile forces of aggression violate its sovereignty and interests nor threaten any other country or region by means of nuclear weapons. However, it will resolutely respond to acts of wrecking peace and security on the Korean peninsula. …” (KCNA, “Kim Jong Un Makes New Year Address,” January 1, 2018)

South Korea responded to an overture from the North and proposed holding high-level talks between the countries on their border next week. Kim Jong Un, had suggested yesterday that the countries open dialogue on easing military tensions and on the possibility of the North’s participating in the Winter Olympics in the South, even as he noted that he now had a “nuclear button” on his desk. President Trump responded somewhat cautiously early today on Twitter to the idea of inter-Korean talks, saying, “Perhaps that is good news, perhaps not — we will see!” But in a Twitter message posted tonight, Trump, referring to Kim, said: “Will someone from his depleted and food starved regime please inform him that I too have a Nuclear Button, but it is a much bigger & more powerful one than his, and my Button works!” The Trump administration earlier had sent a series of mixed messages that strongly suggested it was still trying to figure out the meaning of Kim’s overture and the South’s response. This morning, the White House insisted that it had not changed its view of the efficacy of negotiations or its demands on North Korea to give up its nuclear weapons. “Our policy on North Korea hasn’t changed at all,” said Sarah Huckabee Sanders, the White House press secretary. “The United States is committed and will still continue to put maximum pressure on North Korea to change and make sure that it denuclearizes the peninsula. Our goals are the same and we share that with South Korea, but our policy and our process has not changed.” Speaking at the United Nations, the United States Ambassador, Nikki R. Haley, appeared to dismiss the potential for bilateral negotiations between North and South Korea. “We won’t take any of the talks seriously if they don’t do something to ban all nuclear weapons in North Korea,” she said. “We consider this to be a very reckless regime, we don’t think we need a Band-Aid; we don’t think we need to smile and take a picture. We think we need to have them stop nuclear weapons and they need to stop it now.” Heather Nauert, the State Department spokeswoman, said the Trump administration was still assessing whether the United States supported direct talks between South Korea and North Korea that excluded the United States. “Right now, if the two countries decide that they want to have talks, that would certainly be their choice,” she said. Nauert added that if Kim’s goal in proposing direct talks with the South was to divide the United States and South Korea, such a strategy would not succeed. “That will not happen,” she said. Cho Myoung-gyon, the South’s point man on the North, proposed that the Korean governments hold their meeting December 9 in Panmunjom. “We hope the two sides sit down for frank talks,” Cho, the unification minister, said at a news conference. If the North responds positively, it will set in motion the first official dialogue between the Koreas in two years. But analysts cautioned that a sudden move to improve ties between the Koreas could strain relations between Seoul and Washington. Cho said the South was closely consulting with Washington on its dealings with the North. Cho urged the North to restore the hotline so that both sides could discuss the agenda for the high-level talks. The governments held their last high-level dialogue in December 2015. North Korea’s offer to send a delegation to the Winter Olympics, which are to begin in February in the South Korean town of Pyeongchang, represented a breakthrough for Moon, a dogged champion of dialogue and reconciliation with the North. Moon has repeatedly urged North Korea to join the Pyeongchang Olympics, hoping it would ease the military tensions over the North’s nuclear and missile programs. “I appreciate and welcome the North’s positive response to our proposal that the Pyeongchang Olympics should be used as a turning point in improving South-North relations and promoting peace,” Moon said early today, instructing his cabinet to move swiftly to open dialogue with North Korea. In 2000, the year the countries held their first summit meeting, their delegations marched together at the opening
ceremony of the Sydney Olympics. They again marched together at the 2004 Athens Olympics, using the single name “Korea” and carrying a “Korea is one” flag. But they competed separately in 2000 and 2004. North Korea also sent squads to cheer for its athletes in international events in South Korea in 2002, 2003 and 2005. But such scenes came to an end after the conservatives took power in the South in 2008 and instituted tougher measures against the North’s nuclear weapons development. Moon has suggested that South Korea and the United States could postpone their joint military drills until after the Olympics. In an analysis of Kim’s speech, the Unification Ministry said Kim was seeking an “exit” from harsh sanctions by cultivating ties with South Korea. (Choe Sang-hun, “South Korea Proposes Talks with the North after an Overture by Kim,” New York Times, January 3, 2018, p. A-4)

Woodward: “Lingering after receiving his President’s Daily Brief on December 2, President Trump said, ‘[Kim Jong Un] is a bully.’ He told [Presidential Secretary Rob] Porter, ‘He’s a tough guy. The way to deal with these people is being tough. And I’m going to intimidate him and I’m going to outfox him.’ That evening, Trump sent a taunting mine-is-bigger-than-yours tweet that shook the White House and diplomatic community, ‘North Korean leader just stated that the Nuclear Button is on his desk at all times,’ Trump wrote on Twitter at 7:49 p.m. ‘Will someone from his depleted and starved regime please inform him that I have a Nuclear Button, but it is a much bigger & more powerful one than his, and my Button works’.” (Bob Woodward, Fear: Trump in the White House (New York: Simon & Shuster, 2018), p. 300)

North Korea reopened a border hotline with South Korea, restoring a channel of direct dialogue and signaling a possible thaw in relations between the two Koreas after years of hair-trigger tensions. “We will connect with the South with a sincere and diligent attitude,” Ri Son-kwon, a senior North Korean official, said in a statement on state-run television, announcing the hotline’s reopening. “We once again express our sincere hope that the Pyeongchang Olympics will be successful.” Ri’s television appearance was the North’s response to Unification Minister Cho Myoung-gyon’s news conference. Ri is chairman of the Committee for the Peaceful Reunification of the Fatherland that handles relations with the South. (Choe Sang-hun, “North Korea Reopens Hotline with the South,” New York Times, January 3, 2018)

Trump administration officials said that they were not opposed to the idea of talks, provided that they be limited to the Olympics and that the South Koreans not make any concessions to the North that they, and the United States, would later regret. The White House plans to stay in close touch with South Korean officials to coordinate the messages going out and to review any offers coming in. Above all, the officials said, the Trump administration will resist efforts by the North to drive a wedge between the United States and its ally. White House press secretary Sarah Huckabee Sanders defended the president’s Twitter message late yesterday, “I too have a Nuclear Button, but it is a much bigger & more powerful one than his, and my Button works!” People, Ms. Sanders said on Wednesday, should question Kim’s mental fitness, not Trump’s. “Our policy with North Korea has not changed,” Ms. Sanders added. “We’re fully committed to continuing to apply maximum pressure and working with all of our partners in the region, including South Korea, who we have a better relationship with now than ever before.” But that relationship will be tested by the opening to the North, according to officials and outside analysts. On September 13 after North Korea tested a nuclear bomb, Trump said on Twitter, “South Korea is finding, as I have told them, that their talk of appeasement with North Korea will not work, they only understand one thing!” Diplomats said it was important that South Korea appear to be in lock step with the United States. That would be easier to do, they said, if the talks remain focused on relatively narrow issues, like security at the Winter Olympics. “It is fine for the South Koreans to take the lead, but if they don’t have the U.S. behind them, they won’t get far with North Korea,” said Daniel R. Russel, a former assistant secretary of state for East Asian and Pacific Affairs in the Obama administration. “And if the South Koreans are viewed as running off the leash, it will exacerbate tensions within the alliance.” “Calling his nuclear arsenal too small is not the best way to persuade him to constrain that arsenal,” Russel noted, referring to Kim. Referring to South Korea, Russel asked, “Who is

CPRC Chairman: “Upon authorization of Kim Jong Un, Supreme Leader of the Workers' Party of Korea and the State and the army, the chairman of the Committee for the Peaceful Reunification of the Country (CPRC) of the DPRK made public the following stand of the DPRK on January 3 in response to the south Korean Chongwadae's official stand toward our proposed dispatch of our delegation to the Pyeongchang Olympic Games and remarks made by President Moon Jae In at the state council meeting: Comrade Kim Jong Un, chairman of the State Affairs Commission of the Democratic People's Republic of Korea, upon receiving a report that the south Korean Chongwadae officially supported and welcomed his stand toward the participation in the Pyeongchang Olympic Games and the issue of the improvement of the north-south relations he clarified at the 2018 New Year Address and that at the first state council meeting on Jan. 2 President Moon Jae In personally expressed active support and instructed the relevant fields to take substantial measures, gave an affirmative and high estimation of it and expressed his welcome to such response. He instructed the United Front Department of the Central Committee of the Workers' Party of Korea and the Committee for the Peaceful Reunification of the Country, the National Sports Guidance Committee and relevant units of the DPRK government to promptly take substantial measures with the south Korean authorities out of sincere stand and honest attitude, as the dispatch of our side's delegation to the Pyeongchang Olympiad and the talks between the north-south authorities for it which he proposed at the New Year Address are the first meaningful and good step for improved north-south relations under the present situation. He also instructed to open the Panmunjom liaison channel between the north and the south from 15:00 on Jan. 3 so that the issues related to the opening of talks including the dispatch of the delegation to Pyeongchang Olympic Games would be timely communicated to the south side. Whether the issue of improved north-south relations that has been put high on the agenda is settled to comply with the expectation and desire of the whole nation or not entirely depends on how the north and south authorities handle this issue in a responsible manner, he stressed. We will try to keep close communications with the south Korean side and deal with the practical matters related to the dispatch of our delegation from sincere stand and honest attitude, true to the intention of our supreme leadership. We once again sincerely hope that the Pyeongchang Olympic Games would successfully open.” (KCNA, “CPRC Chairman Clarifies Stand of DPRK upon Authorization of Kim Jong Un,” January 3, 2018)

Woodward: “Within the White House, but not publicly, Trump proposed sending a tweet saying he was ordering all military dependents – thousands of family members of 28,500 troops – out of South Korea. The act of removing the dependents would almost certainly be seen as a signal that the United States was seriously preparing for war. On December 4, [National Security Adviser H.R.] McMaster had received a warning at the White House. Ri Su Yong, the vice chairman of the Politburo, had told intermediaries ‘that the North would take the evacuation of U.S. civilians as a sign of imminent attack.’ ...The tweet did not go out. But Trump would drop the matter, and raised the issue of withdrawing U.S. military dependents with Senator [Lindsey] Graham [R-SC]. On December 3, before Trump[’s] and Kim’s war of words, and after a North Korean ICBM test, Trump Graham had advocated removing military families from South Korea. ‘It’s crazy to send spouses and children to South Korea,’ he said on CBS’s Face the Nation. He suggested making South Korea an unaccompanied tour for service members and said, ‘I think it’s now time to start moving American dependents out of South Korea.’ Now a month later, when Trump called, Graham seemed to have had a change of heart. ‘You need to think long and hard before you make that decision,’ Graham said. ‘Because when you make that decision, it is hard to go back. The day you do that is the day you rock the South Korean stock market and the Japanese economy. That is a big fricking deal.’ ‘You think I should wait?’ Trump asked. ‘Mr. President,’ Graham said, ‘I don’t think you should ever start the process unless you’re ready to go to war.’” (Woodward, Fear, pp. 301-02)
South Korea and the U.S. agreed to push back joint military drills that coincide with the Pyeongchang Olympic Winter Games, the two nations' presidential offices said. The agreement came in the late-night telephone conversation between President Moon Jae-in and US President Donald Trump, which lasted about 30 minutes from 10 p.m. Pyeongchang Olympic Winter Games, and Paralympic Winter Games run from February 9 to March 18. If held on schedule, South Korea-US joint military drills of Foal Eagle and Key Resolve would have been held during the games. During the conversation, Moon also stressed the importance of inter-Korean talks, Cheong Wa Dae said. “[Seoul] will work closely with the U.S. in the process of inter-Korean talks, and we (South Korea) firmly believe that inter-Korean talks are helpful to establishing an atmosphere of dialogue between the US and North Korea,” Moon was quoted as saying by Cheong Wa Dae. Cheong Wa Dae also said that Trump expressed full support for Moon’s policies, and confirmed the plans to send a high-level delegation to the Pyeongchang games. While Seoul focused on Trump’s promise of sending a high-level delegation and postponing of the drills, the statement from the White House also highlights the need to pressure North Korea. “The two leaders agreed to continue the campaign of maximum pressure and not repeat mistakes of the past,” a statement from the White House reads. Trump has been critical of past US leaders’ North Korean policies, citing the advancements in the North’s missile and nuclear weapons programs. (Choi He-suk, “Seoul, U.S. Agree to Push back Military Drills for Pyeongchang Olympics,” Korea Herald, January 4, 2018) During a January 4 phone call in which South Korean leader Moon Jae-in briefed President Trump on plans for talks with North Korea, Moon told Trump to agree to postpone joint military drills until after the Olympics, to avoid antagonizing North Korea, and Trump asked Moon to publicly give him the credit for creating the environment for the talks, according to people familiar with the conversation. (In these conversations, Trump calls his counterpart “Jae-in” — an unimaginable informality in Korean business etiquette. Moon calls
Trump “Mr. President.”) Later that night, Trump tweeted that the talks wouldn’t be happening “if I wasn’t firm, strong and willing to commit our total ‘might’ against the North.” At a news conference six days later, Moon agreed Trump deserved “huge credit” for the talks. (Anna Fifield, “Trump Asked Moon to Credit Him for Swaying N. Korea into Talks,” Washington Post, January 21, 2018, p. A-22)

The security situation facing Japan is the most perilous since World War Two because of North Korea's "unacceptable" provocations, Prime Minister Shinzo Abe said and he vowed to bolster defenses to protect the Japanese people. "It is not an exaggeration to say that the security environment surrounding Japan is at its severest since World War Two. I will protect the people's lives and peaceful living in any situation," Abe told a New Year news conference. Abe said Japan would take new steps to strengthen its defense posture but he did not go to specifics. "It is absolutely unacceptable that North Korea is trampling the strong desire of Japan and the rest of the international community for peaceful resolutions and continuing with its provocative behavior," Abe said. Abe has said he wants to amend Japan's pacifist constitution with the aim of loosening constraints on the military, although the public is divided over changes to the charter imposed after Japan's World War Two defeat. "I would like this to be a year in which public debate over a constitutional revision will be deepened further," he said. (Kiyoshi Takenaka, “Japan Faces Greatest Danger since World War Due to North Korea: PM,” Reuters, January 4, 2018)

South and North Korea agreed to hold high-level talks next week to discuss Pyongyang's potential participation in the Pyeongchang Winter Olympics and ways to improve ties. North Korea notified South Korea that it has accepted Seoul's recent offer to hold talks January 9 at the truce village of Panmunjom, according to the Ministry of Unification. (Kim Soo-yeon, “Koreas Agree to Hold High-Level Talks Next Week,” Yonhap, January 5, 2018)

Tillerson: “Q: Let's start with North Korea. There was big news last night about the North and South arranging talks for next week, North Korea now coming to the table. Is that an opening maybe for talks with the U.S. or nuclear talks? TILLERSON: Well, I think it's too early to tell. We need to wait and see what the outcome of their talks are. The President had a - President Trump had a good call with President Moon yesterday morning, which I participated in, and their intent is to talk about the Olympics - obviously, a very important upcoming event for South Korea - and the potential participation of North Korea in those Olympics. So our understanding is that's the content of the meeting. So I think it's a little early to draw any conclusions. Q: But it could be a positive sign maybe that North Korea wants to engage a little bit. TILLERSON: Well, we'll see. We'll see. Perhaps. I know some are speculating that this may be their first effort to open a channel. But as you know, we've had channels open to North Korea for some time, and so they do know how to reach us when - if and when they're ready to engage with us as well. Q: Well, maybe you'll be next. TILLERSON: We'll see. Q: If you could explain a little bit about what the U.S. policy is on North Korea, because I think Americans are a little bit confused. Do the North Koreans have to give up their nuclear program before committing to talks? TILLERSON: Our policy is the complete, verifiable, irreversible denuclearization …of the Korean Peninsula. That is a policy that is commonly held by everyone in the region as well. …The Chinese have that as a stated policy. Russia has it as a stated policy. So regionally, all of the countries in the neighboring area, as well as the international community, are well aligned on the policy. How we achieve the ultimate endpoint, the final fully - full denuclearization, the verification of that, and the irreversibility of it, clearly that's going to take some time. So how we begin the talks is yet to be determined, but we clearly need a signal from North Korea that they understand these talks must lead to that conclusion. The pathway of how you get there, that is the nature of the negotiation. There'll be some give and take to achieve those objectives. So that's - that objective has never changed. Q: Because as you said, it's unrealistic for them to kind of sit down and say, "We're ready to do it," but it sounds like they'd have to show some willingness, but then the mechanics of that are able to be worked out. TILLERSON: We have to have the shared view that that is the reason we're talking, that's the purpose of these talks, and it is through those talks that North Korea actually can chart the way for themselves of a more secure future, a more
prosperous future for their people as well. So there are very positive outcomes to these talks for North Korea, as there will be positive outcomes for the security of the entire region. That is the nature of the negotiations. Q: Do you think - a lot has been made about the President's tweet on the nuclear button, but now North Korea is talking with South Korea. Do you think that tough rhetoric has worked here? TILLERSON: I think the rhetoric that North Korea understands is while it is our objective - and the President has been very clear - to achieve a denuclearization through diplomatic efforts, those diplomatic efforts are backed by a strong military option if necessary. That is not the first choice, and the President has been clear that's not his first choice.

But it is important that North Korea, as well as other regional players, understand how high the stakes are in an effort to ensure our diplomatic efforts are fully supported. And I think to date, the diplomatic efforts have been supported very well in the international community. If you look at the three UN Security Council resolutions on sanctions, the participation in those sanctions and a number of countries going well beyond the Security Council resolutions and imposing unilateral actions on their own, both economic as well as diplomatic, I think it is a recognition that the President has demonstrated to the world how high the stakes are. That's why we must achieve a diplomatic outcome. But the North Koreans have to understand that, and they have to understand that the penalties to them will continue and will only grow more severe in terms of sanctions actions and other actions until they do get on a pathway to achieve that objective that the entire world hopes to achieve. Q: So it sounds like this kind of good cap, bad cop, if you will - hold out the prospect of talks but if talks don't work, military action - that might be the formula that you and the President will continue. TILLERSON: I'm going to let you characterize it that way. I'm not going to necessarily show all of our cards. ... Q: If - we're surprised that we're having this conversation, because if you read the papers, you should be gone by now. What is with these rumors about you leaving? How long are you planning to stay, or are you planning to stick around for a while? TILLERSON: I had a - we had a very productive 2017. And the 11 months I was here was an extraordinarily challenging period, because when the President came into office we had so many policies that the President ran on in his campaign and made clear to the American people he intends to pivot those policies in a different direction. It takes a lot of effort to do that in that first year so that your partners, your allies, and your adversaries understand you've moved. We had a very successful, in my view, year of 2017 pivoting our policies and helping our partners understand those policies. We're now into the implementation and execution against those policies. I think we're going to have a very productive 2018. Again, the State Department gets stronger every day understanding what we're trying to do, and I look forward to having a very, very successful 2018. Q: For the whole year? TILLERSON: I intend to be here for the whole year. ... Q: Has the President given you any indication that you won't be around for a while? TILLERSON: None. Q: None so - whatsoever? TILLERSON: None whatsoever.” (DoS, Secretary of State Rex W. Tillerson, Remarks: Interview with Elise Labott of CNN, January 5, 2017)

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"I would love to see them take it beyond the Olympics," Trump said at a news conference at the Camp David presidential retreat. "And at the appropriate time, we'll get involved." “[Kim] knows I'm not messing around... not even a little, not even one percent. He understands that," Trump told reporters. "(But) if something can happen and something can come out of those talks, that would be a great thing for all of humanity. That would be a great thing for the world.” (AFP, "Trump Hopes Korea Talks ‘Go Beyond the Olympics,’” January 6, 2017) President Donald Trump said Saturday he is open to talking with the North Korean leader and hopes some progress results from upcoming talks between the Koreas. "Sure, I always believe in talking," Trump said. "Absolutely I would do that; I wouldn't have a problem with that at all." But he was quick to add that any talks would come with conditions, which he did not specify. The president also said that he had spoken with South Korean leader Moon Jae-in, who "thanks me very much for my tough stance." "You have to have a certain attitude and you have to be prepared to do certain things and I'm totally prepared to do that," Trump said, contending his tough words have helped persuade the North to sit down with the South. (Associated Press, “Trump Says He'd Be Open to Talking to North Korean Leader,” January 6, 2018)
Mr. President, the meetings now between South Korea and North Korea — the discussions — THE PRESIDENT: Yeah. Hope it works out. Q I was going ask, are you comfortable that this will remain just about the Olympics? Are you — THE PRESIDENT: Well, I think so. I spoke with the President, as you know — with President Moon of South Korea. He thanked me very much for my tough stance. And you know, for 25 years, they haven’t been using a tough stance. They’ve been giving everything. When you look at what Bill Clinton did — and you’ve seen the famous clip where Bill Clinton wants to give them everything, and where I said, years ago, with Russert on Meet the Press — many years ago, I talked to — I don’t think anything has changed. You have to have a certain attitude and you have to be prepared to do certain things. And I’m totally prepared to do that. But President Moon called me, and we had a great discussion a couple of days ago, and he thanked me very much. And I hope it works out. I very much want to see it work out between the two countries. I’d like to see them getting involved in the Olympics and maybe things go from there. So I’m behind that 100 percent. He actually thanked me. He said — and a lot of people have said, a lot of people have written — that without my rhetoric and without my tough stance — and it’s not just a stance — I mean, this is — this is what has to be done, if it has to be done — that they wouldn’t be talking about Olympics, that they wouldn’t be talking right now. Q Are you comfortable that they’re not also taking the conversation beyond the Olympics while he continues to — THE PRESIDENT: Well, I hope they do. I hope they do. I would love to see them take it beyond the Olympics. We have a very good relationship with South Korea. I would love to see it go far beyond the Olympics, absolutely. And at the appropriate time, we’ll get involved. But I like the idea of their dealing on the Olympics. That should be between those two countries. … Q Just to follow up on the conversations between North Korea and South Korea, are you willing to engage in phone talks with Kim Jong-un right now? THE PRESIDENT: Sure. I always believe in talking. Q Do you think that that would be helpful? THE PRESIDENT: But we have a very firm stance. Look, our stance — you know what it is. We’re very firm. But I would be — absolutely I would do that. No problem with that at all. Q So no prerequisites for coming to the table and talking with him? SPEAKER RYAN: That’s not what he said. THE PRESIDENT: We — that’s not what I said, at all. Look, right now, they’re talking Olympics. It’s a start. It’s a big start. If I weren’t involved, they wouldn’t be talking about Olympics right now. They’d be doing no talking or it would be much more serious. He knows I’m not messing around. I’m not messing around — not even a little bit, not even 1 percent. He understands that. At the same time, if we can come up with a very peaceful and very good solution — we’re working on it with Rex and we’re working on it with a lot of people — if something can happen and something can come out of those talks, that would be a great thing for all of humanity. That would be a great thing for the world. Very important, okay?” (White House, Office of the Spokesman, Remarks by President Donald Trump, Vice President Mike Pence, Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell, and House Speaker Paul Ryan after Congressional Republican Leadership Retreat, Camp David, January 6, 2018)

At the start of Donald Trump’s presidency, American intelligence agencies told the new administration that while North Korea had built the bomb, there was still ample time — upward of four years — to slow or stop its development of a missile capable of hitting an American city with a nuclear warhead. Kim Jong-un, faced a range of troubles, they assured the new administration, giving Trump time to explore negotiations or pursue countermeasures. One official who participated in the early policy reviews said estimates suggested Kim would be unable to strike the continental United States until 2020, perhaps even 2022. At a speed that caught American intelligence officials off guard, Kim rolled out new missile technology — based on a decades-old Soviet engine design, apparently developed in a parallel program — and in quick succession demonstrated ranges that could reach Guam, then the West Coast, then Washington. And on the first Sunday in September, he detonated a sixth nuclear bomb. After early hesitation among analysts, a consensus has now emerged that it was the North’s first successful test of a hydrogen weapon, with explosive force some 15 times greater than the atom bomb that leveled Hiroshima. The C.I.A. and other American intelligence services had predicted this moment would come, eventually. For decades, they accurately projected the broad trajectory of North Korea’s nuclear program. Yet their inability to foresee the North’s rapid strides over the past several months now ranks among America’s most significant intelligence failures, current and former officials said in
recent interviews. That disconnect — they saw it coming, but got the timing wrong — helps explain the confusion, mixed signals and alarm that have defined how Trump’s untested national security team has responded to the nuclear crisis. In an interview, Lt. Gen. H.R. McMaster, national security adviser, acknowledged that Kim’s race to the finish line — a bid to establish the North as a nuclear power before any negotiations begin or sanctions take a more punishing toll — “has been quicker and the timeline is a lot more compressed than most people believed.” As a result, he argued, “we have to do everything we are doing with a greater degree of urgency, and we have to accelerate our own efforts to resolve the issue short of conflict.” Senior intelligence officials said they began investing more heavily in acquiring information on North Korea’s weapons program in 2012, reaping benefits over the past two years. But they acknowledged they made two key assumptions that proved wrong. They assumed that North Korea would need about as much time to solve the rocket science as other nations did during the Cold War, underestimating its access to both advanced computer modeling and foreign expertise. They also misjudged Kim, who took control of the dynastic regime in late 2011 and made the weapons program more of a priority than his father or grandfather did. Obama warned Trump during the transition a year ago that North Korea would pose the most urgent national security threat. Some former officials in the Obama administration concede that the intelligence community’s flawed assessment of the North’s progress meant there was less pressure to bolster missile defenses, more vigorously enforce sanctions or consider stepped-up covert action. It is not clear that even with more advanced warning the Obama or Trump administrations would have been able to slow Kim’s progress. And the shakiness of intelligence on North Korea — even on fundamental questions like how many nuclear weapons Kim possesses — casts a shadow over Trump’s options going forward. He has repeatedly raised the prospect of war with North Korea. He has also ordered up a range of new military plans, from a limited “punch in the nose” to signal American resolve to a large-scale attack aimed at destroying the country’s nuclear and missile facilities — all of which, his aides worry, could trigger a devastating wider conflict. Yet many in the Pentagon see the failure to anticipate the North’s recent breakthroughs as an ominous reminder of how much could go wrong. A successful pre-emptive strike, for example, might require precise knowledge of the locations of manufacturing facilities, nuclear plants and storage areas, and confidence that cyber strikes and electronic strikes would cripple Kim’s ability to retaliate. The past year, one senior administration official said, had been a “humbling lesson” in the limits of electronic, satellite and human intelligence operations against a sealed-off society with few computer networks, a high degree of paranoia about American covert action, and a determined young leader. Trump, however, was not disturbed by the absence of warning, McMaster said. “He doesn’t have the expectation of perfect intelligence about anything. He is very comfortable with ambiguity. He understands human nature and understands he will never have perfect intelligence about capabilities and intentions.” The North’s rapid progress raises a number of awkward questions: Did the American sabotage effort, for example, prompt Kim to scrap an ailing missile program for a new generation of more capable rocket engines? Or was that his plan all along? And does the new program have similar vulnerabilities the United States can exploit? During a talk last fall, Gen. John E. Hyten, who heads the United States Strategic Command, which controls the American nuclear arsenal, acknowledged he had no idea when North Korea would pass its final technological hurdle: proving its warheads can survive fiery re-entry into the atmosphere to hit targets in the United States. “Will they get there in 2017, 2018, 2019?” he asked rhetorically. “I see a lot of the detailed intel. I can honestly tell you, I don’t know the answer.” Ever since the United States began tracking North Korea’s efforts to obtain a nuclear weapon, a pattern has repeated itself: American intelligence agencies excelled at forecasting the direction and overall timeline of the program, yet repeatedly missed critical turns. Recently declassified documents show the C.I.A. recognized the North’s ambitions in the early 1980s, when spy satellites first spotted evidence that it was building a reactor to produce plutonium, a main fuel for nuclear arms. A division of the agency immersed itself in studying the North’s factories and reactors, trying to gauge how fast the backward state could build advanced rocket engines, specialty fuels and nuclear warheads. After the collapse of the Soviet Union, waves of its impoverished missile scientists began to head for North Korea. While Russian security forces intercepted some, others made it out or assisted the North from afar. In retrospect, former American intelligence officials say they almost certainly missed significant transfers of technology. “These are designs you can
put on a thumb drive,” said a senior official who has tracked North Korea for years and spoke on condition of anonymity because of the topic’s sensitivity. The missiles launched in recent months bear numerous signs of Soviet provenance. But analysts and intelligence officials say the specific dates, places and means of transfer remain murky. Ostensibly, North Korea suspended its nuclear weapons program in 1994. That deal appeared to hold for six years but, in fact, the North began cheating on the agreement within a few years. The intelligence community eventually spotted shipments from Russia and Pakistan containing parts for centrifuges used to enrich uranium. Confronted with the evidence, North Korea acknowledged the program, prompting the Bush administration to suspend the agreement. But the North pressed ahead, and today analysts believe it uses uranium for many of its new warheads. From as early as 2000, the National Intelligence Council was remarkably prescient about North Korea’s overall direction, predicting in an unclassified report that it would “most likely” have a nuclear missile that could hit American cities by 2015. Late in 2016, North Korea ditched a failing missile technology for a new type that in 2017 racked up major successes, potentially putting its nuclear warheads in range of American cities. Four years later, when the United States was mired in the first year of the Iraq war, the council refined its prediction, saying a “crisis over North Korea is likely to come to a head sometime over the next 15 years,” that is, no later than 2019. None of this was ignored. President George W. Bush began a program to interdict ships delivering material for the North’s weapons program, and he accelerated secret efforts to cripple the program by sabotaging its supply chain with bad parts. But the C.I.A.’s main focus was on counterterrorism, and satellite coverage over North Korea was often diverted to keep troops safe in the Middle East. The United States was surprised in 2006, when it received a heads-up about the North’s first underground nuclear test — from China, only about an hour before the explosion. It was surprised again the next year when the head of the Mossad, Israel’s intelligence service, arrived at the White House with photographs showing a nuclear reactor under construction in Syria that matched the North’s Yongbyon reactor. One picture, eventually released by the C.I.A., showed the chief of North Korea’s nuclear-fuel production at the Syrian site. Though the plant was less than 100 miles from the Iraqi border, the United States had missed it. In 2010, North Korea invited Siegfried S. Hecker, the former director of the Los Alamos National Laboratory, to visit and showed him a complete uranium-enrichment plant it had built inside an old building at Yongbyon. The Koreans had installed the facility, at a site under regular satellite surveillance, without being detected. Intelligence officials said there were good reasons for this spotty record. Foreign governments almost never succeed in recruiting North Korean scientists as sources because they are rarely allowed to go abroad. The North also appears to have figured out the patterns of some American spy satellites. And while documents released by Edward J. Snowden showed the National Security Agency had penetrated North Korea, it is unclear whether its cyber snooping gleaned anything useful in a nation with minimal computer networking. But in 2008, two years after its first nuclear test, Condoleezza Rice, then secretary of state, warned allies that the North was on the verge of another leap: A Soviet rocket engine representing “a substantial advance” had aided its development of longer-range missiles, according to a secret memo disclosed in 2010 by WikiLeaks. Inside the Pentagon, the alarms grew louder. In early 2011, while visiting Beijing, Defense Secretary Robert M. Gates told reporters North Korea was within five years of being able to fire a long-range missile. Pyongyang, he added, “is becoming a direct threat to the United States.” Then, rather suddenly, the urgency seemed to recede. When Kim came to power, many in the intelligence community doubted he would survive: And over the next four years, during Obama’s second term, North Korea’s missile program experienced repeated public failures, prompting more than a few jokes on late-night television in the United States. The worst humiliation came in April 2012, two days after Kim’s formal elevation to the highest level of state power, on the 100th anniversary of his grandfather’s birthday. He marked the occasion with a satellite launch intended to demonstrate technology used in an intercontinental ballistic missile, and even invited foreign journalists. But the rocket shattered soon after launch and fell into the Yellow Sea. By late 2013, the intelligence community had largely changed its view of Kim. He was eliminating his rivals, sometimes ordering public executions with antiaircraft guns that shredded their bodies. And he seemed far more serious about the nuclear and missile program. His father and grandfather tested weapons to make a political point. Kim, however, turned the program into North Korea’s version of the Manhattan Project, the race to develop the atomic bomb in the United States. He made the development of a nuclear
arsenal one of the state’s top priorities, on equal footing with economic development. Only with a nuclear deterrent, he argued, would the nation be secure enough to focus on growth. It now appears that Kim had several missile programs underway simultaneously, and sped efforts to make parts and missile fuel indigenously, so that the United States and its allies could not cut off its supplies. President Obama, increasingly concerned, ordered multiple reviews, including the one in early 2014 in which he authorized an intensification of covert cyber strikes and electronic strikes on the North’s missile program. The pace of missile tests accelerated, reaching a peak of more than two dozen in 2016. But at least 10 launches failed that year, including seven of an intermediate-range missile known as the Musudan. Former senior officials in the Obama administration say it remains unclear whether the sabotage effort contributed to the failed tests; there are many alternative explanations. But this much is clear: In October 2016, Kim ordered a halt to the Musudan tests, and the missile program rapidly shifted in a different direction, focusing on a new generation of more reliable and potent engines. In May, North Korea successfully tested the new design in an intermediate-range missile capable of hitting the American territory of Guam.

Then, on July 4, it stunned the world with its first successful test of an ICBM — and repeated the success a few weeks later. In November, it tested a greatly improved ICBM, known as the Hwasong-15, that could fly about 8,100 miles, far enough to threaten all of the United States. The latest missiles appeared to have been based on old Soviet designs. In interviews, intelligence officials said “freelancers” from the former Soviet Union — “a handful” by the estimate of one official — are almost certainly working with North Korea. The Russian government, they added, does not appear to be providing support. Between the missile tests, in September, North Korea also detonated its most powerful underground nuclear blast yet. The North claimed it was a hydrogen bomb, and after initial skepticism, many experts now say it probably was. Richard L. Garwin, a main designer of the world’s first hydrogen bomb, called the North’s hydrogen claim quite plausible given the “enormous advances” in computer modeling and “the dedication of the small group of nuclear technologists in North Korea.” Several officials who served under Obama said that was a real surprise; they had been told that moment was still years away. Entering 2018, there are several disputes inside the intelligence world about the North’s capabilities. Most intelligence agencies say the North has an arsenal of about 20 or 30 nuclear weapons, for example, but the Pentagon’s Defense Intelligence Agency puts the number above 50. It is more than an academic argument. If Trump attempted to destroy the arsenal, or if the North Korean government collapsed, the challenge would be to neutralize the weapons without any launch taking place or any warhead falling into the wrong hands. The more there are, the more difficult that task becomes. The intelligence agencies are also intently focused on not missing the next big milestone: the moment North Korea learns how to design and build a warhead that can survive the heat and stresses of re-entry into the atmosphere, continue to plunge downward and succeed in destroying its target. When the United States built its nuclear arsenal in the 1950s and ’60s, that “was the hardest part for us,” said General Hyten of the United States Strategic Command. But the C.I.A. director, Mike Pompeo, told an audience in October that predicting when North Korea crosses this final threshold is less relevant now because “you’re now talking about months.” And Defense Secretary Jim Mattis, who has urged diplomacy over military action, said the November ICBM test flight indicated the North already has the ability to hit “everywhere in the world, basically.” Having underestimated the North, though, Washington now faces some risk of overstating its capabilities and intentions, some experts hold. Hecker, the former director at Los Alamos, recently argued that North Korea needs “at least two more years and several more missile and nuclear tests” to perfect a weapon that can threaten American cities. There is still time “to start a dialogue,” he said, “in an effort to reduce current tensions and head off misunderstandings that could lead to war.” (David E. Sanger, “U.S. Miscalculated the Nuclear Progress of North Korea by Years,” New York Times, January 7, 2018, p. A-1)

Woodward: “Early in 2018, the CIA concluded that North Korea did not have the capability to accurately deliver a missile into the United States mainland with a nuclear weapon on top. According to the intelligence and the information on the testing of North Korean rockets, they did not have the reentry of missiles perfected. But they were marching toward that goal.” (Woodward, Fear, p. 308)
North Korea accepted Seoul's proposal to hold military talks to reduce tensions and agreed to send a delegation to next month's Winter Olympics in the South, according to a joint press statement issued after their high-level talks. During the meeting, South Korea's chief delegate Cho Myoung-gyon raised the need to resume talks on North Korea's denuclearization. Ri Son-gwon, the North's chief delegate, is said to have made "strong" complaints about South Korean media reports that today's talks would deal with the North's nukes. North Korea offered to send high-ranking officials, cheerleaders, performing artists, taekwondo demonstration teams and journalists in addition to athletes. The South promised to provide them with necessary conveniences. The two sides came short of agreeing to march together under a unified Korean flag at the opening and closing ceremonies, but Seoul said that the two Koreas "got closer" on the issue of joint parades and cultural events. They will hold working-level talks to further discuss details of the North's participation, such as its delegation's travel route, accommodation and security issues, should be discussed at follow-up meetings. If the land route across the heavily guarded border is chosen, there will have to be consultation between the military authorities of the two Koreas. North Korea re-opened a military hotline with the South, a move aimed at facilitating discussions on this issue. Pyongyang did not elaborate on who would lead the "high-level" delegation, but experts here think the team may include political heavyweights such as Choe Ryong-hae, the de facto No. 2 official in the North. Choe is blacklisted by South Korea's unilateral sanctions over North Korea's nuclear and missile provocations. Seoul's punitive actions do not cover travel bans, but it could prove controversial if North Korean officials on the blacklist come to the South. Apparently mindful of such criticism, Seoul's foreign ministry said that the government may consider temporarily easing sanctions against the North, if needed, to enable North Korean officials to visit the South next month. But South Korea's proposal to arrange reunions of families separated by the 1950-53 Korean War in February was not included in the press statement. The failure to agree on holding reunions for divided families indicates how far apart the two sides stand on the issue. Seoul is placing priority in resolving the problem of separated families, as more aging Koreans have passed away without being able to meet with their kin on the opposite side of the tense border. About 55 percent of an estimated 131,260 South Koreans on the waiting list for reunion have already died. Data showed that 62 percent of South Koreans hoping for reunions are aged over 80. The last reunion event was held in October 2015. Pyongyang has suggested conditions that could politicize the issue. In exchange for the reunions, it is demanding Seoul return 12 female North Korean workers who worked at a restaurant in China and defected to South Korea en masse in 2016. The South rejects the North's claim, saying that they defected of their own free will. North Korea accepted Seoul's January 5 dialogue offer after the South and the United States agreed to postpone their military drills until after the Olympics. It also reopened a long-disconnected border hotline. "This meeting takes on significance in terms of restoring and developing inter-Korean ties. The two sides shared the need to upgrade our ties based on mutual respect," Unification Minister Cho Myoung-gyon, the South's chief delegate, told pool reporters at the truce village. "South-North ties took their first step. As they have been strained for a long time, there are a lot tasks to do," he added. (Joint Press Corps-Yonhap, “N.K. Agrees to Hold Military Talks, Send Olympic Delegation to South,” January 9, 2018) “The North said that they will send a high-level delegation, including Olympic committee representatives, athletes, a cheering squad, an art performance group, spectators, Taekwondo demonstrators and press,” Chun Hae-sung, vice minister of unification, told reporters at the Panmunjom truce village on the border between the two Koreas. The talks took place in the "Peace House," a building on the southern side, which resulted in the unusual sight of a northern delegation stepping over the concrete curb that marks the border. “I hope that the two Koreas can hold talks with a sincere and genuine attitude," Ri Son Kwon, the North’s chief representative, said at the start of the talks, according to South Korean pool reports from inside the room. “Just as water continues to flow below thick frozen ice, people’s strong desires for these talks and improved inter-Korean relations cannot be stopped or frozen," he said. (Yoonjung Seo and Anna Fifield, “North Korea Agree to Send Athletes to Winter Olympics, South Says,” Washington Post, January 9, 2018)

Joint Press Statement: “High-level inter-Korean talks were held at Panmunjom on Tuesday. At the talks, the two sides earnestly discussed the matter of the North Korean delegation’s participation in the Pyeongchang Olympic Winter Games and Paralympic Winter Games, and issues
surrounding improving inter-Korean relations in accordance with the hopes and expectations of the Korean people, and agreed to the following: 1. South and North agreed to actively collaborate for the success of the Pyeongchang Olympic Winter Games and Paralympic Winter Games, which will serve as an opportunity to raise the Korean people’s status.

In relation to this, the North decided to send a high-level delegation, Olympic Committee delegation, athletes, cheering squad, cultural performance troupe, taekwondo demonstration group, observation delegation and press corps to the Pyeongchang Games. The two sides agreed to hold working-level talks regarding matters concerning the North sending an advance party to assess the sites, and the North’s participation in Winter Games, and to negotiate the schedule by exchanging written statements. 2. The South and North agreed to collaborate in facilitating reconciliation and unity by easing military tensions, and to establish a peaceful environment. The South and North agreed on the need to ease military tensions and hold military talks to resolve the issue. The South and North agreed to facilitate contact, exchange and cooperation in diverse fields to establish reconciliation and unity of the people. 3. The South and the North respect the inter-Korean declarations and have decided to resolve the issues raised in inter-Korean relations through dialogue and negotiations, as parties directly involved in the matters surrounding the Korean Peninsula. For these reasons, both parties decided to hold meetings in respective areas with a high-level South-North meeting to improve inter-Korean ties.” (Choi He-suk, “Joint Press Statement of High-Level Inter-Korean Talks,” Korea Herald, January 9, 2018)

South Korea announced it will not seek to renegotiate the 2015 landmark deal with Japan on the “comfort women” issue but at the same time indirectly urged Japan to extend a fresh “voluntary, heart-felt apology” for the victims forced to work at Japanese military brothels before and during World War II. The announcement immediately drew strong protests from Tokyo. Under the 2015 deal, Prime Minister Shinzo Abe has already expressed “his most sincere apologies and remorse” to all the former comfort women and Japan provided ¥1 billion to South Korean fund for victims, although Tokyo has denied any legal responsibility for compensation. Today Foreign Minister Kang Kyung-wha said Seoul plans to create its own fund worth ¥1 billion for former comfort women. Seoul will also discuss what to do with the ¥1 billion provided by the Japanese government, Kang said. “It cannot be denied that the 2015 deal was an official agreement reached between the governments of each country, and our government will not demand renegotiation,” Kang said, according to the Yonhap news agency. “We still expect Japan to accept the truth in accordance with universally accepted standards and keep making efforts to recover their dignity and heal the wounds in their minds,” she said. What victims want is a fresh “voluntary and heart-felt apology,” Kang was also quoted as saying. Later, Foreign Minister Kono Taro told reporters: “It’s totally unacceptable that South Korea demands Japan carry out more measures, even though the 2015 Japan-South Korea agreement confirmed a final and irreversible resolution.” Kono also said that South Korea must stick with the 2015 agreement to further promote the bilateral ties among the two nations, as Tokyo and Seoul are key partners in coping with the North Korean threat. Kono added that Japan will ask the South Korean government to clarify why it is setting aside its own fund and to give details of today’s talks between Seoul and Pyongyang was inaugurated last May. Prior to Seoul’s announcement on the comfort women accord, Chief Cabinet Secretary Suga Yoshihide reasserted Tokyo’s stance that it has “no intention of changing the deal even by a millimeter,” forestalling any possible calls from the South Korean government for renegotiation or any additional requests. Noting the deal was hammered out after negotiation between foreign ministers and then confirmed by top leaders of the two nations as “final and irreversible,” Suga said Tokyo remains adamant that the deal should be “implemented steadily” and urged Seoul to act accordingly “as soon as possible.” After taking office, President Moon Jae-in ordered a task force re-examine the process that led to the agreement, saying the majority of the South Korean public did not approve of it. In December, the task force under Kang said in a report that the previous government of Park Geun-hye failed to sufficiently consult former comfort women before agreeing to the deal. Moon also criticized the deal as seriously flawed. Kimura Kan, a political science professor and Korean affairs expert at Kobe University, said Seoul’s latest decision appears to have been worked out “desperately” as the South Korean government tried unsuccessfully to impose any clear-cut requests on Japan. “In a nutshell, they couldn’t really do anything,” Kan said, adding that Seoul, despite initial reports, ended up not announcing the
unilateral return of the ¥1 billion yen provided by Tokyo under the 2015 deal. Kang’s comment that Japan should “voluntarily” accept the facts of what happened in accordance with “universally accepted standards” essentially means Seoul failed to demand an outright apology from Tokyo, the professor said. Seoul’s softer-than-expected rhetoric, Kan said, underlines its desire to minimize the danger of its ties with the United States being compromised as it deals with its fragile diplomacy with Washington and Pyongyang. Amid soaring tensions on the Korean Peninsula, “Seoul’s biggest priority is to maintain a good relationship with the U.S.,” Kan said. “Seoul knows Abe and Trump are on good terms, and that Abe may even have the biggest influence over Trump among world leaders. So it makes sense they didn’t want to antagonize Abe,” Kan said, adding that taking the high road will also help Seoul maintain its international reputation. Despite its decision not to seek a renegotiation, Seoul’s latest announcement will still be taken as running counter to the “final and irreversible” nature of the 2015 pact, further intensifying a sense of “Korea fatigue” in the Japanese government and potentially doing harm to bilateral relations in the long run, the professor said. “‘Give me a break’ is probably the sentiment of the Japanese government,” Kan said, adding that today’s development could have a negative impact on Abe’s decision over whether to attend the Winter Olympics in the South Korean city of Pyeongchang. (Kikuchi Daisuke and Osaki Tomohiro, “South Korea Will Not Seek Renegotiation of ‘Comfort Women’ Deal with Japan,” Japan Times, January 9, 2018)

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President Donald Trump told his South Korean counterpart Moon Jae-in he is open to talking with North Korea, the South’s presidential office said after the two leaders spoke by telephone. “Both heads of state forecast the current inter-Korean talks could naturally lead to talks between the United States and North Korea for the denuclearization of the Korean peninsula after the Pyeongchang Winter Olympics and agreed to negotiate closely on the progression of inter-Korean talks,” the statement said. “President Trump said the United States is open to talks should North Korea want them, as long as the circumstances and timing are right.” The South Korean statement also quoted Trump as saying that an article in the Wall Street Journal saying that he was contemplating a military strike against North Korea was “completely wrong.” “He went on to say that there will be no military action as long as talks between the two Koreas are ongoing,” it said. Trump also said he would send Vice President Mike Pence to head the U.S. delegation to the Pyeongchang games to be held in South Korea next month. (Reuters, “Trump Says Open to Talks with North Korea: Seoul Statement,” January 10, 2018)

Trump: “I just spoke to President Moon. He’s very thankful for what we’ve done. They’re having talks with North Korea. We’ll see how that happens. He felt that the original -- that the initial talk was extremely good. Had a lot of good comment. Rex was on the phone, and Nikki has been totally briefed. But we had a very, very good conversation, and we'll see where it goes. He's very thankful for what we've done. It was so reported today that we were the ones -- without our attitude, that would have never happened. Who knows where it leads. Hopefully, it will lead to success for the world -- not just for our country, but for the world. And we'll be seeing over the next number of weeks and months what happens.” (White House, Office of the Spokesman, Remarks by President Donald J. Trump on His Call with President Moon Jae-in of the Republic of Korea,” January 10, 2018)

White House Statement: “President Donald J. Trump spoke today with President Moon Jae-in of the Republic of Korea. President Moon briefed President Trump on the outcomes of the discussions between North and South Korea on January 9 and thanked President Trump for his influential leadership in making the talks possible. The two leaders underscored the importance of continuing the maximum pressure campaign against North Korea. President Trump expressed his openness to holding talks between the United States and North Korea at the appropriate time, under the right circumstances. President Trump told President Moon that Vice President Mike Pence would lead the U.S. Presidential Delegation to the Pyeongchang Winter Olympics.” (White House, Office of the Spokesman, Readout of President Donald J. Trump’s Call with President Moon Jae-in of the Republic of Korea,” January 10, 2018)
President Moon Jae-in said that South Korea will approach the North Korean nuclear issue with both engagement and pressure, and that cooperation with the US has been critical in inter-Korean relations. “The purpose of sanctions and pressure is to bring North Korea to dialogue, (but) it cannot be said that dialogue is the only solution,” Moon said at the New Year’s press conference held at the Blue House. While Seoul will engage the North and endeavor to resolve the North Korean nuclear issue, international sanctions will continue should Pyongyang carry out another provocation or show lack of sincerity, he added. “(South Korea) also cannot avoid using both means. (The government) is open to all dialogue, including summit talks if it is deemed beneficial to inter-Korean relations, but talks for the sake of talks cannot be the goal.” Saying that South Korea and the US have a common understanding on security issues, and both face North Korean missile and nuclear threats, Moon highlighted the importance of the Seoul-Washington alliance and cooperation. “South Korea and the US have been working together closely in responding to the North Korean nuclear issue,” Moon said, adding that yesterday’s inter-Korean talks may have been the result of US-led international pressure. The South Korean president went on to stress that Seoul and Washington fully agree on resolving the issue through peaceful means. He also stressed that the allies have no differences regarding Pyongyang’s nuclear and missile provocations. In addition, Moon thanked President Donald Trump for playing a “very big” role in bringing about inter-Korean talks. Regarding measures taken by previous South Korean administrations, he said that they cannot be rescinded unilaterally by Seoul, but he believes that the “two-track” approach will create a cycle of positive feedback. “Improving relations with the North cannot be separated from resolving the North Korean nuclear issue,” Moon said. He added that improvements in inter-Korean relations will help to resolve the nuclear problem and that inter-Korean relations will be improved by progress in resolving the nuclear issue. “What we can do for the time being is induce the North to engage in denuclearization talks, through dialogue aimed at improving inter-Korean relations. If such outcome is achieved, (the) Kaesong complex and Kumgangsan tour issues will be considered within that framework.” A joint South-North statement released after inter-Korean talks Tuesday stated that the two Koreas will resolve related matters by themselves. However, Moon said that he would increase cooperation with the countries concerned. “I will do my best to make this year a new start for peace on the Korean Peninsula. In the process, I will cooperate more closely with related countries, including our ally, the US, China and Japan, and the rest of the international community,” Moon said. “I stress once again; the denuclearization of the Korean Peninsula is a process toward peace and a goal at the same time. The denuclearization of the Korean Peninsula, which was declared by the two Koreas, is our fundamental position that can never be compromised.” (Choi He-suk, “Dialogue and Pressure’ in Dealing with NK: Moon,” Korea Herald, January 10, 2018)

Vorontsov: “In mid-November 2017, I spent several days in Pyongyang talking to DPRK foreign ministry officials about the prospects of war between North Korea and the United States. These were sobering discussions. All of my interlocutors made it clear that while North Korea does not want war, it will not hide from it either. These officials feared that the US was already trying to shape the battlefield for a military operation against the North, and that South Koreans do not seem to have grasped the reality that the Trump administration is set on a course for preventive war. However, Pyongyang is extremely serious about this scenario and is not bluffing when it says that “only one question remains: when will war break out?” In this respect, our counterparts emphasized that “our soldiers have long been sleeping without removing their boots.” During my visit, I heard nothing to suggest that North Korea is prepared, at this time, to be the first to accept the Russian and Chinese proposal for a freeze on its missile and nuclear tests in return for American agreement to freeze its joint military exercises with South Korea. The North Koreans insisted their sovereignty be respected and rejected any preconditions. Although my North Korean interlocutors acknowledged that the Korean Peninsula was sliding toward war, they reaffirmed the country’s commitment to achieving nuclear parity with the United States. Moreover, according to experts from the DPRK Foreign Ministry’s Institute for Disarmament and Peace, the United States is not just expanding the scale of regular and irregular military exercises along North Korea’s perimeter, but also introducing fundamentally new elements designed to achieve specific operational goals in the event of a large-scale conflict between North Korea and the United States. Indeed, North Koreans see the US-ROK exercises as anything but routine; to the contrary, there
was a sense among them that the Pentagon has launched the contact reconnaissance phase of a military operation it is planning to undertake on the peninsula. They noted that the geographical features of the Korean Peninsula provide no opportunity for the gradual, methodical buildup of troops to create a superior strike force—as was the case before the US attacked Iraq—and that North Korea would immediately notice such actions and naturally regard them as a *casus belli*. In their eyes, the Pentagon is rehearsing elements of a coordinated military operation one step at a time. The three aircraft carrier strike groups that are operating in Korea’s East Sea, as well as many other operations, were not just a show of force. The same is true, they argued, about the latest US-South Korean air exercise *Vigilant Ace*, which involved 230 aircraft and a large number of varied types of stealth aircraft. The deployment for the first time of so many stealth airplanes looks especially ominous from the North Korean perspective against the backdrop of recent US-ROK exercises practicing decapitation strikes against Kim Jong Un in a first strike using ground, naval, air and special operations forces. These, and many other new elements that have appeared in drills over the past several months, have elicited growing concern that different elements of a combined arms operation against North Korea are being methodically rehearsed and that “zero hour,” as they put it, is not too far away. In my conversations in Pyongyang, senior North Korean Foreign Ministry officials did not conceal their surprise that Seoul failed to see the huge gap in threat perceptions between American and South Korean societies. The North Koreans see growing signs, reflecting President Donald Trump’s “America First” principle that the United States is prepared to accept the terrible loss of lives that would result from a large-scale military conflict with North Korea. In contrast, South Korean public opinion continues to believe that president Trump would never start a war in Korea—and that the tension, crisis-like atmosphere, and belligerent rhetoric are all posturing. North Korean diplomats expressed surprise that a substantial part of the South Korean elite have missed many indications, reflected in polling data, that a majority of Americans now believe that the US cannot allow North Korea to acquire a missile capable of delivering a nuclear weapon to the US mainland and that Pyongyang would order such a strike as soon as it had this capability. North Korean diplomats stressed that this is a misperception. As one opined, “it would be suicidal to attack the USA first and especially with nuclear weapons. We understand that it would be the last day of our country.” These officials were truly baffled that a majority of the South Korean population does not seem to have grasped the reality that the Trump administration, despite the risks, is inching ever closer to a preventive strike on North Korea. Pyongyang, they maintained, is under no such illusions. North Korean experts reiterated that they are striving to reach some kind “nuclear parity” with the US, but not in order to use it in an unprovoked first strike against the American mainland. When we expressed doubt regarding the North Korean ability to achieve this parity, their rather uncertain explanations led us to believe they, more accurately, have some kind of “specific asymmetrical” nuclear parity in mind. Finally they told us: “We are diplomats, not military guys. Only our leader knows the issue in full.” They expressed bewilderment over why the political establishment in the US is unwilling to ask itself a very simple question: even if North Korea does develop the capability to target the continental US with nuclear weapons, why would it launch such weapons if it would result in the destruction of North Korea? These weapons are being developed to preserve the survival of North Korea. In short, sooner rather than later, it would benefit both sides to establish a US-DPRK dialogue that would allow Pyongyang to clarify its real intentions and reach consensus with the US on a plan to resolve the nuclear issue. As is well-known, the new year has started off with some important positive changes to the North-South Korean relationship, but the analysis of these significant and encouraging events on the Inter-Korean agenda is subject of a separate article. How they will affect the overall US-DPRK relationship is yet to be seen.” (Alexander Vorontsov, “Is the US Preparing for Preventive War? Views from North Korea,” *38North*, January 10, 2017)

The U.S. Air Force has sent three B-2 nuclear-capable stealth bombers to Andersen Air Force Base on the island territory of Guam amid cooling tensions with North Korea. Around 200 airmen from Whiteman Air Force Base in Missouri were recently deployed to Andersen in support of the U.S. Pacific Command’s Bomber Assurance and Deterrence mission. “During this short-term deployment, the B-2s will conduct local and regional training sorties and will integrate capabilities with key regional partners, ensuring bomber crews maintain a high state of readiness and crew proficiency,” the U.S. Pacific Air Forces said on its website. The U.S. Strategic Command
regularly rotates bombers through the Indo-Pacific region to conduct Pacific Command-led air operations, “providing leaders with deterrent options to maintain regional stability,” the Pacific Air Forces said. It was unclear how long the powerful stealth bombers would be deployed to Guam, a strategically important base amid Pyongyang’s tests of increasingly powerful missiles and nuclear bombs. (Jesse Johnson, “U.S. Deploys Three Powerful B-2 Stealth Bombers to Guam amid Cooling Tensions on Korean Peninsula,” Japan Times, January 11, 2018)

“I probably have a very good relationship with Kim Jong-un,” President Trump told The Wall Street Journal in an interview little more than a week after boasting that he has a bigger nuclear button than Kim Jong-un, the North Korean leader. “I have relationships with people. I think you people are surprised.” Trump declined to say whether he had directly spoken with his North Korean counterpart. “I’m not saying I have or haven’t,” he said. Trump said that his shifting commentary about the North Korean leader was part of a broader strategy. “You’ll see that a lot with me,” Trump said, referring to the difference between his friendly tone toward Kim and his previous tweets calling him a “maniac” and a “short and fat” person. “And then all of the sudden somebody’s my best friend. I could give you 20 examples. You could give me 30. I’m a very flexible person.” Trump said he expected that North Korea’s effort to talk with South Korea is an attempt to drive a wedge between the South Koreans and the United States. He said that probably was their motivation, and he suggested that he should know. “The difference is I’m president, other people aren’t,” Trump said. “And I know more about wedges than any human being that’s lived.” (Michael D. Shear, “Trump Boasts of a ‘Very Good Relationship’ with North Korean Leader,” New York Times, January 11, 2018)

Trump: “You always have to have flexibility. As an example, we’ve been much tougher on China, but not nearly as tough as I would be, but they are helping us a lot with North Korea. And you see in North Korea what’s happening with North Korea all of a sudden. China’s been helping us a lot, so you can veer a little bit differently, but for the most part everything I’ve said I’ve done. ...

WSJ: And you mentioned the link between China and North Korea. We talked about that a little bit the last time we were in here. Trump: Right. WSJ: Is that—does that link still exist for you? Do you feel like China’s been helpful enough... (CROSSTALK) Trump: Not helpful enough, but they’ve been very helpful. Let’s put it this way, they’ve done more for me than they ever have for any American president. They still haven’t done enough. But they’ve done more for me than they have, by far, for any—I have a very good relationship with President Xi. I like him. He likes me. We have a great chemistry together. He’s—China has done far more for us than they ever have for any American president. With that being said, it’s not enough. They have to do more. ... For instance, at the very beginning, you know Obama felt—President Obama felt it was his biggest problem is North Korea. He said that openly. He said that to me, but he said that openly. It is a big problem, and they should not have left me with that problem. That should have been a problem that was solved by Obama, or Bush, or Clinton or anybody, because the longer it went, the worse, the more difficult the problem got. This should not have been a problem left on my desk, but it is, and I get things solved. And one way or the other, that problem is going to be solved. China has been helping us, and I appreciate the help, but they can do much more. WSJ: Are you worried, Mr. President, that sending—delaying military exercises on the peninsula for the Olympics sends the wrong message to the North? Trump: Say it again? WSJ: Are you concerned that delaying military exercises on the Korean Peninsula for the Olympics sends the wrong message to the North Koreans, that you’re in some way bending to them? Trump: You’re the first one that’s asked that question. No, I don’t think anybody thinks that I’m bending. I think that people that, if anything, I’m being too tough. No, I think it’s inappropriate to have the Olympics, have millions of people going to the Olympics hopefully, have North Korea going to the Olympics, and we’re having exercises on the beach. No, I think that it doesn’t—I think it sends a good message to North Korea, not a bad message. I think it would be totally inappropriate to do that during the Olympics. WSJ: You think North Korea is trying to drive a wedge between the two countries, between you and President Moon? Trump: I’ll let you know in—within the next 12 months, OK, Mike? WSJ: Sure. Trump: I will let you know. But if I were them I would try. But the difference is I’m president; other people aren’t. And I know more about wedges than any
human being that’s ever lived, but I’ll let you know. But I’ll tell you, you know, when you talk about driving a wedge, we also have a thing called trade. And South Korea—brilliantly makes—we have a trade deficit with South Korea of $31 billion a year. That’s a pretty strong bargaining chip to me. With that being said, President Xi has been extremely generous with what he’s said, I like him a lot. I have a great relationship with him, as you know I have a great relationship with Prime Minister Abe of Japan and I probably have a very good relationship with Kim Jong Un of North Korea. I have relationships with people; I think you people are surprised. WSJ: Just to be clear, you haven’t spoken to the North Korean leader, I mean when you say a relationship with Korea—Trump: I don’t want to comment on it—I don’t want to comment, I’m not saying I have or I haven’t. But I just don’t—WSJ: Some people would see your tweets, which are sometimes combative towards Kim Jong Un...Trump: Sure, you see that a lot with me and then all of a sudden somebody’s my best friend. I could give you 20 examples. I give you 30. I’m a very flexible person. ... (Wall Street Journal, Transcript of Donald Trump Interview, January 11, 2018)

Ignatius: “Sometimes diplomacy is the art of going in two directions at once, and the Trump administration seems to have chosen that sweet spot of ambiguity, for now, in managing its continuing confrontation with North Korea. President Trump has paused his “Little Rocket Man” rhetoric and his boasts about the size of his own nuclear button. He’s insisting this week that talk of a U.S. military strike (which he had encouraged) is “completely wrong” and is calling for discussions with North Korea “under the right circumstances.” A fragile detente seems to have begun. North Korea hasn’t tested weapons in more than a month and is talking to South Korea. North Korean athletes and spectators will attend the Pyeongchang Olympics next month. The United States has postponed joint military exercises with South Korea until after the last gold medal is awarded. Call it speed-skater diplomacy, if you like, but the table for negotiations has at least been set. Trump administration diplomacy is like the oft-quoted description of New England weather: If you don’t like it, wait awhile. But at least through late February, we’re likely to experience a thaw on the Korean Peninsula, and it’s interesting to explore what it means. ...The problem with this Olympic peace parade is that nothing has really been resolved. Once the games have ended, all the same problems will continue to exist. If the United States resumes military exercises, North Korea may go back to testing missiles and bombs. “We have avoided escalation of tension,” said one U.S. official, but in several months, “we’re back to square one.” Ideally, the next step would be direct talks between the United States and North Korea. A senior State Department official told me he hopes face-to-face meetings will start before the Olympics end; the United States will characterize the goal as eventual denuclearization of the Korean Peninsula. Pyongyang may offer a different formula, but Washington probably won’t care so long as the other side shows up. There’s no sign yet that it will, however. The State Department official explained that the conversation with Pyongyang can “start at the edges,” with each country describing how it sees the future, and then “work toward the center,” meaning denuclearization. “The Olympics themselves might be the perimeter” from which talks start, says the official. Trump argues that his nuclear brinkmanship over the past year has worked. ...Who has blinked here? It’s hard to argue that it’s Kim. The mutual stand-down for the Olympics looks very much like the “freeze for freeze” approach that Russia and China were recommending last year, although U.S. officials resist the characterization. For all Trump’s bluster and self-congratulation, the past month’s diplomacy really has been a Korean show, with Kim and Moon both showing considerable finesse. Kim gave his New Year’s Day speech with the confidence of a member of the nuclear club, but he was also deferential toward South Korea. Moon responded avidly, but he also kept faith with Washington by stressing that diplomacy must eventually encompass denuclearization...Tillerson will meet in Canada next week with diplomats from countries that sent troops to fight the Korean conflict nearly 70 years ago. The gathering is meant to signal global solidarity and resolve. But it will also highlight the failure of the U.S.-led coalition, so far, to stop North Korea from becoming a de facto nuclear power. A pause for the Olympics, and then, alas, the crisis resumes.” (David Ignatius, “The Korean Crisis Will Resume – after the Olympics,” Washington Post, January 12, 2018)
Hook: “The Vancouver Foreign Ministers’ Meeting on Security and Stability in the Korean Peninsula will be held in Vancouver on January 16th. The United States and Canada are convening the meeting to demonstrate international commitment to diplomatic solutions to the escalating threat posed by DPRK’s nuclear and ballistic missile programs. The ministerial – the goal of the ministerial is to provide a practical mechanism – mechanisms to exert continued pressure on the Kim regime while demonstrating that diplomatic options remain open and viable. The invitation list is largely based on countries who are UN Command sending states, which are the countries that sent combat support and/or humanitarian aid to support the Republic of Korea during the Korean War. There is growing evidence that our maximum pressure campaign is being felt in North Korea. They are feeling the strain. And we believe that this pressure campaign remains the best avenue to force change in Kim Jong-un’s behavior and to get him to the negotiating table for meaningful discussions. Among the issues we will be discussing is how the international community can thwart North Korean efforts to evade UN sanctions through smuggling. … One of the things that we’re looking that – we hope that the UN can list some of these vessels for port entry bans, and we think that that will demonstrate seriousness of purpose if we can start having more of these vessels listed so that we can then – they can be banned from entering other ports.” (DoS Briefing, Director of Policy Planning Brian Hook, January 11, 2018)

Choe Ryong-hae, 68, vice chairman of the central committee of the Workers’ Party of Korea (WPK), appears to have become the director of the organization and guidance department that oversees the party's operation and surveillance, according to data provided by the Ministry of Unification. A chief of the organization and guidance department is in charge of overseeing personnel policy at the WPK. The ministry said that Jong Kyong-thaek is leading North Korea's spy agency, the Ministry of State Security. He replaced Kim Won-hong, who is said to have been punished after a party inspection. Shin Ryong-man has become the head of Office 39, known as the WPK's special unit managing Kim Jong-un's secret funds. The ministry said that North Korea's state agency in charge of inter-Korean affairs is placed under the North's cabinet. In June 2016, North Korea upgraded the Committee for the Peaceful Reunification of the Country to a state apparatus from an offshoot of the WPK. The agency's head is Ri Son-gwon, who led North Korea's five-member delegation to South and North Korea's high-level talks held two days ago. (Yonhap, “N. Korean Official Choe Ryong-hae Apparently Leading Ruling Party’s Key Department,” January 11, 2018)

Pabian, Bermudez, Liu: “Recent commercial satellite imagery of North Korea’s Punggye-ri Nuclear Test Site indicates that the North Portal, where the last five nuclear tests were conducted, remains dormant and that tunnel excavation has been stepped up at the West Portal. Throughout December 2017, mining carts and personnel were consistently present around the West Portal and there was significant expansion of the spoil pile. On December 28, there were also a large number of personnel (~100 to 200) observed in seven different formations whose purpose is unknown in the Southern Support Area. These activities underscore North Korea’s continued efforts to maintain the Punggye-ri site’s potential for future nuclear testing.” (Frank V. Pabian, Joseph S. Bermudez Jr. and Jack Liu, “Punggye-ri Nuclear Test Site: Significant Tunneling Underway at West Portal,” 38North, January 11, 2018)

Website Uriminzokkiri said South Korea should “permanently halt” its annual military drills with the US, which South Korean President Moon Jae-in and his US counterpart Donald Trump agreed to temporarily postpone until after the Winter Olympics. “Inter-Korean talks and war drill can never be incompatible,” Uriminzokkiri said in its commentary. “It’s nothing but an attempt to bring disaster and misfortune to our people.” Rodong Sinmun has demanded South Korea stop its efforts to have US strategic assets deployed on the peninsula, such as strategic bombers and nuclear aircraft carriers. “If the South Korean authorities really want detente and peace, they should first stop all the efforts to bringing in US nuclear equipment and conducts exercise for nuclear warfare with foreign forces,” the newspaper said in a commentary. (Yeo Jun-suk, “North Korea’s State Media Demands ‘Complete Cessation’ of Allied Military Drills,” Korea Herald, January 12, 2018)
The U.S. Air Force is going ahead with two long-planned flight tests of intercontinental ballistic missiles next month despite efforts to damp tensions over North Korea’s nuclear ambitions and encourage fragile talks with South Korea. “There are two launches currently scheduled for February that have been scheduled for three to five years” to test the reliability and accuracy of the Minuteman III missiles, according to Captain Anastasia Schmidt, a spokeswoman for the Air Force Global Strike Command, which manages ICBMs and long-range bombers. Schmidt said the potential range of dates for tests “are typically not released this far in advance.” (Anthony Capaccio, “U.S. Sticks to ICBM Test-Flight despite North Korean Tensions,” Bloomberg News, January 12, 2018)

For 38 harrowing minutes, residents and tourists in Hawaii were left to believe that missiles were streaming across the sky toward the Pacific island chain after an erroneous alert this morning by the state’s emergency management agency. “Ballistic missile threat inbound to Hawaii,” warned an 8:07 a.m. message transmitted across the state’s cellphone networks. “Seek immediate shelter. This is not a drill.” Only after an inexplicable delay by the state agency — during which residents scrambled to seek shelter and contact relatives — was a subsequent message sent describing the missile warning as a “false alarm.” The frightening mistake, which Gov. David Ige (D) later attributed to a state employee’s errant push of a button, prompted outrage and calls for an investigation into how such an error could occur and take so long to correct. The episode underscored the already heightened level of anxiety at the western edge of the United States amid mounting tensions with North Korea over its nuclear arsenal and the menacing social media exchanges between President Trump and its leader, Kim Jong Un. The false alert prompted U.S. military officials to scan systems that monitor missile launches; they determined almost instantly that there was no threat. But officials described confusion over whether or how the military should correct a state-issued alert. At the North American Aerospace Defense Command, which tracks the skies for threats to the United States, U.S. troops manning the watch floor confirmed within minutes that there were no missiles bearing down on Hawaii. That information was quickly relayed to state officials, said Navy Lt. Cmdr. Joe Nawrocki, a spokesman for the command. But Hawaii struggled to issue a comprehensive correction. The Hawaii Emergency Management Agency transmitted its first “no missile threat” message within 12 minutes of the mistaken alert, but that revision went out only on the agency’s Twitter account. It wasn’t until 8:45 a.m. that the agency was able to issue a stand-down message across the same cellphone and cable television networks that had spread the initial, erroneous warning. By that time, officials from Hawaii including Rep. Tulsi Gabbard (D) had taken it upon themselves to distribute stand-down messages on social media. “What happened today is totally inexcusable,” Sen. Brian Schatz (D) said in a posting on his Twitter account. “The whole state was terrified. There needs to be tough and quick accountability and a fixed process.” Deputy White House press secretary Lindsay Walters said Trump had been briefed on the false missile warning in Hawaii. She added that it was “purely a state exercise.” Officials in Hawaii did not characterize the errant alarm as part of any drill or exercise. (Amy B. Wang, Dan Lamothe, and Greg Miller, “Missile Scare Alarms Hawaii,” Washington Post, January 14, 2018, p. A-1)

Maritime Self-Defense Force vessels have been patrolling international waters off the Korean Peninsula since late last year to thwart attempts by North Korea to evade international sanctions, government sources said. Their primary task is to foil efforts by North Korea to acquire refined petroleum products from foreign cargo carriers in the Yellow Sea as well as the Sea of Japan. The mission is purely aimed at “warning and monitoring” activities in waters surrounding North Korea, the sources added. The MSDF vessels are not authorized to forcibly inspect suspect ships. It is the first involvement by MSDF vessels in efforts to bolster the effectiveness of U.N. sanctions. China is strongly opposed to MSDF vessels operating in the Yellow Sea that rings its eastern coastline, but the Japanese government decided the patrols were necessary to ensure that the embargo remains watertight. The MSDF monitors the movement of foreign ships and share that information with the United States, the sources said. In the Sea of Japan, the SDF and the U.S. military patrol together, each in an assigned area. (Doi Takateru, “MSDF Patrolling Yellow Sea to Stop Smuggling to North Korea,” Asahi Shim bun, January 13, 2018)
A meeting of states that backed South Korea in the Korean war will look at ways to better implement sanctions to push North Korea to abandon its nuclear weapons, officials said, even as the North and South explore detente ahead of next month’s Winter Olympics. Foreign ministers and senior officials from 20 nations will hold a full-day meeting in Vancouver tomorrow, hosted by the United States and Canada, looking to increase diplomatic and financial pressure on North Korea to give up development of nuclear missiles capable of hitting the United States, a program that has raised fears of a new war. Canadian and U.S. officials say the meeting will discuss ways to ensure implementation of wide-ranging U.N. sanctions, including steps agreed last month to further limit Pyongyang’s access to refined petroleum products, crude oil and industrial goods. Brian Hook, the State Department’s director of policy planning, said last week that participants, including Secretary of State Rex Tillerson, would probe how to boost maritime security around North Korea and options to interdict ships carrying prohibited goods in violation of sanctions. China and Russia, which backed the North in the war but have since agreed to U.N. sanctions on Pyongyang, will not be attending. China has reacted angrily to the Vancouver meeting as an example of “Cold War” thinking. China’s state media said Chinese President Xi Jinping, in a phone call with U.S. President Donald Trump, stressed that a hard-earned alleviation of tensions must continue. “Maintaining international unity on the issue is extremely important,” Xi said. China was ready to work with the United States to resolve the issue in an appropriate way, state broadcaster CCTV quoted the Chinese leader as saying. China’s special envoy for North Korea Kong Xuanyou, speaking in an interview with Phoenix Television on Monday, urged the United States to seize the opportunity to seek direct talks with North Korea. China’s state-run Global Times newspaper said the Vancouver meeting reflected Washington’s desire to “highlight its dominant role in resolving the North Korean nuclear issue and cripple the clout of China and Russia.” “But the meeting will likely accomplish little,” it said in an editorial. U.S. officials say hawks in the Trump administration remain pessimistic that the North-South contacts will lead anywhere. Even so, debate within the U.S. administration over whether to give more active consideration to military options, such as a pre-emptive strike on a North Korean nuclear or missile site, has lost momentum ahead of the Olympics, the officials said. Scott Snyder, director of the U.S.-Korea policy program at Washington’s Council on Foreign Relations, said that if Pyongyang felt tougher sanctions constituted a blockade, it might interpret them as an act of war. British Foreign Secretary Boris Johnson, who will be in Vancouver, said the international community had to stand united. “Sanctions are biting but we need to maintain diplomatic pressure on Kim Jong Un’s regime,” he said in a statement. (David Ljunggren and David Brunnstrom, “Vancouver Meeting Focuses on Sanctions as Koreas Explore Détente,” Reuters, January 15, 2018)
we are working it. That is then President Trump's direction. ... And the whole point is this in the diplomatic realm as far as how we're trying to address the issue. Certainly our diplomats are -- are backed up by our military options. ... They're trying to further align the coordination coming in now and intensify the international campaign of economic pressure on DPRK. It is a global problem requiring a global solution. And, the -- our efforts -- our international efforts appear to be having some effect. You're aware that for the first time now in many, many months over years we are now having negotiations, even if they're starting with the -- with the Olympics. They're still some reason to see the diplomatic initiatives are starting to go in the right direction. It's too early to make a statement about that -- an all-encompassing statement about that. But the fact is there are negotiations going on -- (inaudible). ... Q: Secretary Mattis, what would you hope would come out of this meeting in Vancouver -- (inaudible)? SEC. MATTIS: It's a good question. What's the outcome, you know. First of all, it's expanding the number of nations that are sitting down now and looking at how we reinforce the diplomatic overtures and the diplomatic initiatives. So a lot of this is just -- (inaudible) -- one another, answering questions, and making certain that we replace uncertainty with certainty, so they know -- everybody knows where we're going as we go forward. As you're aware, we've got the ROK, Republic of Korea, forces -- (inaudible) -- less than 30,000 of U.S. forces there. They're under the U.N. rubric of years ago that is a compliance demand of international -- (inaudible). And part of this -- (inaudible) -- as everyone knows, how do we fit into this, if the diplomatic option does not work, then obviously the whole point is to reinforce the diplomatic option to show that there are military options should there be a DPRK attack. (inaudible) Q: What's -- what's the uncertainty, sir -- what's the uncertainty about -- you say we're replacing uncertainty with certainty. What is the uncertainty about? MATTIS: Well, the certainty with uncertainty will show them that there are military options. But -- (inaudible) -- within the framework of strengthening the diplomats' hands. That is what we want to have come out of this, let the diplomats know that they are backed up by the force of arms. And part of this -- (inaudible) -- as everyone knows, how do we fit into this, if the diplomatic option does not work, then obviously the whole point is to reinforce the diplomatic option to show that there are military options should there be a DPRK attack. ... Q: And when you walk out of this meeting, if there is some kind of event or something that could -- this meeting leads to some kind of further discussion or some kind of a -- (inaudible) -- situation, how ready are you to do that -- (inaudible) -- North Koreans or the South Koreans? MATTIS: We're going to continue the dialogue. How ready are we to continue the dialogue? Secretary Tillerson, through the diplomatic channels, has laid out how we could move forward like this. And, again, that's where we can give the hand to the diplomats. I can't give you a thorough answer, but all along this has been guiding towards some kind of freezing of the programs, both ballistic missile tests and nuclear tests, and moving this back into discussions for that verifiable nuclear-free Korean Peninsula. Remember, we have moved our weapons -- our weapons out of there many years ago. So there's only one nation -- when China said they want a nuclear-free peninsula, when Russia, U.K., France, ROK, Republic of Korea, Japan, United States said we want a nuclear-free peninsula, there's only nation that could start that negotiation, and that's DPRK. That's the reason for economic sanctions and the diplomatic isolation you see going on. And the force going that way. We would be ready to do it. Q: (inaudible) -- current talks between the North and the South relieve some of the pressure? MATTIS: The current talks about the Olympics -- (inaudible). I think they're a positive indicator. I don't think they relieve any of the U.N. sanctions. I don't think it's -- we have sufficient data to say what this indicates as far as the way forward by the Kim regime. We don't know where -- (inaudible) -- don't have enough data. But I think it is a positive indicator. We just don't know where or how far it goes. Does it have traction? Will it go a long ways or will it go no further than this? I don't know. ... ). Q: Thank you. Mr. Secretary, real quick back to the North Koreans -- (inaudible) -- being interested in talking with the South. Do you feel like Kim is sincere about this or is this -- MATTIS: I don't know, JJ. I can't -- we don't have enough data yet to know what's in his mind. Our problem is not with the North Korean people. Our problem is with Kim and his regime. But that is the regime in power that we must deal with. And I believe it is impossible to say right now, after the years of provocations, if this one indicator is sufficient data point. (Inaudible). Your question really goes to the heart of the issue.” (DoD, Media Availability with Secretary Mattis en Route to Vancouver, Canada, January 16, 2018)
Tillerson: “...The goal of the maximum pressure campaign is and always has been to move North Korea towards credible negotiations on denuclearization. And our diplomatic talks have always been backed up by a strong and resolute military option. Today, however, we had constructive discussions about how to push our diplomatic efforts forward and prepare for the prospects of talks. But productive negotiations require a credible negotiating partner. North Korea has not yet shown themselves to be that credible partner. The United States has always been open to clear messages that North Korea - and we have sent clear messages to North Korea that we are ready for serious negotiations. North Koreans know our channels are open, and they know where to find us. But a sustained cessation of North Korea's threatening behavior is necessary - is a necessary indicator of whether the regime is truly ready to pursue a peaceful, diplomatic resolution to the security threat that it has created. Our nations must remain united on sustaining pressure until North Korea takes concrete steps toward and ultimately reaches denuclearization. ...
South and North Korea agreed Wednesday to field a joint women's ice hockey team for the Pyeongchang Winter Olympics and march together under a "unified Korea" flag at the opening ceremony. The North will also send a 230-member cheering squad and a 30-member taekwondo demonstration team to the South, according to a joint statement issued after a working-level meeting at the border village of Panmunjom. The North's delegation will use a western land route, marking the opening of the cross-border road for the first time since February 2016, when a joint industrial complex in the North Korean border city of Kaesong was shut down. The two sides also agreed to hold a joint cultural event at Mount Kumgang on the North Korean east coast before the opening of the February 9-25 Olympics and to conduct joint training of skiers at Masikryong Ski Resort in the North. As for the Paralympics scheduled for March 9-18, the North promised to send a 150-member delegation including athletes and cheerleaders. The outcome is expected to be discussed at the International Olympic Committee's meeting with officials from the Koreas slated for March 5 in Lausanne, Switzerland.

Japan’s public broadcaster mistakenly sent an alert that warned citizens of a North Korean missile launch and urging them to seek immediate shelter, then minutes later corrected it, days after a similar error in Hawaii. NHK television issued the message on its internet and mobile news sites as well as on Twitter, saying, “North Korea appears to have fired a missile.” It added that a government warning had been issued: “The government: Seek shelter inside buildings and basements.” NHK said the mistake was the result of an error by a staff member who was operating the alert system for online news, but did not elaborate. NHK deleted the tweet and text warning after several minutes, issued a correction and apologized several times on air and on other formats. “The flash was a mistake,” NHK said. “We are very sorry.” (Associated Press, “Japan Public TV Sends Mistaken North Korea Missile Alert,” January 16, 2018)
for Saturday in Lausanne, Switzerland. Earlier today, President Moon Jae-in hailed North Korea's participation as a chance to improve long-stalled ties. "I believe it will be a great opportunity to thaw the South-North Korea relationship that is frozen solid," Moon said during a meeting with Olympic athletes. Moon hopes that better inter-Korean relations will pave the way for the resolution of the North Korean nuclear issue and for broader dialogue between the United States and the North. The South's government is carefully reviewing ways to greet the North's Olympic delegation in a way that does not violate multilayered sanctions on the communist regime. Under U.N. sanctions, the South can't offer cash directly to the North when it supports delegates' accommodation expenses. Sea travel could be in violation of South Korea's unilateral sanctions that ban the entry to South Korea of any vessel that has sailed to North Korea within the past 12 months. It is highly likely that North Koreans would travel to the South by land. The North asked the South two days ago to allow its art troupe to cross the border via Panmunjom for concerts during the Olympics. Another sticking point is the North's possible inclusion in its delegation of high-ranking officials blacklisted by U.N. sanctions or by Seoul's unilateral punitive actions. (Yonhap, “Koreas to Field Joint Women’s Hockey Team, March Together at Opening Ceremony,” January 17, 2018)

KCNA: “Working-level talks between the north and the south of Korea for the north side’s participation in the 23rd Winter Olympics and Paralympics were held at the "house of peace" in the south side portion of Panmunjom on Wednesday, under the agreement of the north-south high-level talks. Present there were a delegation of the north side led by Jon Jong Su, vice-chairman of the Committee for the Peaceful Reunification of the Country of the DPRK, and a delegation of the south side with Chon Hae Song, vice-minister of Unification, as its chief delegate. At the talks both sides thrashed out the practical matters arising in the successful holding of the Winter Olympics and adopted a joint press release. The joint press release dealt with the scales and action programs of the north side's National Olympic Committee delegation, sports team, cheer group, Taekwon-do demonstration group and press corps to take part in the 23rd Winter Olympics, the south side's offer of conveniences for them and the dispatch of an advance team for field survey. Matters related to the International Olympic Committee will be settled by both sides in cooperation with the Committee, according to the joint press release. It also mentioned the practical matters on joint training of north-south ski runners and north-south joint cultural event to be held at the Masikryong Ski Resort and in Mt Kumgang from late January to early February. Both sides will agree in the way of exchange of documents on such other practical matters as dispatch of the north side's Paralympic Committee delegation, sports team, cheer group, art troupe and press corps to the Winter Paralympics, the joint press release said. (KCNA, “Inter-Korean Working-Level Talks,” January 17, 2018)

President Donald Trump complained that Russia was helping North Korea to evade international sanctions, signaling frustration with a country he had hoped to forge friendly relations with after his 2016 election win. “Russia is not helping us at all with North Korea,” Trump said during a 53-minute Oval Office interview with Reuters. He [President Vladimir Putin] can do a lot. But unfortunately we don’t have a relationship - I think it’s too bad, but unfortunately we don’t have much of a relationship with Russia, and in some cases it’s probable that what China takes back, Russia gives. So the net result is not as good as it could be.” He added, “What China is helping us with, Russia is denting. In other words, Russia is making up for some of what China is doing.” “I spoke with President Xi (Jinping) the other day, who I have a great chemistry with, I have a great relationship with. They’re doing a lot ... But they can do more. Ninety-three percent of the trade goes through China.” The president cast doubt on whether talks with North Korean leader Kim Jong Un would be useful. In the past he has not ruled out direct talks with Kim. “I’d sit down, but I’m not sure that sitting down will solve the problem. They’ve talked for 25 years and they’ve taken advantage of our presidents, of our previous presidents.” He blamed his three immediate predecessors, Bill Clinton, George W. Bush and Barack Obama, for failing to resolve the crisis and, a day after his doctor gave him a perfect score on a cognitive test, suggested he had the mental acuity to solve it. “I guess they all realized they’re going to have to leave it to a president that scored the highest on tests,” he joked. He declined to comment when asked whether he had
engaged in any communications at all with Kim, “No, I just don’t want to say as to whether or not we’ve had communication. But, but we will see how that plays out. OK? And hopefully it can be done in a peaceful way but it’s very possible that it can’t.” Asked whether North Korea could hit the U.S. with a missile, he said, “I don’t think - they’re not there yet, but they’re close. And they get closer every day. And again, this is a problem that should have been handled over the last 25 years before they were this close or before they did have a capability.” Asked whether he thought the United States needs more missile defense systems, he said, “Yes, yes I do. We’re ordering more missile defense and we’re ordering more missile offense also. We have been very depleted as a nation and I would love to spend money on other things but I’m also a person of great common sense.” Trump said he welcomed talks between North and South Korea over the Winter Olympics to be held in the South next month and said this could be an initial phase in helping defuse the crisis. Asked whether the United States has been considering a limited, pre-emptive attack to show the North that the United States means business, he said, “Well, again I don’t want to say what options I want to consider. I just don’t think we should be talking about options to the media.” Asked what his reaction would be to new North Korean missile tests, he said, “I don’t like talking about things like that. We’re playing a very, very hard game of poker and you don’t want to reveal your hand.” (Steve Holland, Roberta Rampton, and Jeff Mason, “Trump Accuses Russia of Helping North Korea Evade Sanctions; Says U.S. Needs More Missile Defense” and “Key Quotes from Reuters Interview with Trump,” Reuters, January 17, 2018)

North and South Korea reached an agreement for their athletes to march together under one flag at the opening ceremony of the Winter Olympics next month, a powerful gesture of reconciliation that further complicates President Trump’s strategy for dealing with the nuclear-armed regime of Kim Jong-un. South Korea, the host of the games, said it hoped a partnership in sports could contribute to a political thaw after years of high tensions on the Korean Peninsula. For the White House, however, the budding détente scrambles its strategy of pressuring the North, with sanctions and threats of military action, to give up its nuclear arsenal. This latest gesture of unity, the most dramatic in a decade, could add to fears in Washington that Pyongyang is making progress on a more far-reaching agenda. White House officials warn that Kim’s ultimate goal is to evict American troops from the Korean Peninsula and to reunify the two Koreas under a single flag. They have cited that long-held goal to buttress their argument that Kim cannot be deterred peacefully as the Soviet Union was during the Cold War. While a onetime Olympics ceremony is hardly a step toward reunification, the image of athletes marching behind a “unified Korea” flag is a symbolic manifestation of what worries Trump’s aides. And the prospect of crowds from North and South Korea cheering together would be a striking contrast to the threats of war from Trump. The White House this week welcomed the announcement but played down its significance, noting that it was not the first time that athletes from the two Koreas had competed together. “Let’s hope that the experience gives the North Korean athletes a small taste of freedom and that it rubs off,” said Michael Anton, a spokesman for the National Security Council. “North Korean propaganda is in a category all its own,” he added. “It is not surprising that North Korea is sending more cheerleaders and musicians than athletes.” That emphasis on propaganda, other officials said, was in keeping with North Korea’s longer-term goal of reunification. The Olympic agreement could bolster President Moon Jae-in of South Korea, who has been pushing for dialogue with the North. “This will be a great opportunity to thaw the frozen relations,” he said during a visit to the training camp for South Korean athletes. “If we unify our team with the North’s, it won’t necessarily improve our team’s strength very much,” Moon said. “It will even require extra efforts to build up teamwork with the North Korean players. But if the two Koreas unify their teams and play a great match together, that itself will be long remembered as a historic moment.” Few expected that the breakthrough in sports diplomacy would lead to a broader relaxation of the decades-old standoff over the North’s nuclear weapon programs. But it provided a welcome reprieve for South Koreans who have grown alarmed and weary over the tensions and relentless talk of war. (Choe Sang-hun and Mark Landler, “Olympic Détente Upends Strategy on North Korea,” New York Times, January 18, 2018, p. A-1)
The U.S. has canceled a plan for a 7,800-ton Virginia-class nuclear-powered submarine to dock at Busan for refueling on today to avoid fresh tensions with North Korea. A government official said Seoul told Washington that the submarine had better not enter the naval operations base. Instead it suggested that the sub should dock in Jinhae, but the U.S. military declined and abandoned the port call entirely. The U.S. Navy has been operating 13 Virginia-class nuclear-powered submarines since 2004. The newest type of the U.S. Navy's attack subs, they are armed with Tomahawk cruise missiles and MK-48 torpedoes. They can also be used in counterterrorism operations because they have smaller submersibles for commando infiltration missions. (Yoon Hyung-jun, “U.S. Nuke Sub Kept out of Busan for Fear of Agitating N. Korea,” Chosun Ilbo, January 18, 2018)

Joseph Yun: “Hani: Will Secretary Tillerson’s plan to visit to Pyongyang still be effective if NK stops so-called provocations during a certain period? It seems that a 60-day period [of North Korea refraining from provocation] is no longer a precondition. Could you confirm that? Yun: I think what you have to understand is that Secretary Tillerson has always stated that we are open to credible dialogue. And what form that credible dialogue takes, we don’t know. We really believe that it is up to the North Korean side to suggest how a dialogue could be credible. So fundamentally, I believe that now the North Korean side has to respond. Hani: Is the “60 days condition” still in effect? Yun: There has never been a “60 day condition.” What has been a condition is that North Korea should say we are stopping testing because we want a dialogue. So it doesn’t matter whether it’s sixty days or ninety days or whatever. They need to say that they want to have a dialogue, and for that reason they are stopping testing nuclear and missile devices. Hani: If North Korea announces that it will stop nuclear and missile testing, could Secretary Tillerson meet with the North Koreans? Yun: Well, it’s something that we have to think about seriously, but that would be a good first step. Hani: Is the “New York channel” still working well? Is this being used to notify North Korea of US intentions? Yun: We correspond regularly via the New York channel. The New York channel is a message center. So, I’m sure what we tell the channel gets to Pyongyang. So this is working fine. I’m not prepared to go into what we’ve discussed. Hani: There are concerns the tensions might re-escalate if there is no tangible solution to the nuclear issue after the Pyeongchang Olympics conclude. Do you have any plan to keep the momentum that has resulted from recent inter-Korean dialogue and North Korea’s participation in the Olympics? Yun: We have stated clearly that we are open to serious dialogue, and so it would be nice if North Korea responded meaningfully to our offer, which is a standing offer out there. So like you, I hope something can be worked out so they come to the table for serious and credible dialogue. Hani: There is an argument that in order to keep the current momentum, the US-ROK joint exercises need to be scaled down or modified. Is that something the US is prepared to consider? Yun: Again, we’re not going to reveal what we’re going to do and what we will not do. So it is tough to answer those questions. But I think everyone has made it clear that freeze-for-freeze is not acceptable for the US. Hani: Would the US accept South Korea sending a special envoy to North Korea in order to make a breakthrough regarding the nuclear issue? Yun: Why wouldn’t the US accept it if there is a breakthrough and North Korea decided that all of a sudden, “You know what? You’re right. The special envoy from South Korea is right; we’re going to get rid of our nuclear weapons.” That’d be great. That would be fantastic. But is that going to happen? I don’t think so. I think it’ll be tough. Hani: Secretary James Mattis indicated while en route to Vancouver that the current focus is freezing the North Korean nuclear and ballistic missile tests. This seems to be an implication that the first goal of US side is to freeze the testing. Is that a fair inference? Yun: I think everyone realizes that this will be a long process. and everyone also acknowledges that step one could be freezing nuclear missile test. But it has to be step by step, and I think everyone knows the steps clearly. You start from a freeze, then you stop development, and then you send in inspectors, and you begin what we call disabling and then dismantling and finally denuclearization. I think everyone understands these steps, and also acknowledges that the very first step is a freeze, yes. Hani: Is that realistic? Yun: Yes. Hani: It’s realistic to think that North Korea will give up its nuclear program through a diplomatic approach? Yun: Of course, I believe that. I think it’s going to take a lot of effort and time. I do believe that they will eventually denuclearize as many countries have done, including Ukraine, South Africa, and so on. (Yi Yong-
At a National Security Council meeting, Trump disregarded the significance of the massive U.S. military presence on the Korean Peninsula, including a special intelligence operation that allows the United States to detect a North Korean missile launch in seven seconds vs. 15 minutes from Alaska, according to Woodward. Trump questioned why the government was spending resources in the region at all. “We’re doing this in order to prevent World War III,” Defense Secretary Jim Mattis told him. After Trump left the meeting, Woodward recounts, “Mattis was particularly exasperated and alarmed, telling close associates that the president acted like — and had the understanding of — ‘a fifth- or sixth-grader.’” (Philip Rucker and Robert Costa, “On the Edge in Trump’s West Wing,” Washington Post, September 5, 2018, p.A-1)

Woodward: “In several secure phone conversations with President Moon Jae-in of South Korea, Trump had intensified his criticism of the KORUS trade agreement between the two countries. He would not let go of the $18 billion trade deficit and the $3.5 billion expense of stationing 28,500 U.S. troops. The refrain was jeopardizing relations with Moon, whom he disliked. ...Trump told Moon he wanted to send a 180-day termination letter and destroy the trade relationship. You guys are ripping us off. He wanted the trade and security issues separated. I’m doing giving you guys free money! Moon replied that trade and security were intertwined. We want to work with you, the South Korean president said. He was conciliatory. ...We want to come to an understanding. Trump was amped up. You’ve got to pay for the THAAD anti-ballistic missile system. Why do we need to have any of our anti-ballistic missile system there? He belittled the KORUS trade agreement, South Korea and its new president. Kelly, McMaster, Tillerson, and Mattis joked darkly that it was inexplicable that the president was voicing more ire at South Korea than our adversaries – China, Russia, Iran, Syria, and North Korea. The senior White House staff and national security team were appalled. They didn’t know what the president might say or do. This was an important relationship, especially at that moment. They had to shut this down. There was a consensus that something needed to be done before Moon decided he’d had enough. McMaster set up a National Security Council meeting in the Situation Room for January 19, 2018. The meeting was billed as a discussion of issue related to South Korea among the president and his principals – Tillerson, Mattis, Kelly, McMaster, Dunford, Cohn. Trump got right to the point. ‘What do we get by maintaining a massive military presence in the Korean Peninsula?’ he asked, returning to his obsession with the money and the troops. ...Mattis and General Dunford once more explained that the benefit was immense. We get a stable democracy in a part of the world where we really need it, Mattis said. ...Trump had been informed about the edge the Special Access Program intelligence operations gave the United States in detecting a North Korean missile launch – seven seconds versus 15 minutes from Alaska. There was also an offensive cyberattack capability. It had mixed results sabotaging North Korean missiles before or after launch. Mattis showed signs he was tired of the disparaging of the military and intelligence capability. And of Trump’s unwillingness to comprehend their significance. ‘We’re doing this in order to prevent World War III,’ Mattis said. He was calm but stark. It was a breathtaking statement, a challenge to the president, suggesting he was risking nuclear war. ...One person present said Mattis’s message was clear: Stop fucking around with this. ...Mattis was not finished. ‘We have the ability to defend the homeland with forward deployment’ of the 28,500 troops. He was reluctant to mention the Special Access Programs in such a large meeting. Mattis explained, without the intelligence capability and the troops, the risk of war would vastly increase. The means of defending South Korea and Japan would be decreased. If there was a war without these assets, ‘the only option left is the nuclear option. We can’t achieve the same deterrent effect’ in any other way. ‘And we can’t do it as cost effectively.’ The arrangement with South Korea was one of the great national security bargains of all time. Mattis tried to speak the president’s language of cost/benefit analysis. ‘But we’re losing so much money in trade with South Korea, China and others,’ Trump countered. ‘I’d rather be spending money on our own country.’ The United States was subsidizing others with the trade imbalances. ‘Other countries,’ Trump went on, ‘who’ve agreed to do security things with us only do it because they’re taking so much of our money.’ They were almost stealing from us. ‘Forward-
positioned troops provide the least costly means of achieving our security objectives, and withdrawal would lead our allies to lose all confidence in us.’ [Joint Chiefs of Staff] Chairman Dunford jumped in, seconding all these points with some passion. ‘We’re spending massive amounts for very rich countries who aren’t burden sharing,’ Trump said, hammering his point. ...Tillerson ...turned back to the main issue: the value of forward deployment. ‘It’s the best model. The global system. Joining together in trade and geopolitics leads to good security outcomes.’ Dunford again supported his argument. ‘Our forward-deployed cost in South Korea is roughly $2 billion. South Korea reimburses us for nearly $800 million of that. We don’t seek reimbursement for the cost of our troops’ such as their pay. The chairman also said that other countries were paying the U.S. an annual subsidy for activities we would engage in anyway for our own protection. ‘We’re getting $4 billion a year subsidy in our efforts to protect the homeland,’ Dunford said. ‘I think we could be so rich,’ Trump said, if we weren’t so stupid. We’re being played [as] suckers, especially NATO.’ ...The president left. Among the principals, there was exasperation with these questions. Why are we having to do this constantly? When is he going to learn. They didn’t believe they were having these conversations and had to justify their reasoning. Mattis was particularly exasperated and alarmed, telling close associates that the president acted like – and had the understanding of – ‘a fifth or sixth grader.”’ (Woodward, Fear, pp. 304-8)

Gary Cohn, then Trump’s top economic adviser and former president of Goldman Sachs, is described as having swiped from the president’s desk in the Oval Office a letter from Trump addressed to South Korean President Moon Jae-in terminating the Korea-U.S. free trade agreement (FTA) last September. In a White House National Security Council meeting on January 19 of this year, Trump asked the point of maintaining a massive U.S. military presence on the Korean Peninsula. Mattis and Dunford briefed Trump on the benefits of the alliance with South Korea, a stable democracy and the 11th largest economy in the world with a GDP of $1.5 trillion, the same as Russia’s. This meeting, arranged by McMaster, came after Trump was described as having badgered South Korean President Moon Jae-in, whom he disliked, in phone conversations threatening to terminate the Korea-U.S. FTA and criticizing the trade deficit and the cost of stationing 28,500 U.S. troops in South Korea. At one point, Mattis told the president, “We’re doing this in order to prevent World War III.” He was said to have explained that without the intelligence capability and the forward deployment of the U.S. troops, the risk of war would vastly increase, and without such assets, the “only option left is the nuclear option.” (Sarah Kim, “‘Fear’ Shows How Close Korea Came to War,” JoongAng Ilbo, September 14, 2018)

Sigal: “Ever since North Korea’s Kim Jong Un accepted South Korea’s invitation to participate in the 2018 Winter Olympics in Pyeongchang, the two countries have been moving at a speed skater’s pace to ease tensions. It’s a moment of real opportunity — but it’s also a fragile one, because any relaxation of tensions in Korea won’t be sustained unless Washington resumes negotiations with Pyongyang. President Trump shows signs he may do just that. "I would love to see them take it beyond the Olympics," he told reporters at Camp David on Jan. 6. "And at the appropriate time, we'll get involved." He reiterated that four days later in a telephone call with South Korean President Moon Jae-in. In the weeks after North Korea’s surprise Olympics move, Washington and Seoul postponed joint military exercises scheduled to begin in February, and the Koreas have restored a military hotline, agreed to march together at the opening ceremony, field a joint women’s hockey team, and allow a large contingent of cheerleaders and a pop orchestra travel south across the Demilitarized Zone that has divided them since the Korean War. Observers were too quick to dismiss Kim’s move as a charm offensive or a ploy to sow division in allied ranks. But some of us who have spent years dealing with North Korea see this opening as the North’s latest attempt to ease tensions — not just with South Korea, but also with the United States. Amid contradictory messages from the Trump administration, a senior State Department official hinted that time may come sooner than many expect. They told the Washington Post’s David Ignatius last week that face-to-face meetings could start before the Olympics end. The conversation with Pyongyang can “start at the edges,” with each country describing how it sees the future, and then “work toward the center,” meaning denuclearization was no longer a precondition but an eventual goal. “The Olympics themselves might be the perimeter” from which talks start,
they said. Demanding that Pyongyang suspend nuclear tests without getting anything in return has only delayed diplomatic give-and-take, enabling it to add to its nuclear capacity and boost its bargaining leverage in the meantime. How long will it take for sanctions to compel North Korea to accept talks on U.S. terms? How many ICBM and nuclear tests will it conduct and how many nuclear weapons and ICBMs will it make in the meantime? Pressure without negotiations has never worked in the past with Pyongyang. There’s no reason to think it will now — and getting China to toughen sanctions won’t help. Understanding Pyongyang’s strategy, as well as Beijing’s place in it, is the starting point for understanding this. Korea’s history with China has been fraught for centuries, and North Korean-Chinese tensions are hardly new. During the Cold War, Kim Il Sung played China off against the Soviet Union to maintain freedom of maneuver. In 1988, anticipating the Soviet Union’s collapse, he reached out to the United States, South Korea and Japan in order to avoid overdependence on China. As China has grown stronger, that need became more compelling. Forcing North Korea’s lifelong foes to become friends has been the Kims’ aim ever since. From Pyongyang’s viewpoint, that aim was the basis of the 1994 Agreed Framework, committing Washington to “move toward full normalization of political and economic relations” — in plain English, end hostility. That aim was also the essence of the September 2005 Six-Party Joint Statement in which Washington and Pyongyang pledged to “respect each other’s sovereignty, exist peacefully together, and take steps to normalize their relations” as well as to “negotiate a permanent peace regime on the Korean Peninsula.” For Washington, suspension of Pyongyang’s nuclear and missile programs was the point of these agreements, which succeeded for years in shutting the North’s production of fissile material and stopping test-launches of longer-range missiles. Both agreements collapsed, however, when Washington did little to implement its commitment to improve relations and Pyongyang reneged on denuclearization. Pyongyang’s desire for an end to enmity could yield much more leverage for Washington than more stringent sanctions. By contrast, nothing provokes Pyongyang more than cooperation between Washington and Beijing. Far from becoming more pliable, on four occasions when China and the United States cooperated in the U.N. Security Council to impose tougher sanctions — in 2006, 2009, 2013, and this fall - North Korea responded by conducting nuclear tests in an effort to drive them apart. Is easing tensions with Washington still Kim’s strategy? The only way to find out for sure is to resume negotiations. Reciprocity is needed to get the North Korea to suspend missile and nuclear tests. It doesn’t mean postponing or cancelling joint exercises with South Korea, but their size and operating tempo can be adjusted, especially by suspending deployment of nuclear assets like flights of nuclear-capable B-52 bombers into Korean airspace. Kim Jong Un himself hinted at that more acceptable version of a freeze for a freeze in his New Year’s Day address. South Korea, he said, “should discontinue all the nuclear war drills they stage with outside forces.” North Korea’s party newspaper Rodong Sinmun made that explicit on January 11, “If the South Korean authorities really want detente and peace, they should first stop all the efforts to bringing in U.S. nuclear equipment and conducts exercise for nuclear warfare with foreign forces.” The odds of persuading North Korea to go beyond another temporary suspension to stop generating fissile material and dismantle its nuclear and missile programs are slim unless Washington and Seoul move toward political and economic normalization, undertake a peace process to end the Korean War, and negotiate regional security arrangements. Eliminating its weapons could only be possible after the North is convinced a fundamentally new relationship is firmly in place, which would take years. A policy of “maximum pressure and engagement” can only succeed if nuclear diplomacy is soon resumed and the North’s security needs are satisfied. Amid all the chatter about war-war in the news, the Administration seems to be moving to try jaw-jaw. Let’s hope that works.” (Leon V. Sigal, “North Korea Is Reaching Out. Will Trump Play Ball?” BuzzFeed, January 19, 2018)

A North Korean delegation arrived in Gangnueng, an eastern city, to check the venues for its proposed art performances at next month’s Pyeongchang Winter Olympics. The trip came amid brisk inter-Korean contact on the North’s participation in the Olympic Games to open in three weeks. The seven-member team is led by Hyon Song-wol, head of the North's Samjiyon Orchestra and director of the Moranbong Band, the country's well-known all-female musical group, reportedly created at the order of Kim Jong-un. Known as one of the most influential women in the North, she is rumored to be an ex-girlfriend of Kim. Earlier in the day, the North’s delegation
crossed the land border via the Gyeongui Line, becoming the first North Koreans to travel to the South since the shutdown of the Kaesong Industrial Complex in early 2016. Several South Korean officials greeted the North Koreans at the customs, immigration and quarantine (CIQ) office at Dorasan Station, just south of the border. The two Koreas will exchange visits of working-level officials later this week to continue consultations on issues related to the North's participation in the Olympics and the ensuing Paralympics. A dozen South Korean officials are scheduled to make a three-day visit starting January 23 to the Mount Kumgang area and Masikryong Ski Resort in the North's eastern area. The North accepted the South's offer to send the advance team as part of its plan to stage a joint cultural event in the Mount Kumgang region, according to the Ministry of Unification. Their skiers will train together at the ski compound as well. The North also informed the South of a plan to dispatch an eight-member delegation, led by Yun Yong-bok, a deputy director general at its sports ministry, on January 25, it added. Yun traveled to South Korea in 2014 for such an inspection before the North joined the Incheon Asian Games. The North's team wants to look around Olympic facilities, such as stadiums, lodgings and the press center for three days. The International Olympic Committee (IOC) announced the North will send 22 athletes to the Pyeongchang Games in three sports -- skating, skiing and ice hockey. The IOC also confirmed that two nations will also march together behind a single flag at the opening ceremony and field a unified women's hockey team in what it described as a "milestone." (Lee Chi-dong, “N. Korea Delegation in S. Korea to Inspect Concert Venues,” Yonhap, January 21, 2018)

CPRK statement: "A breakthrough was made in the improvement of the north-south ties and there is a warm wind for reconciliation thanks to the DPRK's sincere efforts, to be warmly welcomed by the whole Korean nation and the world. But the puppet conservative forces have gone beyond a tolerance limit in their ill intention to chill the atmosphere for the improved north-south ties and ruin the great event of the nation, shocking the public at home and abroad. A hideous provocative act, openly perpetrated in downtown Seoul in broad daylight on Jan 22, clearly proved that the wild act of the group of traitors challenging the trend of the national history toward the improvement of the north-south ties and reunification has reached the extremes. Timed to coincide with the arrival of our field survey delegation for dispatch of an art troupe in Seoul that day, coteries of the "Korean Patriotic Party" flocked to the plaza of Seoul Railways Station where they held a press interview and viciously slandered the DPRK's participation in the Olympics. They went on the rampage, torching a portrait symbolizing the dignity of the DPRK supreme leadership and a DPRK flag, not content with talking hoarse that "Pyeongchang Olympics is about to change into Pyongyang Olympics for promoting the north's social system and making the north's nuclear weapons a fait accompli" and "dispatch of the north's cheering group and joint training at the Masikryong Ski Resort are an attempt to bring to naught the sweats and efforts exerted by inhabitants in Kangwon Province and Pyeongchang". This is a never-to-be-condoned hideous crime as it is an intolerable mockery of the sincerity and efforts being made by the DPRK for the improvement of the north-south relations and a deliberate political provocation to turn the Olympics into a theatre for escalating confrontation between the north and the south. Far from making a deep bow to the fellow countrymen for their sincere efforts for the successful Olympics, the conservative group resorted to all sorts of slandering and committed such shuddering acts in the eyes of the delegation of the DPRK. They are a despicable group of gangsters in human form. The conservative forces who had been pushed into the cesspool of history being severely punished by history for their acts of treachery under the armpit of Lee Myung Bak and Park Geun Hye, are now going on the rampage, making hideous provocations. This is a shame to the nation. It is deplorable that due to a handful of betes noires, our efforts and the desire of all Koreans to make the Olympics a great auspicious event common to the nation are being mocked and dark clouds lay low over the prospect of the Olympics. The puppet conservative forces are human rejects devoid of appearance as human beings, to say nothing of elementary etiquette and manners toward the fellow countrymen, and dregs of history that would do only harm to the nation if they are allowed to go at large. It is quite natural that the south Koreans from all walks of life raise their voices calling for throwing overboard those rubbish so that they would not give off stinking smell any more, being concerned that such acts omen new trouble in the north-south relations. What should not be overlooked is the south Korean authorities' behavior of conniving at such serious politically-motivated provocation. As we truly hoped for the Olympics becoming a theater for
promoting trust and reconciliation between the north and the south, we repeatedly advised and warned them so as to keep any acts that may incite mistrust and confrontation between the fellow countrymen and get on the nerves of the dialogue partner from being occurred. **Even though they watched the reckless confrontation moves committed by the conservatives, the south Korean authorities have taken a non-committal stand**, reading the faces of those conservatives who are no more than living corpses, while talking about "freedom of expression" and only asking them to "restrain". No wonder, the situation is turning out to be worse, far from being brought under control. This is little short of egging the conservative group on to foster such acts so that they go on the rampage. The criminal acts committed by the conservative forces with no fear of divine punishment have now greatly enraged the people of the DPRK. We will never tolerate hideous acts of the conservative hooligans who insulted the sacred dignity and symbol of the DPRK, and the dishonest behavior of the south Korean authorities who connived at such acts, and we cannot but take a serious consideration of our follow-up measures regarding the Winter Olympics. **The south Korean authorities have to apologize before the nation for the political provocation, severely punish those involved in the crime and take a prompt measure to prevent the recurrence of such acts. If the north-south agreement and schedules for the DPRK's participation in the Olympics are cancelled due to the confrontational act of the conservative riff-raffs keen on spouting vituperation and committing provocative acts against the fellow countrymen, the blame will wholly rest with the conservative group and the south Korean authorities.** We value the north-south ties but have no intention to continue to show good faith and magnanimity even while seeing the confrontational fanatics dare challenge the dignity of the supreme leadership of the DPRK and its sacred symbol. We will closely follow the future attitude of the south Korean authorities concerning the recent hideous crime.” (KCNA, “We Will Never Pardon S. Korean Conservative Forces’ Shuddering Hideous Crime against Dignity of DPRK,” January 23, 2018)

CIA Director Mike Pompeo said that North Korea is moving "ever closer" to putting Americans at risk and that he believes leader Kim Jong Un won't rest until he's able to threaten multiple nuclear attacks against the U.S. at the same time. "North Korea is ever closer to being able to hold America at risk." Pompeo said at the American Enterprise Institute, a conservative-leaning think tank in Washington. "I want everyone to understand that we are working diligently to make sure that a year from now I can still tell you that they are several months away from having that capacity." Speaking after one year on the job, Pompeo also said the CIA believes Kim would not only use nuclear weapons to stay in power, but to threaten to reunify the divided Korean Peninsula under his totalitarian regime. The quest for reunification is disputed by some North Korean experts who see Kim's nuclear program as primarily a means of retaining power and don't think he would threaten or forcibly try to take over South Korea. Pompeo said North Korea's nuclear weapons program has developed at a "very rapid clip," but that Kim is hoping for an arsenal of nuclear weapons — "not one, not a showpiece, not something to drive on a parade route." He wants the ability to deliver nuclear weapons from multiple missiles fired simultaneously. "That increases the risk to America," Pompeo said. Despite his warning, Pompeo doesn't think a North Korean attack on the United States is imminent. He said the Trump administration is "laser-focused" on achieving a diplomatic solution to the nuclear standoff. "The American people should know we are working to prepare a series of options to make sure we can deliver a range of things so that the president will have the full sweep of possibilities," he said. "The president is intent on delivering the solution through diplomatic means." He wouldn't address the question of whether there are military options available to the U.S. that don't risk an escalation into nuclear war with North Korea. "There is much effort all across the U.S. government to ensure that Americans don't have to feel at risk," Pompeo said. "We saw what happened in Hawaii. It is an imperative — an American, national imperative — that we as an intelligence agency deliver the information to our senior leaders such that they can resolve this issue in a way that works for the American people." (Associated Press, “CIA: North Korea Moving ‘Ever Closer’ to Putting U.S. at Risk,” January 23, 2018) The president's long-term mission is to remove nuclear weapons from the Korean peninsula, Mike Pompeo said. But in the near- to medium-term, he suggested, the administration would consider it a victory to accomplish something far more modest: stopping North Korea's nuclear-weapons program from progressing, rather than rolling it back. The North is “a handful of
Korea’s illicit financing schemes because of the broad swath of sanctions that already have been.

Sanctions experts have suggested that the United States faces limited options to crack down on North Korean representatives and front companies to hide and transfer funds that finance its weapons program. During a stop in Hong Kong on Wednesday, Ms. Mandelker noted that North Korea has been using cover companies to evade sanctions. In her testimony before Congress last week, Ms. Mandelker noted that North Korea has been using cover companies to hide and transfer funds that finance its weapons program. Sanctions experts have suggested that the United States faces limited options targeting North Korea’s illicit financing schemes because of the broad swath of sanctions that already have been.
imposed on the isolated Asian nation. The designation on Wednesday of two Chinese trading companies, Beijing Chengxing Trading Co. Ltd. and Dandong Jinxiang Trade Co., Ltd., signals that the Treasury Department is looking more broadly for ways to squeeze North Korea. “The Chinese trading companies that were targeted are the most interesting,” said Mike Casey, a sanctions expert at the law firm Kirkland & Ellis International. “Even though the U.S. hasn’t been able to get a ton of direct economic pressure on North Korea, it certainly hasn’t given up on exerting indirect economic pressure on North Korea.” The sanctions enable the United States to freeze the assets of the people or businesses that are designated and blocks Americans from doing business with them. Today, Japan said that a military plane had spotted a North Korean tanker and a Dominican-registered tanker side by side in the East China Sea on Saturday, apparently transferring cargo. Yasutoshi Nishimura, the deputy chief cabinet secretary, on Thursday called that a sign that fuel sanctions were working, in that the North had been forced to go outside normal methods to obtain fuel. (Alan Rappeport, “U.S. Orders New Batch of Sanctions on Kim,” New York Times, January 25, 2018, p. A-9)

“The US is prepared to engage in dialogue with the North. I think this is the best time for North Korea [to engage in dialogue with the US],” a senior official at South Korea’s Ministry of Foreign Affairs said. “US Secretary of State Rex Tillerson said that dialogue is possible if [North Korea] refrains from additional provocations to some extent, and President Donald Trump has recently signed on as well. [The US] has never said that kind of thing before,” the official said during a meeting with reporters this afternoon. “The US always used to impose preconditions [for dialogue] that complicated things. But now they’re saying they want to meet for dialogue, which means that it’s better to meet now,” the official added. “When I asked people about it on a visit to the US, they told me that [Tillerson’s remarks] were still valid. When [Tillerson] said we could talk about the weather, he meant we could get together and talk about everything, including what [North Korea’s] concerns are and what form the deliberations should take,” the official explained.

“[Tillerson] said we could talk about the weather, he meant we could get together and talk about everything, including what [North Korea’s] concerns are and what form the deliberations should take,” the official explained. “I think that North Korea coming to Pyeongchang to take part [in the Winter Olympics] is a message about relaxing tensions. They’re not likely to commit a provocation while they’re down here. Once things cool down and [tensions] are eased, the mood will be set for dialogue as well.” Along with the importance of North Korea-US dialogue for resolving the North Korean nuclear issue, the official also emphasized that the South Korean government must be ensured a seat at the table when those talks resume. “We are engaging in dialogue with North Korea out of the belief that inter-Korean dialogue should serve as the impetus toward North Korea-US talks and other talks toward denuclearization and resolving the North Korean nuclear issue. It’s clear that South Korean participation must be guaranteed [in future deliberations],” the official said. Americans have also been emphasizing the importance of resolving the North Korean nuclear issue through diplomacy. “The president is intent on delivering this solution [to the North Korean nuclear issue] through diplomatic means. It is the focus. It has been uniformly that for 365 days. It remains so today,” CIA Director Mike Pompeo said during a lecture hosted by the American Enterprise Institute (AEI), a conservative think tank, yesterday. (Noh Ji-won, Kim Ji-eun, and Yi Yong-in, “’Now Is the Best Time’ for U.S.-North Korea Negotiations, Says S.K. Ministry of Foreign Affairs,” Hankyore, January 25, 2018)

North Korea shipped coal to Russia last year which was then delivered to South Korea and Japan in a likely violation of U.N. sanctions, three Western European intelligence sources said. The U.N. Security Council banned North Korean exports of coal last August 5. But the secretive Communist state has at least three times since then shipped coal to the Russian ports of Nakhodka and Kholmsk, where it was unloaded at docks and reloaded onto ships that took it to South Korea or Japan, the sources said. A Western shipping source said separately that some of the cargoes reached Japan and South Korea in October last year. A U.S. security source also confirmed the coal trade via Russia and said it was continuing. “Russia’s port of Nakhodka is becoming a transshipping hub for North Korean coal,” said one of the European security sources, who requested anonymity because of the sensitivity of international diplomacy around North Korea. Russia’s mission to the United Nations informed the Security Council sanctions committee on November 3 that Moscow was complying with the sanctions. “Russia does not buy coal from
North Korea and is not a transit point for coal deliveries to third countries,” Interfax news agency on January 26 quoted an unidentified official at Russia’s embassy to North Korea as saying. Two lawyers who specialize in sanctions law told Reuters it appeared the transactions violated U.N. sanctions. Reuters could not independently verify whether the coal unloaded at the Russian docks was the same coal that was then shipped to South Korea and Japan. Reuters also was unable to ascertain whether the owners of the vessels that sailed from Russia to South Korea and Japan knew the origin of the coal. The U.S. Treasury yesterday put the owner of one of the ships, the UAL Ji Bong 6, under sanctions for delivering North Korean coal to Kholmsk on September 5. It was unclear which companies profited from the coal shipments. Asked about the shipments identified by Reuters, Matthew Oresman, a partner with law firm Pillsbury Winthrop Shaw Pittman who advises companies on sanctions, said: “Based on these facts, there appears to be a violation of the U.N. Security Council resolution by the parties involved.” “Also those involved in arranging, financing, and carrying out the shipments could likely face U.S. sanctions,” he said.

Asked about the shipments, a U.S. State Department spokesman said: “It’s clear that Russia needs to do more. All U.N. member states, including Russia, are required to implement sanctions resolutions in good faith and we expect them all to do so.” Two separate routes for the coal were identified by the Western security sources. The first used vessels from North Korea via Nakhodka, about 85 km (53 miles) east of the Russian city of Vladivostok. One vessel that used this route was the Palau-flagged Jian Fu which Russian port control documents show delivered 17,415 tonnes of coal after sailing from Nampo in North Korea on August 3 and docking at berth no. 4 run by LLC Port Livadiya in Nakhodka. It left the port on August 18. The vessel had turned off its tracking transmitter from July 24 to August 2, when it was in open seas, according to publicly available ship tracking data. Under maritime conventions, this is acceptable practice at the discretion of the ship’s captain, but means the vessel could not be tracked publicly. Another ship arrived at the same berth -- No. 4 -- on August 16, loaded 20,500 tonnes of coal and headed to the South Korean port of Ulsan in Aug. 24, according to Russian port control documents. Reuters was unable to reach the operator of the Jian Fu, which was listed in shipping directories as the China-based Sunrise Ship Management. The Nakhodka-based transport agent of the Jian Fu did not respond to written and telephone requests for comment. LLC Port Livadiya did not respond to a written request for comment. The second route took coal via Kholmsk on the Russian Pacific island of Sakhalin, north of Japan. At least two North Korean vessels unloaded coal at a dock in Kholmsk port in August and September after arriving from the ports of Wonsan and Taean in North Korea, Russian port control data and ship tracking data showed. The Rung Ra 2 docked in Kholmsk three times between August 1 and September 12, unloading a total of 15,542 tonnes of coal, while the Ul Ji Bong 6 unloaded a total of 10,068 tonnes of coal on two separate port calls -- on August 3 and between September 1 and 8, according to the official Russian Information System for State Port Control. The coal did not pass Russian customs because of the UN sanctions taking effect, but was then loaded at the same dock onto Chinese-operated vessels. Those vessels stated their destination in Russian port control documents as North Korea, according to a source in Sakhalin port administration who spoke on condition of anonymity. Reuters has seen the port control documents which state the destination of the coal as North Korea. But the vessels that loaded the North Korean coal sailed instead for the ports of Pohang and Incheon in South Korea, ship tracking data showed. Asked about the shipments, a South Korean foreign ministry official said: “Our government is monitoring any sanctions-evading activities by North Korea. We’re working closely with the international community for the implementation of the sanctions.” The official declined to say whether the ministry was aware of the shipments reported by Reuters. “The Chinese have cracked down on coal exports from North Korea so the smuggling route has developed and Russia is the transit point for coal,” one of the European security sources said.

"The nuclear issue has to be solved through negotiations and diplomatic endeavors. This idea of a military solution is unacceptable," Foreign Minister Kang Kyung-wha said at a news briefing on the sidelines of the World Economic Forum in Davos. "I'm assured that anything the U.S. administration does on this front is done in close consultation with us," Kang said. She declined to comment if Washington had given Seoul clear assurance but added: "This is our fate that is at
stake. Any option that is to be taken on the Korean peninsula cannot be implemented without us going along." U.S. Vice President Mike Pence, who will represent the United States at the Olympics, said on January 23 he would seek to counter what he described as an effort by North Korea to "hijack" the Games with a propaganda campaign. Seoul has rejected that criticism, saying the Olympics will help defuse tensions over Pyongyang's nuclear and missile programs. "This is an opportunity for engagement and a peaceful engagement around the Olympic Games, and we just need to make the best of it," Kang said in the interview today. But she cautioned that sustained improvement in bilateral ties cannot take place apart from the nuclear issue: "There have to be advances on this front as well." Kang said she was "very disappointed" with the U.S. government's decision this week to impose steep tariffs on washing machines imported from South Korea, but said that the trade dispute should not affect a "very strong security alliance" between the two countries. "The period of non-engagement with North Korea has been too long," Kang said, hoping that discussions "will create the momentum for dialogue on the North Korean nuclear issue as well." Seoul had proposed a delay in the drills during the Olympics based on the "spirit of the Olympic Games," Kang said, but declined to elaborate on whether the South would resume the drills after the event. "We're on the same page on all fronts [with the United States]," she said. "So we will see how the next two months will unfold." (Soyoung Kim, “South Korean Minister Says Military Option ‘Unacceptable’ on North Korea Crisis,” Reuters, January 25, 2018)

North Korea's participation in the 2018 Pyeongchang Winter Olympics opens up a window of opportunity to resume long-suspended talks to discuss the country's denuclearization, former United Nations Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon said Thursday. "There's actually a very tiny window open," Ban said in a press seminar. He added he thought the Pyeongchang Olympics could be "very successful" in opening up denuclearization talks with North Korea. "The question is how to expand this window to lead to actual, meaningful talks. I agree [with some diplomats in the U.S. and South Korea] that this is the best time for talks with the North," the former South Korean foreign minister also noted. "Without any talks to follow Pyeongchang, the crisis of last year will be repeated. Talks must be started," he said. "The small window could be wide open depending on how we do." Military talks between the two Koreas could be one of the options for such talks following the Olympics, Ban said, referring to the countries' recent agreement in principle to hold dialogue between their militaries. "If it does not take place as agreed, another bout of problems or North Korea's miscalculation or defiant provocations could follow," he stated. (Yonhap, “N. Korea’s Olympic Participation Opens up ‘Tiny’ Window for Denuclearization Talks: Ban Ki-moon,” January 25, 2018)

North Korean hockey players and an advance team of sports officials crossed the border to South Korea early today to prepare for their country’s participation in next month’s Pyeongchang Winter Olympics. Twenty-three North Koreans arrived in the South via the Kaesong route. Among them were a 15-member delegation of 12 women’s ice hockey players with their coach Pak Chol-ho and two support staff, which swiftly left for the national training center in Jinchon, North Chungcheong Province. The athletes will enter practice sessions with their South Korean counterparts to form a unified women’s ice hockey team for the upcoming games. The players met the South Korean team and coach Sarah Murray in Jinchon after arriving at the training center around 12:30 p.m. They were warmly greeted with a six-minute welcoming ceremony, where the South Korean athletes presented the North Korean players bouquets of flowers. The North agreed to send 22 athletes to compete in women’s ice hockey, figure skating, short track speed skating, cross-country skiing and alpine skiing at the February 9-25 Winter Games. The decision, approved by the International Olympics Committee, spawned out of a series of inter-Korean meetings held after North Korean leader Kim Jong-un expressed willingness to dispatch a delegation to the Winter Games. South Korea currently has 23 players on its entry, but Murray must now add at least three players from North Korea to her roster of 22 players -- 20 skaters and two goaltenders. Meanwhile, a South Korean advance team is set to return home from a three-day trip to North Korea. They inspected venues suggested for a joint cultural event and ski training such as Kumkangsan Resort and Masikryong Ski Resort. The North Korean hockey team’s visit comes as South Korean society remains divided over the idea of a unified team. Critics say the South
Korean team could be burdened by North Korean players and their chances of success have become slimmer. According to a survey by Korea Research released today 58.7 percent of the respondents disagreed with the idea of the unified team, citing “unfairness for South Korean national players who lost their spot at the games.” Those who agreed with the move came in at 37.7 percent, saying it could contribute to an improvement in inter-Korean ties. The main opposition Liberty Korea Party criticized the liberal Moon administration as having allowed North Korea to steal the limelight at the upcoming Pyeongchang Olympics by putting too much emphasis on the North’s participation. “We cannot help but ask once again whether this is the Pyeongchang Winter Olympics or the Pyongyang Olympics,” Rep. Kim Sung-tae, the party’s floor leader, said during a party meeting. Today’s visit also comes as the United States reaffirmed its stance of sticking to further pressure in dealing with North Korea, by imposing a fresh round of sanctions against the rogue regime. Today, North Korea sent a rare announcement addressed to “all Koreans at home and abroad,” saying they should make a “breakthrough” for unification without the help of other countries, via its state media. Some US officials have expressed worries the North may be trying to drive a wedge in the South Korea-US alliance by making a rare gesture of friendliness. (Jung Min-kyung & Joint Press Corp, “N.K. Hockey Players Join S. Korean Team for Training,” Korea Herald, January 25, 2018)

President Moon Jae-in’s approval rating has dipped below 60% for the first time since he took office, a recent opinion poll shows. On January 22–24, Real Meter surveyed Moon’s approval rating among 1,509 adult South Korean men and women nationwide (±2.5 percentage point margin of error with a 95% confidence level). The results showed 59.8% of respondents rating Moon’s governance performance as “good,” the polling outfit reported on January 25. The number was down 6.2 percentage points from 66% the week before – indicating a steep slide. It was also down 10.8% from two weeks prior. A January 19 Gallup Korea survey for the third week of January also Moon’s approval rating at 67%, a six percentage point drop from the week before. (Seong Yeon-cheol and Hong So-jin, “President Moon’s Approval Rating Drops below 60% for First Time since Inauguration,” January 27, 2018)

1/26/18 South Korea and the United States plan to resume their delayed joint military exercises after the 2018 Pyeongchang Winter Olympics and Paralympics, the defense ministry said. "The exact date and size of the planned joint exercises cannot be disclosed, but they will be carried out after the close of the Olympics," Choi Hyun-soo, spokeswoman for the Ministry of National Defense, said in a press briefing. Another ministry official added that the joint exercises will be business as usual, indicating that the size of the exercises will be the same as before. Asked whether this year's joint exercises would be the same as previous drills, the spokeswoman responded affirmatively. Another ministry official, however, added that the exact scale has not been determined. (Yonhap, “S. Korea, U.S. to Conduct Exercises ‘Normally’ after Olympics: Seoul,” January 26, 2018)

1/28/18 The last time South Korea hosted an Olympics, in 1988, the North not only refused to take part, it blew up a South Korean airliner ten months before the Games. Yet South Koreans at the time expressed hope that the two Koreas, divided by the Cold War, could one day become a single nation again. Now, as the South prepares to host its second Games next month, the Koreas are cooperating in unheard-of ways, including their first joint Olympic team, in women’s ice hockey. But South Koreans, especially younger ones, are far less interested in reconciliation, to say nothing of reunification. Experts and recent surveys describe a profound shift in attitudes in South Korea, where reuniting the peninsula, and the Korean people, was long held as a sacrosanct goal. These days, younger South Koreans in particular are far more likely to see the idea of reintegrating their prosperous capitalist democracy with the impoverished, totalitarian North as unrealistic and undesirable. Young Koreans say they are more concerned about pressing domestic issues — like unemployment, and whether they can live as well as their parents did — than the enormously costly, complex and hypothetical task of reunifying with the North. A survey last year by the government-run Korea Institute for National Unification in Seoul found that far more South Koreans in their 20s now oppose reunification — 71.2 percent — than support it. Across the population, support has dropped to 57.8 percent from 69.3 percent just four years ago. “Especially
men in their 20s, about half of them, consider North Korea an outright enemy,” said Kim Ji-yoon, a research fellow at the Asan Institute for Policy Studies in Seoul who has been tracking attitudes toward reunification. “To young South Koreans, North Korea is someone they don’t want anything to do with.” Polling experts say that South Korean men in their 20s often get more hawkish after they finish their mandatory military service. The skepticism was apparent this month, when the two Koreas set aside their disputes over the North’s nuclear weapons and missile programs and agreed to field a joint team in the Winter Games in the town of Pyeongchang, and to march together in the opening ceremony on February 9. In the past, such gestures triggered waves of pro-unification sentiment, as in 2000, when North and South Korean athletes marched together at the Games in Sydney, Australia. (They competed separately.) The administration of President Moon Jae-in, a progressive who has long supported inter-Korean unity, hoped this latest rapprochement would create similarly warm feelings. Instead, a survey found that more than 72 percent of South Korean adults overall — and more than 82 percent of those in their 20s and 30s — were not enthusiastic about the hockey team. More than 54,000 people signed a petition opposing it, and many expressed anger that some South Korean players would cede their positions to North Koreans. “I am taken aback,” said Kim Sung-hwan, a former South Korean foreign minister. “Young people seem to think of North Korea as strangers who barge into their party bringing with them nothing but empty spoons.” Such pushback would have been expected from conservatives, who have long been suspicious of efforts to engage the North. But younger South Koreans tend to be politically progressive and supportive of Moon on other issues. Analysts say a key turning point in attitudes toward the North came in 2010, when a South Korean naval ship was sunk by an apparent North Korean torpedo attack, killing 46 sailors, and North Korea launched a rocket barrage on a South Korean island that killed four people, including two civilians. These were formative events for young South Koreans, these analysts say. Reunification is a personal matter for Moon, 65, who was born in a refugee camp after his parents fled their native North Korea during the 1950-53 Korean War. “If Korea reunified, the first thing I would do is to take my mother’s hand and visit her hometown,” he said during last year’s election campaign. The assumption that the South and North belong together is shared by many South Korean conservatives, though from a very different point of view. They tend to call for the South liberating the North from the Kim family’s rule, by force if necessary. Younger South Koreans don’t share the pain caused by the peninsula’s divide, or the inclination to see North Koreans as long-lost brethren. Last year’s survey by the unification institute found that while more than 47 percent of respondents in their 60s and older said the two Koreas must reunify “because they belong to the same nation,” less than 21 percent of respondents in their 20s said so. (Choe Sang-hun, “The Olympic Spirit Unites Korea, But Reunification’s Flame Fades,” New York Times, January 29, 2018, p. A-1)

North Korea's armed forces have scaled back their annual winter military exercises this year, U.S. officials said, a development they believe reflects growing pressure from international sanctions on the isolated nation’s economy and its military preparedness. The North Korean maneuvers, which typically run from December through March, were slow in getting started and are less extensive than usual, according to American officials familiar with intelligence reports and experts outside the government. One possibility is that restrictions on shipments of oil and refined petroleum products to North Korea imposed by the United Nations have led the country, which has one of the world’s largest standing armies, to conserve fuel by cutting back on ground and air training exercises. “Where this will have an effect is on ground force readiness,” said Joseph S. Bermudez Jr., a military analyst for 38 North. "Military units have to train to maintain their proficiency." The reduction in the North Korean winter exercises comes amid other signs of strain on the country's military. "We are seeing defections happening in areas where we don't generally see them, for example crossing the DMZ," said Gen. Vincent K. Brooks, the top U.S. commander in South Korea. "We're seeing some increase in executions, mostly against political officials who are in military units, for corruption," the general said. He said the moves "are really about trying to clamp down as much as possible on something that might be deteriorating and keeping it from deteriorating too quickly." Senior South Korean officials and foreign diplomats in Pyongyang say they have yet to see indicators of instability in everyday life inside the country, but point to signs of stress. North Korean laborers are being sent home in large numbers from overseas work...
postings, for example, crimping the country's supply of hard currency and leading to fluctuations in the exchange rate, they say. In addition, propaganda directed at the North Korean public also points to anxiety about the likely impact of sanctions. Kim in his New Year speech this month acknowledged that the economy faced "unprecedented impediments" in 2017. North Korea's armed forces have long had to contend with tight budgets and antiquated hardware. A declassified 2015 report by the U.S. Army on North Korea's military noted that "the amount of time spent on larger exercises pales in comparison to most Western militaries." The exercise cutbacks this year are likely to further diminish the ability of the North Korean military to synchronize large-scale maneuvers involving multiple armor, artillery and aviation units, while slowing the training of new conscripts. (Michael R. Gordon and Jonathan Cheng, “North Korea, Under Sanctions Strain, Dials back Military Exercises,” Wall Street Journal, January 29, 2018)

North Korea has canceled a joint cultural performance with South Korea scheduled for February 4 blaming South Korean media for encouraging “insulting” public sentiment regarding the North, South Korea’s unification ministry said. The North said it had no choice but to call off the performance, which was to be held in the North Korean territory of Mount Kumgang, as South Korean media continued to insult what Pyongyang called “sincere” measures regarding the Winter Olympics Seoul will host next month, the ministry said. (Christine Kim, “North Korea Cancels Joint Performance with South Korea, Blames South Media: Seoul,” January 29, 2018)

The U.S. is stepping up pressure on African states to cut longstanding military and diplomatic ties with North Korea as part of its push to squeeze the funding of Kim Jong Un’s nuclear missile program. U.S. officials want African countries to expel North Korean workers and diplomats, alleging that Pyongyang’s 13 embassies on the continent double up as “profit making centers.” Washington says Pyongyang is using its military co-operation and arms deals with African states to obtain precious foreign currency. It also accuses some of the several thousand North Koreans believed to be living in Africa, including diplomats, of trafficking wildlife parts, such as rhino horn, another relatively easy source of foreign currency. U.S. officials estimate that Pyongyang makes at least $100m through the supply of arms, military training, construction contracts and smuggling. Peter Pham, head of the Atlantic Council’s Africa Center in Washington, said that, although it might seem like “chump change”, it was “a fairly significant sum to the regime given the overall squeeze on its finances.” It was roughly 3-5 per cent of Pyongyang’s total annual foreign exchange earnings, he said. Last September, a UN panel of experts identified 11 African countries — Angola, Benin, Botswana, Democratic Republic of Congo, Eritrea, Mali, Mozambique, Namibia, Tanzania, Uganda and Zimbabwe — as having suspected military ties to Pyongyang. Some African countries, including Sudan, which the US lists as a sponsor of terrorism, have responded to Washington’s demands in an effort to curry favor and extract concessions. Last October, after Khartoum committed itself to downgrading North Korea ties, the US eased some sanctions. Namibia also initiated steps to cut military ties. Eleven African countries identified by UN experts’ panel as having suspected military ties to Pyongyang but other countries, say experts, are either resisting or quietly ignoring US pressure. “There are things that African states can get from North Korea that they’re not going to get from anywhere else,” said Daragh Neville, an expert on Africa-North Korea ties at Chatham House, a UK think-tank. North Koreans were among the few countries able to maintain and upgrade Soviet-era military equipment cheaply, he said. Eritrea, an isolated state in the Horn of Africa, has refused to supply information to the UN on its North Korean links. Other countries, including Mozambique, Uganda and the Democratic Republic of Congo, where North Koreans are said to help train Joseph Kabila’s presidential guard, have taken a more ambiguous approach. Some have said they will cooperate but have been slow to provide information, let alone act, according to officials. Even some of supposed US allies, including South Africa, where Pyongyang has an embassy and which the US considers a hub of North Korea’s arms trade, have been slow to respond to Washington’s demands. “South Africa has not given us a clear answer” on its policy, said Robert Scott, the state department’s acting deputy assistant secretary for Africa. Many African states, including Angola, Mozambique and Zimbabwe, have maintained close ties with North Korea since the cold war, when Pyongyang offered material and ideological support to black liberation movements. In
Maputo, Mozambique’s capital, for example, one of the main thoroughfares is named after Kim Il Sung, the founder of North Korea. Construction company Mansudae Overseas Projects Group, which is subject to sanctions by both the US and UN, has erected dozens of monuments and buildings across Africa, including Namibia’s state house and official presidential residence in Windhoek. US officials believe Mansudae continues to employ North Korean laborers throughout the continent. Since September, when President Donald Trump signed Executive Order 13810, the US has been able to threaten any individual or company with a ban on business in the US if they deal with North Korea, ratcheting up the pressure. Grant Harris, an adviser on Africa to Barack Obama as president, said Washington needed to offer economic and security incentives, as well as threats, if governments were to “discard longstanding ties with North Korea.” Trump has alienated some African leaders with his comment on “shithole” countries. Neville of Chatham House said African states had more to gain and less to lose than others from dealing with Pyongyang. “The threat of North Korea is to the US, Japan and South Korea,” he said. “It’s not threatening to bomb Kinshasa or Addis.” (David Pilling, Adrienne Klasa, and Katrina Manson, “US Raises Pressure on Africa to Sever Ties with North Korea,” Financial Times, January 30, 2018, p. 4)

The White House’s original choice for U.S. ambassador to South Korea is no longer expected to be nominated after he privately expressed disagreement in late December with the Trump administration’s North Korea policy, according to people familiar with the matter. Victor D. Cha, an academic who served in the George W. Bush administration, raised his concerns with National Security Council officials over their consideration of a limited strike on the North aimed at sending a message without sparking a wider war — a risky concept known as a “bloody nose” strategy. Cha also objected to the administration’s threats to tear up a bilateral trade deal with Seoul that President Trump has called unfair to American companies. The administration last week imposed new tariffs on imports of washing machines and solar energy panels, a move criticized by the South Korean government. The White House had spent months conducting a security and financial background check on Cha, and U.S. officials formally notified Seoul in December of Trump’s intent to send his nomination to the Senate. South Korean officials quickly signed off on Cha, a formal process in international affairs known as “Agrément.” (David Nakamura and Anne Gearan, “Disagreement on North Korea Policy Derails White House Choice for Ambassador to South Korea,” Washington Post, January 30, 2018)

President Trump sketched out an ominous view of America’s international role, emphasizing adversaries over allies, threats over opportunities, and a world to be pacified rather than elevated. But the president saved his longest foreign policy passage, and strongest words, for North Korea, whose “reckless pursuit of nuclear weapons,” he said, “could very soon threaten our homeland.” “We are waging a campaign of maximum pressure to prevent that from happening,” he said. “Past experience has taught us that complacency and concessions only invite aggression and provocation. I will not repeat the mistakes of past administrations that got us into this dangerous position.” Trump did not, as he has before, issue specific threats of a military strike on the North. But he outlined an unrelenting case for what he called the North Korean government’s “depraved character,” echoing a speech he delivered to the South Korean National Assembly in Seoul in November. Hours before the speech, the president’s Korea policy was buffeted by the administration’s decision to abandon a long-delayed plan to nominate a prominent Korea scholar, Victor D. Cha, as its ambassador to Seoul. Cha, 57, had voiced opposition to the administration’s threat to carry out a preventive military strike against North Korea, said two people with knowledge of the decision. He had already undergone an extensive vetting process, and his name had been submitted for approval to the South Korean government — normally an indication that the background check was complete. Officials in Seoul had already signed off on the ambassadorship; Cha is a Republican who identifies as a hawk on North Korea. But friends said he told Pentagon and other administration officials his concerns about ordering a pre-emptive, or preventive, military strike on North Korea before it had the capacity to fire a nuclear-armed missile at the United States. Administration officials, particularly the White House national security adviser, Lt. Gen. H. R. McMaster, have raised the prospect of such a strike — sometimes
called the “bloody nose” strategy — though they emphasize they would prefer to solve the confrontation with Pyongyang through diplomacy. Cha has also publicly voiced the high cost to both Washington and Seoul of ripping up the Korea Free Trade Agreement, as Trump has threatened to do, unless the South Koreans agree to renegotiate the deal. In his speech, Trump made no mention of the Winter Olympic Games. Nor did he mention a budding détente between North and South Korea, which have agreed to march their teams into the opening ceremony under a single flag and to field a unified women’s ice hockey team. (Mark Landler, “A Foreign Policy Shaped by Adversaries,” *New York Times*, January 31, 2018, p. A-15)

Trump: “As we strengthen friendships around the world, we are also restoring clarity about our adversaries. ...But no regime has oppressed its own citizens more totally or brutally than the cruel dictatorship in North Korea. North Korea's reckless pursuit of nuclear missiles could very soon threaten our homeland. We are waging a campaign of maximum pressure to prevent that from happening. Past experience has taught us that complacency and concessions only invite aggression and provocation. I will not repeat the mistakes of past administrations that got us into this dangerous position. We need only look at the depraved character of the North Korean regime to understand the nature of the nuclear threat it could pose to America and our allies. Otto Warmbier was a hardworking student at the University of Virginia. On his way to study abroad in Asia, Otto joined a tour to North Korea. At its conclusion, this wonderful young man was arrested and charged with crimes against the state. After a shameful trial, the dictatorship sentenced Otto to 15 years of hard labor, before returning him to America last June -- horribly injured and on the verge of death. He passed away just days after his return. Otto's Parents, Fred and Cindy Warmbier, are with us tonight -- along with Otto's brother and sister, Austin and Greta. You are powerful witnesses to a menace that threatens our world, and your strength inspires us all. Tonight, we pledge to honor Otto's memory with American resolve. Finally, we are joined by one more witness to the ominous nature of this regime. His name is Mr. Ji Seong-ho. In 1996, Seong-ho was a starving boy in North Korea. One day, he tried to steal coal from a railroad car to barter for a few scraps of food. In the process, he passed out on the train tracks, exhausted from hunger. He woke up as a train ran over his limbs. He then endured multiple amputations without anything to dull the pain. His brother and sister gave what little food they had to help him recover and ate dirt themselves -- permanently stunting their own growth. Later, he was tortured by North Korean authorities after returning from a brief visit to China. His tormentors wanted to know if he had met any Christians. He had -- and he resolved to be free. Seong-ho traveled thousands of miles on crutches across China and Southeast Asia to freedom. Most of his family followed. His father was caught trying to escape, and was tortured to death. Today he lives in Seoul, where he rescues other defectors, and broadcasts into North Korea what the regime fears the most -- the truth. Today he has a new leg, but Seong-ho, I understand you still keep those crutches as a reminder of how far you have come. Your great sacrifice is an inspiration to us all. Seong-ho's story is a testament to the yearning of every human soul to live in freedom.” (President Donald J. Trump, State of the Union Address, January 30, 2018)

Cha: “North Korea, if not stopped, will build an arsenal with multiple nuclear missiles meant to threaten the U.S. homeland and blackmail us into abandoning our allies in Asia. North Korean dictator Kim Jong Un will sell these weapons to state and non-state actors, and he will inspire other rogue actors who want to undermine the U.S.-backed postwar order. These are real and unprecedented threats. But the answer is not, as some Trump administration officials have suggested, a preventive military strike. Instead, there is a forceful military option available that can address the threat without escalating into a war that would likely kill tens, if not hundreds, of thousands of Americans. When I was under consideration for a position in this administration, I shared some of these views. Some may argue that U.S. casualties and even a wider war on the Korean Peninsula are risks worth taking, given what is at stake. But a strike (even a large one) would only delay North Korea’s missile-building and nuclear programs, which are buried in deep, unknown places impenetrable to bunker-busting bombs. A strike also would not stem the threat of proliferation but rather exacerbate it, turning what might be a North Korean moneymaking endeavor into a vengeful effort intended to equip other bad actors against us. I empathize with the hope, espoused by some Trump officials, that a military strike would shock Pyongyang into
appreciating U.S. strength, after years of inaction, and force the regime to the denuclearization negotiating table. I also hope that if North Korea did retaliate militarily, the United States could control the escalation ladder to minimize collateral damage and prevent a collapse of financial markets. In either event, the rationale is that a strike that demonstrates U.S. resolve to pursue “all options” is necessary to give the mercurial Kim a “bloody nose.” Otherwise he will remain undeterred in his nuclear ambitions. Yet, there is a point at which hope must give in to logic. If we believe that Kim is undeterred without such a strike, how can we also believe that a strike will deter him from responding in kind? And if Kim is unpredictable, impulsive and bordering on irrational, how can we control the escalation ladder, which is premised on an adversary’s rational understanding of signals and deterrence? Some have argued the risks are still worth taking because it’s better that people die “over there” than “over here.” On any given day, there are 230,000 Americans in South Korea and 90,000 or so in Japan. Given that an evacuation of so many citizens would be virtually impossible under a rain of North Korean artillery and missiles (potentially laced with biochemical weapons), these Americans would most likely have to hunker down until the war was over. While our population in Japan might be protected by U.S. missile defenses, the U.S. population in South Korea, let alone millions of South Koreans, has no similar active defenses against a barrage of North Korean artillery (aside from counterfire artillery). To be clear: The president would be putting at risk an American population the size of a medium-size U.S. city — Pittsburgh, say, or Cincinnati — on the assumption that a crazy and undeterable dictator will be rationally cowed by a demonstration of U.S. kinetic power. An alternative coercive strategy involves enhanced and sustained U.S., regional and global pressure on Pyongyang to denuclearize. This strategy is likely to deliver the same potential benefits as a limited strike, along with other advantages, without the self-destructive costs. There are four elements to this coercive strategy. First, the Trump administration must continue to strengthen the coalition of U.N. member states it has mustered in its thus far highly successful sanctions campaign. Second, the United States must significantly up-gun its alliances with Japan and South Korea with integrated missile defense, intelligence-sharing and anti-submarine warfare and strike capabilities to convey to North Korea that an attack on one is an attack on all. Third, the United States must build a maritime coalition around Korea involving rings of South Korean, Japanese and broader U.S. assets to intercept any nuclear missiles or technologies leaving the country. China and Russia should be prepared to face the consequences if they allow North Korean proliferation across their borders. Lastly, the United States must continue to prepare military options. Force will be necessary to deal with North Korea if it attacks first, but not through a preventive strike that could start a nuclear war. In the land of lousy options, no strategy is perfect, but some are better than others. This strategy gets us out of crisis-management mode. It constitutes decisive action, not previously attempted, by President Trump. And it demonstrates resolve to other bad actors that threats to the United States will be countered. Such a strategy would assuredly deplete Pyongyang’s hard currency, deter it from rash action, strengthen our alliances in Asia for the next generation and increase the costs to those who continue to subsidize Pyongyang. A sustained and long-term competitive strategy such as this plays to U.S. strengths, exploits our adversary’s weaknesses and does not risk hundreds of thousands of American lives.” (Victor Cha, “Giving North Korean a “Bloody Nose’ Carries a Huge Risk to Americans,” Washington Post, January 30, 2018)

An estimated 60,000 children face potential starvation in North Korea, where international sanctions are exacerbating the situation by slowing aid deliveries, the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) said. Under United Nations Security Council resolutions, humanitarian supplies or operations are exempt from sanctions, Omar Abdi, UNICEF deputy executive director, said.

"But what happens is that of course the banks, the companies that provide goods or ship goods are very careful. They don’t want to take any risk of later on being associated (with) breaking the sanctions," Abdi told a news briefing. "That is what makes it more difficult for us to bring things. So it takes a little bit longer, especially in getting money into the country. But also in shipping goods to DPRK. There are not many shipping lines that operate in that area," he said, referring to the Democratic People's Republic of Korea. Sanctions on fuel have been tightened, making it more scarce and expensive, Abdi added. "We are projecting that at some point during the year 60,000 children will become severely malnourished. This is the malnutrition that potentially can lead to death. It's protein and calorie malnutrition," said Manuel Fontaine, director of UNICEF.
emergency foreign policy debates are seldom lively, which is just the way the ruling Communist party wants to keep them. Polemics are few, articles and lectures are full of sleep-inducing slogans and official orthodoxy. But a curious exception to this apparently placid consensus has taken place as a debate roils China’s expert community over what to do about North Korea, its increasingly wayward, nuclear-armed neighbor. Over the past several months, policy journals have run articles questioning the official line, while scholars at top universities have been unafraid to publish previously heretical views — in western journals, no less. They have even taken to social media to argue. “There has been a sea change in the debate regarding how China should handle the North Korea crisis,” says Yawei Liu, director of the China Program at the Carter Center in Atlanta, Georgia. “A year ago, or two years ago, there was no such debate.” The window of openness seems to exist only for experts. Many users of Wechat, the country’s largest social network, report the Chinese characters for “North Korea” are frequently censored if used in large groups. The mainstream press is similarly muzzled. But academics and even officials have been allowed greater freedom to express themselves. “North Korea is a very unique area; the government does not allow such open debate in many other areas,” says Shen Dingli, a professor of American studies at Fudan University in Shanghai. The debate, he says, demonstrates that China’s policy of seeking to “de-nuclearize” North Korea while shielding the regime from harsher sanctions at the UN has been shown to be wrong since Pyongyang began testing nuclear weapons in 2003. “Since 2003, everyone knows China’s policy towards North Korea has not succeeded,” says Shen. “The reason these views are allowed is a virtual admission that our current policy is dead, so now they seek fresh ideas.” This has produced some memorable public polemics. China’s foreign policy community is still reeling from a social media slugfest last September between Jia Qingguo, dean of the Peking University School of International Studies, and Zhu Zhihua, vice-president of the Zhejiang Association of International Relations. Zhu accused Jia of in effect conspiring with Washington when he advocated “contingency planning” with the U.S. in the event of a war with North Korea. “When war becomes a real possibility, China must be prepared. And, with this in mind, China must be more willing to consider talks with concerned countries on contingency plans,” Jia wrote in an article. Zhu accused Jia of treason in a social media post, saying: “A military attack is the next step.” Jia responded that Zhu was a “career public security officer” who had put words in his mouth. Zhu then replied that Jia’s U.S. education — he has a PhD from Cornell University — had “brainwashed” him. “That debate became very vicious,” says Liu of the Carter Center. A decade earlier this would not have happened. As recently as 2013, Deng Yuwen was suspended as deputy editor of Study Times, the journal of the Central Party School of the Communist party of China, after publishing an article in the Financial Times calling for Beijing to give up on Pyongyang altogether. The only thing that is clear is that no one agrees with the current policy Shen Dingli, a professor of American studies at Fudan University in Shanghai. But today the plurality of opinion in the expert community appears to reflect what is happening behind the government’s closed doors, where nationalists, conservatives and liberals are similarly divided. The debate, which the North Korea hawks appear to be winning, has tracked a steady shift in government policy towards supporting tougher sanctions and even, as Jia suggested, contingency planning with the U.S. “I couldn’t imagine two years ago that China could go this far,” says Zhu Feng, director of the Institute of International Studies at Nanjing University, who has argued in the
US journal *Foreign Affairs* for tougher sanctions on North Korea. He says he faced a backlash from colleagues, but not the government. “I have friends in the foreign ministry who told me they share my views,” he says. On the other side of the ideological fence are those who advocate accepting North Korea into the nuclear club. “We should simply accept reality. We accept India as a nuclear weapons state, we accept Pakistan, so why not North Korea?” says Shen. One Chinese analyst, referring to Mao Zedong’s policy of encouraging freedom of expression in the 1950s, says: “The government has let a hundred flowers bloom” on North Korea. He notes, however, that Mao eventually swung the axe on those who had stuck their necks out too far. How long the current openness will last is hard to say, says Shen. “The only thing that is clear is that no one agrees with the current policy.” (Charles Clover, “China Loosens Reins on N. Korea Polemics,” *Financial Times*, January 30, 2018, p. 3)

In a letter sent to United Nations Secretary-General Antonio Guterres circulated today, North Korea’s Foreign Minister Ri Yong-ho urged Guterres to exert efforts to halt the US’ deployment of military equipment and upcoming military maneuvers. “I express my expectation that you pay a serious attention to the U.S. deployment of nuclear war equipment and its maneuvers to provoke a nuclear war which will undermine the improvement of inter-Korean relations and the easing of tensions,” Ri said. Criticizing the U.S. military pressure as a “primary factor” for worsening ties between the two Koreas, Ri asked the UN Security Council to take up “the issue of welcoming the process of improved inter-Korean relations and discouraging the neighboring countries from disturbing the process.” (Yeo Jun-suk, “NK Chief Diplomat Urges UN Chief to Stop U.S. Military Maneuvers,” *Korea Herald*, February 2, 2018)

Air Force Gen. Paul J. Selva, vice chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, said the U.S. military could “get at most of his infrastructure” when asked about Kim’s nuclear missile program, but he declined to specify the percentage of North Korean missiles U.S. forces could destroy. His comments indicate that the United States possesses enough information to target not only North Korea’s missiles but also the support facilities that allow a launch in a potential attack on the United States. “Remember, missile infrastructure is not just the missiles,” Selva said at a roundtable with journalists in Washington. “If you’re the poor sergeant that has to go out and launch the missile, and I blow up your barracks, you’re not available to go do your job.” North Korea has not yet successfully tested all the components necessary to show the world it possesses an ICBM capable of delivering a nuclear warhead to a target in the U.S. mainland, Selva said. Kim’s tests have shown that his missiles can travel far enough to reach the United States and maneuver stably in the right direction, according to Selva. But the North Korean leader has yet to demonstrate a “terminal guidance system” that allows for the specific targeting of the missile and a “reentry vehicle” capable of withstanding the stress and shock that comes with carrying a nuclear warhead back through the Earth’s atmosphere to a target, the general said. Selva did not rule out that North Korea already possesses those technologies but said the country has not demonstrated them. “It is possible, although I think unlikely, that he has found a way to do the test without us knowing,” Selva said. “But I can’t envision what that test would look like, where he would be convinced that he has those components at a reliable-enough level of performance to declare that he’s ready.” Asked about the possibility of pursuing a “freeze for freeze,” Selva said the decision was up to the U.S. officials leading diplomacy with North Korea. “I’m not in charge of the diplomatic effort,” Selva said. But he added that the current situation — in which North Korea has not yet crossed the finish line in its quest — presented “an opening to have that conversation.” Selva declined to rule out the possibility of a preemptive strike on North Korea’s weapons facilities but suggested that preemption is not generally how the U.S. has approached nuclear-armed adversaries. “We don’t do preemption,” Selva said. “Our method of warfare: If they launch one, then game on. But preemption is not something we do as a matter of course.” (Paul Sonne, “U.S. Can Destroy Most of N. Korea’s Nuclear Missile Infrastructure, Top General Says,” *Washington Post*, January 30, 2018)

An American interceptor missile missed its target in a test off the Hawaiian coast, Defense Department officials said, renewing concerns of how the United States will defend itself in the
The White House has grown frustrated in recent weeks by what it considers the Pentagon’s reluctance to provide President Trump with options for a military strike against North Korea, according to officials, the latest sign of a deepening split in the administration over how to confront the nuclear-armed regime of Kim Jong-un. The national security adviser, Lt. Gen. H. R. McMaster, believes that for Trump’s warnings to North Korea to be credible, the United States must have well-developed military plans, according to those officials. But the Pentagon, they say, is worried that the White House is moving too hastily toward military action on the Korean Peninsula that could escalate catastrophically. Giving the president too many options, the officials said, could increase the odds that he will act. The tensions bubbled to the surface this week with the disclosure that the White House had abandoned plans to nominate a prominent Korea expert, Victor D. Cha, as ambassador to South Korea. Cha suggested that he was sidelined because he warned administration officials against a “preventive” military strike, which, he later wrote, could spiral “into a war that would likely kill tens, if not hundreds, of thousands of Americans.” But the divisions go back months, officials said. When North Korea tested an intercontinental ballistic missile in July that experts concluded was capable of reaching the West Coast of the United States, the National Security Council convened a conference call that included Secretary of Defense Jim Mattis and Secretary of State Rex W. Tillerson. After General McMaster left the room, Mattis and Tillerson continued to speak, not realizing that other participants were still on the line. The officials familiar with the matter overheard them complaining about a series of meetings that the National Security Council had set up to consider options for North Korea — signs, Tillerson said, that it was becoming overly aggressive. For now, the frustration at the White House appears to be limited to senior officials rather than Trump himself. But the president has shown impatience with his military leaders on other issues, notably the debate over whether to deploy additional American troops to Afghanistan. As they examine the most effective way of giving credibility to Trump’s threat of “fire and fury,” officials are considering the feasibility of a preventive strike that could include disabling a missile on the launch pad or destroying North Korea’s entire nuclear infrastructure. American officials are also said to be considering covert means of disabling the nuclear and missile programs. While General McMaster also favors a diplomatic solution to the impasse, officials said, he emphasizes to colleagues that past efforts to negotiate with North Korea have forced the United States to make unacceptable concessions. The Pentagon has a different view. Mattis and the chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, Gen. Joseph F. Dunford Jr., argue forcefully for using diplomacy. They have repeatedly warned, in meetings and on video conference calls, that there are few, if any, military options that would not provoke retaliation from North Korea, according to officials at the Defense Department. Representatives of Mattis and Dunford denied that they have slow-walked options to the White House. Even the most limited strike, the so-called bloody nose option, risks what one Defense Department official called an unacceptably high number of casualties. Cha, writing in The Washington Post, said the premise of such a strike — that it would jolt Kim into recognizing that the United States was serious, and draw him back to the bargaining table — was flawed. “If we believe that Kim is undeterrable without such a strike, how can we also believe that a strike will deter him from responding in kind?” Cha wrote. “And if Kim is unpredictable, impulsive and bordering on irrational, how can we control the escalation ladder, which is premised on an adversary’s rational understanding of signals and deterrence?” Friends said Cha pressed that case in meetings at the Pentagon, the United States Pacific Command, the State Department and the National Security Council. He passed along articles critical of preventive military action by two colleagues: John J. Hamre, the president of the Center for Strategic and International Studies, and Michael J. Green, a senior
fellow at the center who worked in the George W. Bush administration, as did Cha. Green warned against a preventive strike in testimony on Tuesday before the Senate Armed Services Committee. He said there appeared to be little support for it, even among normally hawkish Republicans like Senators Tom Cotton of Arkansas, Joni Ernst of Iowa and Dan Sullivan of Alaska. Even the White House has struggled to send a consistent message. In the week after Trump issued his threat to rain “fire and fury” on North Korea, Stephen K. Bannon, then his chief strategist, told a progressive journalist, “There’s no military solution. Forget it.” “Until somebody solves the part of the equation that shows me that 10 million people in Seoul don’t die in the first 30 minutes from conventional weapons,” he said, “I don’t know what you’re talking about.” Bannon’s bluntness angered other White House officials and hastened his exit from the White House. But there is evidence that General McMaster shares those concerns. Asked by a reporter in August whether there was any military option that would not put Seoul in North Korea’s cross hairs, he paused briefly, then said, “No.” With as many as 8,000 artillery pieces and rocket launchers positioned along its border with the South, North Korea could rain up to 300,000 rounds on the South in the first hour of a counterattack. While that arsenal is of limited range and could be destroyed in days, North Korea would still have time to cause widespread destruction. In a rare appearance last year on the CBS News program “Face the Nation,” Mattis warned that war with North Korea would be “catastrophic” — “probably the worst kind of fighting in most people’s lifetimes.” That does not mean the military has not begun preparing for that possibility. At multiple Army bases across the country this month, more than 1000 reserve officers are practicing how to set up so-called mobilization centers, which move reservists overseas in a hurry. But as the military gears up, State Department officials say the United States has far from exhausted its nonmilitary options for pressuring Pyongyang. It could, for example, push to expel North Korea from the United Nations or interdict ships that it suspects are violating sanctions against the government. Neither Tillerson nor Mattis has broken with the White House on the issue of a preventive strike. That is because for now, they still view it as a useful tool in deterring North Korea, according to people briefed by the administration. More important, they continue to be confident that, despite their anxieties, cooler heads with eventually prevail. (Mark Landler and Helene Cooper, “Split Grows over Alternatives for Strike against North Korea,” New York Times, February 2, 2018, p. A-1)

Joseph Yun, special envoy on North Korea, said all options remained on the table for solving the nuclear standoff with the reclusive country but that he did not think the military option was close. "Our policy is very much for the peaceful resolution of the North Korean nuclear crisis. We've said over and over again that what we want to see is dialogue," Yun told reporters in Tokyo. "Having said that, we also have said that all options are on the table and by all options, it has to include military options," he said. "I don't believe we are close to it." Yun welcomed the North-South dialogue and said he hoped it was a sign of things to come, but he said that any talks with Washington would have to "be about steps North Korea would take toward denuclearization." (Nick Macfie, “U.S. Special Envoy on North Korea Says War Is Still an Option, But We're Not Yet Close to Fighting,” Reuters, February 1, 2018) With questions swirling about Trump’s commitment to diplomacy, Yun said “there should be no confusion that the U.S. is completely committed to peacefully resolving” the crisis. “We’ve said many, many times over and over again diplomacy is very much preferred — way more preferred — than any other option,” Yun said. But he noted that this went beyond merely talking, and also included what he called “peaceful pressure.” Asked if denuclearization was a prerequisite for even starting talks with North Korea, Yun reiterated Washington’s long-held stance. “We should all face the reality, which is that these talks, if there are engagement and talks, have to be about denuclearization, they have to be about steps that North Korea would take toward denuclearization,” he said. “That is the basis for any real engagement with North Korea.” Yun also played down earlier statements that an extended lull in missile tests could lead to dialogue between the two countries. “North Korea stopping nuclear and missile tests would be a great first step,” he said. But “I don’t think it’s so important, sixty days, 90 days, 30 days. Diplomacy is not conducted with smoke signals,” Yun said. North Korea “has to tell us” when they are suspending missile or nuclear tests for the purpose of opening diplomatic channels. “So for them to go through a period of time without telling us, that’s … meaningless,” Yun said. “Communication channels are open, so there’s no problem in telling us their intent.
Collins and Frantz: “One person who had an inside look at [A.Q.] Khan’s network was Benazir Bhutto. Sitting in her living room in late 2003 during her exile in Dubai, the former two-time Pakistani prime minister (who was assassinated in 2007) recounted to the authors how she learned of Khan’s role in Iran’s nuclear program and how she became an unwitting midwife to his relationship with North Korea. As Bhutto recalled it, she was on an official trip to Tehran in late 1989, her second year as prime minister, when Iranian President Akbar Hashemi Rafsanjani took her aside during a state dinner. He explained that the military leaders of their two countries had agreed to a defense pact that included Pakistan’s help with nuclear weapons technology. Bhutto said she was blindsided. (U.S. intelligence reports from that period concluded that the military had shut her out of its nuclear weapons program.) Bhutto said she summoned General Mirza Aslam Beg, the head of the Pakistani armed forces, to her office when she returned to Islamabad. He denied any knowledge of an agreement or a transfer of nuclear capabilities. Bhutto told us she was certain he was lying but was too weak politically to challenge the military. She took a half measure, ordering that no nuclear scientist be permitted to travel outside Pakistan without her approval, an order confirmed by one of her aides at the time. By the late 1970s, the United States and other governments were aware of Pakistan’s nuclear efforts and Khan’s progress in enriching uranium. Bhutto was right to feel vulnerable—she was ousted as prime minister less than a year later. By then, Khan had traveled to Iran to lay the groundwork for the country’s first uranium enrichment plant at Natanz. While the precise dates are unclear, subsequent investigations by the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) and others found that Khan’s first contact with Iran occurred in 1987 and that by the late 1980s Khan and his network were supplying nuclear technology to Iran’s fledgling program. Before the end of the decade, Khan had sent Iran over 2,000 components and assemblies for centrifuges to enrich uranium—a flow that continued until the mid-1990s. Khan’s network started with a handful of companies in Switzerland and Germany willing to exploit lax export controls. He also developed strong ties to engineers and other experts in Germany, the Netherlands, Switzerland, and the United Kingdom. Eventually he was producing components in factories in Malaysia and South Africa and maintained a shipping hub in Dubai.

During the 1990s, however, Khan’s smuggling operation remained under the radar of the United States, which was focused on the possibility of Russia providing nuclear secrets to Iran. In 1993, Bhutto became prime minister a second time. Within weeks, Khan was on her doorstep. In our interview, Bhutto recalled Khan asking her to make a side trip to North Korea during her state visit to China in 1994. She claimed he said he wanted help with “this nuclear thing.” When Bhutto asked what he meant, Khan said that he wanted North Korean expertise for a missile he was developing to carry a nuclear payload. Bhutto wanted to improve her standing with Pakistan’s military, so she agreed. “I thought the military would be very happy with me and would stop trying to destabilize my government,” she told us. The former prime minister maintained in our interviews that Pakistan paid for the designs for North Korea’s Nodong missile. She said she had ruled out providing nuclear technology to North Korea. Her testimony, however, was contradicted by Khan himself. During the mid-1990s, U.S. intelligence observed Khan making 13 trips to North Korea, often with shipments aboard Pakistani military aircraft. And in his 2004 confession, Khan admitted that he transferred nuclear technology to Iran, Libya, and North Korea, though he later retracted his statement. For North Korea, Khan’s assistance arrived at a critical moment. Like Pakistan, North Korea focused initially on processing plutonium from its two civilian reactors into fissile material for weapons. ... Khan provided North Korea with an alternate path to nuclear weapons. Unlike a reactor, centrifuges are small and can be concealed in underground facilities and tunnels inside mountains (something at which the North Koreans are quite skilled). These centrifuges allowed North Korea to continue developing a secret stockpile of fissile material despite the Agreed Framework and UN sanctions. Although North Korea has conducted multiple nuclear tests in recent years, international monitoring has not determined whether the fissile material comes from plutonium or HEU. But in 2010, the North Koreans surprised the world by inviting Siegfried Hecker, a leading U.S. nuclear expert, to visit a previously unknown installation holding 2,000 centrifuges. The North Koreans claimed the centrifuges were for low-grade enrichment to power a new reactor to produce electricity. But Hecker wrote that the facilities
Prime Minister Abe Shinzo will ask the United States and South Korea to conduct a planned joint military drill after the Pyeongchang Olympics without scaling it down in order to keep pressure on North Korea to give up its nuclear and missile development, a Japanese government source has said. The matter will be discussed when U.S. Vice President Mike Pence meets with Abe in Tokyo before heading to the opening ceremony of the games, and they are expected to agree on the need to conduct the drill as normal, the source said. Abe has been calling on the international community to maximize pressure on Pyongyang and reject dialogue unless the reclusive state ends provocations and shows actions toward denuclearization. (Kyodo, “Abe to U.S. and South Korea: Don’t Scale down Military Drill,” Japan Times, February 4, 2018) Prime Minister Abe Shinzo will ask South Korean President Moon Jae-in for support in evacuating Japanese citizens if a contingency breaks out on the Korean Peninsula, government sources said. The decision reflects Japan’s concern that escalating tensions could lead to a military clash between Washington and Pyongyang, possibly after the Winter Games conclude in Pyeongchang, the sources said. Abe will pay a two-day visit to South Korea and hold talks with Moon on the sidelines of the opening ceremony in Pyeongchang on February 9. It is unclear how Moon might respond. The two are expected to meet for 45 minutes in a hotel near the venue. Abe plans to explain why he feels an evacuation plan is urgently needed and to propose the start of working-level negotiations possibly involving the United States and other countries, the sources said. The Foreign Ministry estimates roughly 38,000 Japanese were residing in South Korea as of October 2016. “For the safety of the Japanese people, I will firmly request South Korea’s cooperation,” Abe told the Upper House budget committee two days ago. Tokyo has studied emergency plans to send chartered planes to Seoul and other cities and transport Japanese by land to the southern port city of Busan, where ships would take them to the Japanese mainland via the island of Tsushima in Nagasaki Prefecture. Many in the government believe that Self-Defense Force destroyers and aircraft, as well as the U.S. military, would be needed to transport large numbers of Japanese. Tokyo has told Seoul it would like to discuss the possibility of dispatching SDF personnel to South Korea for evacuations. Abe has said other possible topics include trilateral cooperation with the United States to rein in North Korea’s nuclear weapons program and the 2015 agreement with South Korea on the “comfort women” who were forced to work in Japan’s wartime military brothels. (Kyodo, Associated Press, Reuters, “Abe to Ask Moon for Evac Support in Case of Emergency on the “comfort women” who were forced to work in Japan’s wartime military brothels. (Kyodo, Associated Press, Reuters, “Abe to Ask Moon for Evac Support in Case of Emergency on...
Korean Peninsula,” *Japan Times*, February 3, 2018) Progressive South Korean President Moon Jae-in will meet with his conservative Japanese counterpart, Prime Minister Abe Shinzo, for talks at the Winter Olympics site on February 9, the day of the Opening Ceremonies. Until last week, it wasn’t even clear that Abe would attend. But the Trump administration intervened to ask him to go — not least because Vice President Pence will be traveling from Tokyo to Pyeongchang for the Opening Ceremonies. The White House “strongly urged” Abe to attend the ceremonies, a senior Japanese government official told the conservative Sankei Shimbun newspaper. Together, Abe and Pence will be able to send “a strong message to South Korea” not to be too conciliatory toward North Korea and also to abide by their bilateral agreements, the paper reported. This has sparked talk in Tokyo that Abe and Pence are going to Pyeongchang to “gang up” on Moon, who favors closer relations with North Korea as a way to bring Kim Jong Un’s regime in from the cold. Despite his efforts to include North Korea in the Olympics, Moon has publicly said he supports the “maximum pressure” approach espoused by the Trump and Abe administrations. (Anna Fifield, “Wounds Still Fresh between South Korea, Japan,” *Washington Post*, February 2, 2018, p. A-10)

North Korea is flouting sanctions by exporting coal, iron, steel and other banned commodities, earning nearly $200 million in revenue last year, a UN report said. A UN panel of experts also found evidence of military cooperation by North Korea to develop Syria's chemical weapons programs and to provide Myanmar with ballistic missiles. North Korea "continued to export almost all the commodities prohibited in the resolutions, generating nearly $200 million in revenue between January and September 2017," said the report by the experts seen by AFP. Coal shipments were delivered to China, Malaysia, South Korea, Russia and Vietnam by ships using "a combination of multiple evasion techniques, routes and deceptive tactics," said the report. Syria and Myanmar are continuing cooperation with North Korea's KOMID corporation, the country's main arms exporter, which is on a UN sanctions blacklist, the report said. The panel uncovered more than 40 previously unreported shipments from North Korea between 2012 and 2017 to front companies for Syria's Scientific Studies Research Council, also known as CERS, a key institute for Syria's chemical program. The investigations reveal "substantial new evidence" concerning Pyongyang's military cooperation with Damascus, including at least three visits by North Korean technicians to Syria in 2016. A visit by a North Korean technical delegation in August 2016 involved the "transfer of special resistance valves and thermometers known for use in chemical weapons programs," said the report. A member-state that was not named told the panel that North Korean "technicians continue to operate at chemical weapons and missile facilities at Barzei, Adra and Hama" in Syria, said the report. Syria however told the panel that there were no North Korean technicians in its territory and that the only experts it was hosting from the country were involved in sports. A member-state, which was not named, also notified the panel that Myanmar had received "ballistic missile systems from (North Korea) in addition to a range of conventional weapons, including multiple rocket launches and surface-to-air missiles". North Korean diplomats, in particular trade representatives, continue to provide logistical support for arms sales and help organize exchanges for military technicians, it said. While sanctions have been significantly broadened, this "expansion of the regime is yet to be matched by the requisite political will" to implement the measures, the experts said. (Carole Landry, “North Korea Flouts Sanctions, Earning $200 Million from Banned Exports: UN,” AFP, February 3, 2018)

NPR Briefing: “DEPUTY SECRETARY OF DEFENSE SHANAHAN: … The NPR also makes recommendations to keep our deterrent effective for our world today: namely, lowering the yield of some existing submarine-launched ballistic missile warheads and bringing back nuclear sea-based -- launched cruise missiles, a capability our nation had for decades. Neither recommendation requires developing new nuclear warheads. Neither will increase the size of our nuclear stockpile. They break no treaty. They align with our non-proliferation commitments. They strengthen American deterrence. Some will say any additional capability, no matter how measured, increases the chance of using one of these weapons. On the contrary, it is the exact opposite. The NPR states, and I quote, "the United States would only consider the use of nuclear weapons in extreme -- in extreme circumstances to defend the vital interests of the
**United States, its allies and partners.** The NPR clarifies long-standing policy that extreme circumstances could include significant nonnuclear strategic attacks. This clarification is stabilizing. It lowers the risk of nuclear use by anyone. The United States does not want to use nuclear weapons. We do want to maintain an effective deterrent to keep Americans and our allies and partners safe and secure. …

UNDER SECRETARY OF STATE FOR POLITICAL AFFAIRS SHANNON: …We know that other unfriendly regimes and enemies of our country put our lives at risk by pursuing nuclear weapons. North Korea continues its illicit nuclear weapons program and missile capabilities. Iran retains the technological capability to develop a nuclear weapon within one year of deciding to do so. The potential threat of non-state actors getting their hands on a nuclear weapon remains at the front of all of our minds. Nuclear terrorism is still a major threat in this century, and one we must work to mitigate at every opportunity.

**Because of the dangerous world we live in and our unwavering commitment to our allies, the 2018 Nuclear Posture Review focuses on strengthening extended deterrence. The United States has formal extended deterrence commitments that assure European, Asian and Pacific allies of our commitment to use nuclear force to protect them, if necessary. Ongoing, close collaboration with allies and partners is essential to deterring or defeating the common threats we face. This collaboration includes sustained dialogues and joint military exercises. But we also realize that every ally and partner faces a different threat environment. We will continue to work with them to tailor our assurance strategies in ways that are most effective for their specific situation. But let me be clear: The United States is committed to our allies under the U.S. nuclear umbrella. Our extended deterrence commitments are unwavering. We have the ability and will to fulfill them. Potential adversaries should not doubt our resolve. In addition, as the 2018 Nuclear Posture Review makes clear, the United States will hold accountable any state or non-state actor that supports terrorist efforts to obtain or employ a nuclear weapon.

**Important to this deterrence is maintaining our capabilities so that the United States can respond decisively across the full spectrum of potential nuclear and non-nuclear scenarios.** But, as this NPR makes clear, the United States will only consider the use of nuclear weapons in extreme circumstances to defend the vital interests of the United States, its allies and partners. The NPR also states that, and I quote, "the United States will not use or threaten to use nuclear weapons against non-nuclear weapons states that are party to the NPT and in compliance with their nuclear nonproliferation obligations." …Finally, this review also affirms that the United States will not resume nuclear explosive testing unless we find it necessary to ensure the stability and effectiveness of our nuclear arsenal. …

**MODERATOR:** Michael Gordon from the Wall Street Journal. Q: For -- a question for the DOD and DOE reps: The report is very explicit that you would contemplate the use of nuclear weapons in extreme circumstances, which could include significant non-nuclear strategic attack. This is stated, and the section reports made very explicit -- and also that you would contemplate the use of weapons, if there was a terrorist nuclear attack, against those that enabled it. The way this is being read is that the U.S. is prepared to use nuclear weapons if there's a cyberattack that would affect the population or do great damage to the infrastructure of our allies or of the United States. Is that the message you intended to send? Because that's how everyone's interpreting it. And could you please also give us the projected total dollar amount of this modernization for DOD and DOE? There are a lot of figures in here, but the dollar amount for this modernization isn't included. SEC. ROOD: With respect to U.S. nuclear declaratory policy of the United States, as articulated in this Nuclear Posture Review, is constant with that of the past. Again, it is that the United States would employ nuclear weapons only in extreme circumstances to defend the vital interests of the United States, allies and partners. Now the part of the declaratory policy that you are referring to is the circumstances under which the United States would contemplate the use of nuclear weapons, or what constituted extreme circumstances. And I think in that area, the context of an attack that does not involve nuclear weapons initially would be very important to take into account. It's been long-standing U.S. policy to maintain some ambiguity around the circumstances under which we would consider the use of nuclear weapons in response to a strategic, non-nuclear attack on the United States, and this NPR is explicit in saying, it is in our interests, it is part of reinforcing deterrence to maintain some ambiguity in those circumstances. With respect to cyber or other forms of attack, I think the context in which an attack occurred against the United States or allies would be very
important. As we sit here today, it's easy to dissect one action being disconnected from that in other fields, other domains. Whether that be air, sea, on land, or whether you would contemplate a hypothetical situation involving deployment of other forms of weapons of mass destruction, which are not nuclear weapons, such as biological weapons. And so I think what this NPR strives to do is to say, in the context of a non-nuclear attack on the United States or our allies that was strategic in nature, that imposed substantial impacts to our infrastructure, to our people, then we would consider that context in evaluating the appropriate response, perhaps to include nuclear weapons. … Q: Tony Bertuca from Inside Defense. Going to the nuclear sea-launched cruise missile, could you talk a little bit about the rationale for bringing that program back, how much that will cost, when that's expected to come online and what -- again, the rationale for bringing the program back?

SEC. ROOD: In the security environment that's discussed in the Nuclear Posture Review, one of the things that has been concerning is that, over the last 20 years, we've seen the growth of the role of nuclear weapons in some potential adversaries' doctrine, as well as growth in capabilities and planned growth over that time period. And so what was discussed in terms of the rationale in the NPR is that its overriding purpose -- the overriding purpose of our nuclear arsenal is deterrence and to assure allies and, as I mentioned, to hedge against uncertainty and, if necessary, provide a credible response capability. Within that, we've become concerned that we need a more flexible set of capabilities to -- in order to have tailored deterrence. There's no one-size-fits-all approach to deterrence, as you know, and we're not deterring a single person in a single circumstance. And so, therefore, a more flexible set of capabilities that is survivable, that is credible and can be tailored to the circumstances to maintain deterrence is the rationale behind looking at that capability.

Now, as mentioned, there are two supplementary capabilities that the NPR discusses. One, we've already discussed -- the submarine-launched ballistic missile. You're talking about a submarine-launched cruise missile. In that regard, what the NPR talks about is that we will begin a study of the appropriate way to pursue that and the specifics around the program in that area. And so, at this time, I can't quote you a specific time frame and dollar figure, because of the stage of that activity. But it's one of the supplementary capabilities that we think is very important to pursue, both due to the survivability of submarine-launched cruise missiles, the flexibility that that type of platform provides. And again, here, this would involve use of low-yield nuclear weapons. Low-yield nuclear weapons have been in the U.S. arsenal for decades. The difference here would be -- and, as you pointed out, they -- we formerly, in the United States, had the capability to fire cruise missiles from submarines armed with nuclear weapons. This would be to look at that capability again. … Q: Thanks. Patrick Tucker with Defense One. So the question of what constitutes extreme circumstances is, I think, what has some folks hung up, especially in the context of a cyber-physical attack on U.S. infrastructure. The National Academies has published a study on the possible effects of a cyber-physical attack on U.S. infrastructure, and the worst case scenario that they've come up with is a service disruption possibly lasting weeks. So the question is, is that sort of eventuality -- a limited service disruption possibly lasting weeks -- is that the sort of extreme circumstance that might possibly provoke a nuclear response? And, if not, if you're working with a different worst case scenario for a cyber-physical attack on U.S. infrastructure, potentially much greater than that, can you -- can you speak to that a little bit? SEC. ROOD: Sure. You know, starting at the top, the declaratory policy of the United States that we would consider the use of nuclear weapons in extreme circumstances -- the language on that that you will find in this Nuclear Posture Review is identical to what you will have found: that the United States would employ nuclear weapons only in extreme circumstances, to defend the vital interests of the United States, allies and partners. That -- those words that I just spoke are the same as that appeared in the 2010 Nuclear Posture Review released by President Obama's administration. So, in that sense, there is no difference in the declaratory policy. With respect to what constitutes extreme circumstances and the provision of other things, again, I think the context in which that occurs is important, and hypothetical examples of a cyberattack or biological weapons attack -- I think what's very important is there's no automaticity in this policy as to how the United States would respond. We would consider the circumstances under which that occurred. We would consider the context around that and the effects on the United States and our allies before determining what the appropriate response would be, whether that
involved nuclear weapons, or purely non-nuclear weapons. And so the difficulty with answering hypothetical questions is it's very hard to know what the circumstances surrounding that would be. For example, in the hypotheticals you cited, would that also involve the employment of biological weapons against the U.S. population or allies? Would it involve the use of chemical weapons against our people? Would it involve a conventional attack in other parts of the world? The context in which an attack occurred on the United States or allies would be how we would evaluate the appropriate response. But I want to point -- make one additional point that I forgot. I think it's very important, implied in your question, to address one thing. There is no lowering of the nuclear threshold in this Nuclear Posture Review. That threshold remains at an incredibly high level. There has been no diminution to that. And this document is explicit in stating there is nothing in this approach that is -- that will lower the nuclear threshold. Indeed, the capabilities and the type of approach that we're pursuing is intended to raise the nuclear threshold by making the type of punishment that we could employ against an attack on the United States so high that it would not be countenanced by an adversary. MODERATOR: Jeff Schogol Q: Thank you. On that theme, you had mentioned the Russian dogma of "escalate to de-escalate." They seem to feel that they can escape nuclear retaliation if they use low-yield nuclear weapons. I just want to make clear, is it -- is U.S. policy that, if the United States or if one of its allies is attacked by a nuclear weapon, regardless of the yield, there will be a nuclear response? SEC. ROOD: There -- U.S. nuclear doctrine has never involved automaticity in terms of response, and there is no automaticity in this current document. Our declaratory policy would be that we would consider the use of nuclear weapons only in extreme circumstances. ... MODERATOR: Ryan Browne from CNN. Q: Thank you. Just two quick ones: First, on North Korea, is the last one was in 2010 -- obviously, North Korea's made a lot of strides in its nuclear program, and you list 11 fielded or in-development nuclear delivery systems for North Korea. What, in this review, is kind of specifically tailored to North Korea, or focused on the North Korean threat? And I know we -- you've mentioned briefing Russia on this. Was China also briefed on this review? SEC. ROOD: With respect to North Korea, the capabilities in the nuclear triad that exist today, as well as the recapitalization that's discussed in the report, and some of these supplementary capabilities -- all of those things, in various circumstances, would have applicability in the type of hypothetical scenarios that we worry about with North Korea. Fortunately, some of the -- our concerns that we used to have a few years ago have become, quite frankly, not so hypothetical anymore, in terms of the threat that we face. And so I think, whether it's with North Korea and demonstrating that we have a range of options, that we have flexible options, that these are credible and can be employed, when necessary, I think, is very important to reinforcing deterrence. Certainly wouldn't want that regime or others to wrongly conclude that there's a lack of resolve on our part, should they threaten the use of nuclear weapons or use nuclear weapons against the United States. So I think, in this circumstance, having this more flexible set of capabilities that we can tailor to the circumstances, whether it be with North Korea or another, to reinforce that deterrence -- and this is a much more challenging activity than 20 years ago or more -- we've really got to watch out for that. And it's not just with North Korea. Others are similarly concerning to us. SEC. FREIDT: And we did brief China. (CROSSTALK) SEC. ROOD: Yes. Go ahead and take that. SEC. FREIDT: And we did -- we did brief China. Q: Also today, or... SEC. FREIDT: No, and with China, I would say we've long sought to have dialog with China to -- specifically to discuss and enhance our understanding of nuclear weapon issues, to help manage the risk of miscalculation, misperceptions. So, yep, we briefed them this morning. MODERATOR: (inaudible) Q: Yeah, yeah. Thank you very much. On North Korea nuclear issues, recently, in North Korea, Kim Jong-un said that the nuclear button is on his table, toward the United States. What is the United States doing to prevent North Korea's nuclear attack? And what is the U.S.'s final destination of all this? SEC. ROOD: Well, certainly, the Nuclear Posture Review talks about one of its aims, deterring North Korean nuclear attack. And, on that, we're very explicit that, clearly, these capabilities are intended to deter North Korea from a nuclear attack in the United States or our allies. Another element of our deterrent posture with North Korea is the ballistic missile defense system that the United States employs. One of the things that it does is it reduces the likelihood that North Korea would contemplate or use a ballistic
missile to attack the United States, knowing that we have a capability to defeat that. And, if North Korea would, in a hypothetical, launch a ballistic missile tipped with a nuclear weapon at the United States, that we intercepted, it's not the sort of thing that we would say, "Well, that's the end of the story. Let's go back to the way things were before." That kind of attack on the United States or our allies that we defeated is something that we would regard extremely seriously, for obvious reasons. And so ballistic missile defenses that are credible and effective are very important as part of our deterrent equation, both for the United States, as well as for our friends and allies around the world. And that's why you've seen us, over the years, in the United States Defense Department, not only deploy some of these capabilities on the home territory of our allies, where they host them, but also have our forces that are deployed there increasingly have those capabilities. Because the connection between our allies' security in an attack with shorter-range missiles, and that against the United States homeland, are increasingly being driven together. And we have to have an integrated set of capabilities, which is what we're pursuing, and we've requested money from the Congress both last year -- you will see that again in our budget proposal this year to the Congress -- for substantial funds for our ballistic missile defense system. Our nuclear capabilities are also very important in that deterrence equation: how we message, how we talk about the circumstances is also part of our messaging to North Korea. And you'll see some passages in the NPR speak directly to North Korea about our thinking in that regard.” (DoD, News Briefing on the 2018 Nuclear Posture Review by Patrick Shanahan, Deputy Secretary of Defense; Dan Brouillette, United States Deputy Secretary of Energy; Thomas Shannon, Under Secretary of State for Political Affairs; John Rood, Under Secretary of Defense For Policy; Anita Freidt, Deputy Assistant Secretary in the Bureau of Arms Control, Verification, and Compliance, U.S. State Department; Steve Erhart, Acting Under Secretary for Nuclear Security and NNSA Administrator, February 2, 2018)

2/?/18 Woodward: “The pressure campaign was effectively put on hold while the 2018 Winter Olympics were held in South Korea from February 9 to 25. ...General Dunford [Joint Chiefs of Staff chairman] learned that the Air Force had planned some research and design tests of its nuclear-capable ballistic missiles from California into the Pacific Ocean, scheduled right before and after the Olympics. They were the kind of tests that the United States pressuring North Korea to stop. They were provocative. He stepped in and the Air Force held off on the tests.” (Woodward, Fœar, p. 308)

2/4/18 DPRK FoMin spokesperson’s “answer to a question put by KCNA on February 4, as regards "State of the Union Address" made by Trump. In the "State of the Union Address", Trump described last year as a year fully recorded with "incredible progress and extraordinary success"- the year during which he pushed the American society and the world into disturbance through his reckless words and deeds as well as aggression moves dumbfounding the world public. This is indeed the height of Trump-style arrogance, arbitrariness and self-conceit. The whole world is deeply concerned, seeing as an omen of new disaster the Address of Trump who asserted "America First" and "unmatched power" based on nuclear weapons while forcing other countries to submit themselves to the U.S. chauvinistic interest. Trump also insisted upon the "maximum pressure" against our country, viciously slandering our most superior people-centered social system. However, it is no less than screams of Trump terrified at the power of the DPRK that has achieved the great historic cause of completing the state nuclear force and rapidly emerged as the strategic state recognized by the world, and it is purely a nasty perversity aimed to disturb the advance of inter-Korean relations. Trump even reveals his sinister intention to do something against us by relying on strength while talking about "American resolve." Our self-reliant defense capability with the nuclear force as its backbone will, however, completely deter Trump and his lackeys from showing off on the Korean peninsula. If Trump does not get rid of his anarchistic and dogmatic way of thinking, it will only bring about the consequence of further endangering security and future of the United States.” (KCNA, “DPRK Foreign Ministry Spokesperson Blasts Trump,” February 4, 2018)
North Korean factory workers and restaurant staff have been returning from China in droves since the United Nations ordered member states to send laborers home last year. North Korean “ghost ships” containing dead, or almost-dead, fishermen have been washing up on the shores of Japan after the country’s seafood industry was sanctioned, too. And even Kim Jong Un has admitted that the American-led “maximum pressure” campaign is hurting his country’s economy. The “life-threatening sanctions and blockade” were causing “difficult living conditions,” the North Korean leader said in a New Year’s address that repeatedly emphasized self-sufficiency. But the campaign to squeeze Kim and his cronies into denuclearization talks could already be having a tangible — and, from the perspective of Washington, undesirable — effect. “The sanctions will set back what has been basically a positive process — the development of markets,” said one regular visitor to Pyongyang. This will make it harder for money to flow within the private economy and as markets contract it will also make it harder for isolated North Koreans to get information from the outside world, said the visitor, who spoke on the condition of anonymity to avoid jeopardizing access to North Korea. The international sanctions imposed at the end of last year in response to North Korea’s intercontinental ballistic missile launches and nuclear test were designed to cut off key revenue earners for the regime. Together, the minerals, garment and seafood industries — all now sanctioned — accounted for about one-third of the country’s $3 billion annual export revenue. The tens of thousands of North Koreans working abroad for the regime, a practice now also banned, had been bringing in an estimated $500 million a year for Kim’s coffers. “This will have a big impact,” said Ro Hui-chang, who was in charge of North Korean construction workers in Russia until he defected in 2014. Even after international financial sanctions were imposed on North Korea, Ro said that he would hand-carry $1 million a month on flights back to Pyongyang.

“Construction work is good because it doesn’t require any investment” on North Korea’s part, he said. “You just send the workers and they’re ready to start building and making money the very next day.” The regime has been unable to feed the populace. As a result, the state has tolerated an increasing amount of market activity, allowing people to trade and earn their own livings to buy the food that the state can no longer provide. This trend has accelerated in the six years that Kim has been in power, with as much as half of the population now relying on markets instead of on the regime for their subsistence. With this increased economic independence have come other freedoms. Markets have become places for selling pirated films smuggled in from the outside world and for trading gossip, both of which help belie the regime propaganda that North Korea is a “paradise on earth.” Money earned through the markets sometimes is used to bribe guards and officials so North Koreans can travel or make more money, including through illicit activities — dealing in crystal meth, for instance, even to police officers, or renting out apartments by the hour during the daytime to young couples. This market economy has been the biggest force for change in modern North Korea. But it could now be under threat. “The sanctions place the massive numbers of ordinary people working in these industries at risk for loss of income,” said Kee Park, a Korean American neurosurgeon who travels to Pyongyang every year to perform surgeries. “The loss of income limits their ability to purchase food in the market to supplement [rations] as well as the economic opportunities.” In state-run industries such as garment manufacturing and fishing, the regime pockets much of the profits, but investors in the country say that people who work in such export-oriented industries were earning more than those in purely domestic businesses. As for those working abroad, while the regime keeps two-thirds of their wages, the laborers earn up to $100 a month, an astronomical sum compared with the single-digit salaries they would earn at home. These earnings have increased the amount of money in the private economy and have helped lessen reliance on the regime. “When industries are harmed by sanctions, there are also wage earners who are harmed because they’re out of work and have to go try to find work elsewhere,” said Andray Abrahamian, a fellow at the Pacific Forum of the Center for Strategic and International Studies, who has visited North Korea dozens of times as a business consultant. “So in that sense, there are consumers that are losing their power to consume.” But Cho Bong-hyun, a North Korea expert in the Industrial Bank of Korea’s Economic Research Institute in Seoul, thinks sanctions could have the opposite effect. By introducing more stress into the economy, they could encourage more adaptation from the regime and more entrepreneurialism from the people. (Anna Fifield, “Sanctions Imperil the Freedom Some N. Koreans Have Tasted,” Washington Post, February 5, 2018, p. A-8)
When North Korean dictator Kim Jong Un suggested in a New Year address that his country might be open to participating in the Winter Olympics, South Korea's president and top aides quickly convened to craft a friendly response. U.S. officials, however, weren't included in those consultations and, to their consternation, were notified just hours before Seoul announced its proposal to Pyongyang for negotiations. North Korea's surprise outreach and South Korea's opening to its northern rival have stirred tensions between Seoul and Washington--despite professed unity in public statements--as the allies work to present a common front in dealing with Pyongyang, according to senior U.S. and South Korean officials. "We're good today, but there are lots of policy tests that we have to manage in the days ahead and then after the Olympics," said one official familiar with the diplomatic process. "It's a challenging road." Differences were on public display last week when President Donald Trump, in his first State of the Union address, reiterated a call for tough sanctions on North Korea, while omitting mention of the inter-Korean talks and their most prominent outcome: Athletes from both Koreas will march under one flag when the Winter Olympics open in South Korea. The two allies drew starkly different conclusions from Kim's January 1 speech, according to people familiar with the matter. At the White House, officials were struck by the bellicose talk from Kim, who ordered the mass production of nuclear warheads and ballistic missiles and called for reunification of the Korean Peninsula, saying he would pursue "the final victory of the revolution." By contrast, in the South Korean presidential Blue House, Moon and his advisers were encouraged by Kim's openness to participating in the Olympics and discounted what they considered formulaic tough talk from the North. Seoul's subsequent outreach to Pyongyang, cutting the U.S. out of the decision-making process, left U.S. officials particularly frustrated because of Moon's repeated demands last year that the U.S. seek his consent before taking any pre-emptive military action against North Korea. Diplomats at the U.S. Embassy in Seoul, which sits across the street from South Korea's ministries of Foreign Affairs and Unification, expressed their displeasure to their South Korean counterparts, according to people familiar with the matter. South Korean officials told the Americans that the immediacy of the coming Winter Olympics left them little choice but to act quickly in response to Kim's speech, those people said. In an effort to chart a path forward, the U.S. and South Korea have taken steps to protect their alliance -- moves that also have been marked by strains. Trump spoke with Moon by phone on January 4, and the two agreed to postpone joint annual military exercises until after the end of the Winter Paralympics on March 18. But U.S. officials were still rankled by the fact that Moon had in December publicly presented the idea of a delay as a South Korean request awaiting U.S. agreement. U.S. officials said they had actually anticipated the request and quickly signaled their willingness to Seoul. As the divide threatened to widen, Moon in a January 10 press conference acknowledged a policy gap with the U.S., and sought to ease the strain by giving Trump credit for creating the opening for the inter-Korean dialogue... Trump thanked Moon for the compliment in a follow-up phone call--the second of two between the leaders in January. Then, in an unannounced mid-January meeting in San Francisco, Lt. Gen. H.R. McMaster, Trump's national security adviser, emphasized to his South Korean and Japanese counterparts the importance of keeping up pressure on North Korea, according to people familiar with the matter. McMaster said it was necessary to proceed with exercises and maintain unity in the face of Pyongyang's attempts to drive a wedge between the U.S. and its Asian allies, the people said. Seeking to keep relations on track, the U.S. canceled a planned February port visit to South Korea by an attack submarine, the U.S.S. Texas, to assure Seoul that Washington wouldn't upset the atmosphere for inter-Korean detente, these people said. The U.S. also gave South Korea a last-minute sanctions waiver on January 31 to send athletes to a North Korean ski resort for joint training--part of the two Koreas' Olympics agreement. Easing U.S. concerns, Seoul agreed with Washington to proceed with the joint exercises as originally envisioned after the Paralympics. However, the U.S. could ratchet up or down public statements on these exercises, depending on the status of the inter-Korean dialogue and North Korea's actions. Chatter in Washington that some Trump administration officials are considering a limited "bloody nose" strike on North Korea, together with the withdrawal last week of Victor Cha to fill the yearlong vacancy as U.S. ambassador to Seoul, has also led to confusion and frustration inside South Korea's government, according to people familiar with the matter. "This city was once completely destroyed. No Korean is interested in seeing that happen again--period," said an official at South Korea's Blue House. If there is war, the official said, "The cost will have to be borne by us." (Jonathan Cheng
A group of Democratic senators is warning President Trump that he lacks the “legal authority” to carry out a preemptive strike on North Korea, amid questions over whether the White House is considering a risky “bloody nose” attack. In a letter to be sent to Trump on Monday, the 18 senators said they are “deeply concerned about the potential consequences of a preemptive military strike on North Korea and the risks of miscalculation and retaliation.” They emphasized that it is an “enormous gamble” to believe that such an action, even if it were modest in scope, would not provoke an escalation. “Moreover, without congressional authority, a preventative or preemptive U.S. military strike would lack either a constitutional basis or legal authority,” the senators wrote in the letter organized by Sen. Martin Heinrich (D-N.M.), a member of the Senate Armed Services Committee. Congressional aides said the letter was prompted by the circumstances surrounding the sudden derailment of the White House’s original choice for ambassador to South Korea, a post that has remained vacant since Trump took office. “We ask that you provide a clear reasoning and justification for his removal from consideration,” the senators wrote. The others who signed the letter are: Benjamin L. Cardin (Md.), Jack Reed (R.I.), Tim Kaine (Va.), Patty Murray (Wash.), Christopher A. Coons (Del.), Elizabeth Warren (Mass.), Edward J. Markey (Mass.), Brian Schatz (Hawaii), Jeff Merkley (Ore.), Bernie Sanders (I-Vt.), Jeanne Shaheen (N.H.), Catherine Cortez Masto (Nev.), Kamala D. Harris (Calif.), Mazie Hirono (Hawaii), Sheldon Whitehouse (R.I.), Chris Van Hollen (Md.). (David Nakamura, “Democratic Senators: Trump Lacks ‘Legal Authority’ for Preemptive ‘Bloody Nose’ Strike on North Korea,” Washington Post, February 5, 2018)

Vice President Pence departs today for a five-day trip to Japan and South Korea, a visit to Asia intended to focus almost entirely on rallying allies to ratchet up their pressure on Kim Jong Un’s repressive regime, as well as directly pressing North Korea to stop its nuclear ambitions. The trip, White House officials said, has two main goals. “The first one is that we are seeing unprecedented cooperation from the international community from the maximum pressure strategy targeting North Korea,” said Jarrod Agen, Pence’s communications director. “The vice president will deliver a message that the maximum pressure strategy is only going to intensify.” The second goal is to ensure that the Olympics don’t turn into an opportunity for North Korea to burnish its image on the world stage. In January, North and South Korea agreed to try to resolve their tensions through dialogue, marking the first negotiations between the two countries since 2015 and frustrating some in the Trump administration as it attempts to take an even more hardline stance against the regime. “We’re not going to let the North Korea propaganda machine hijack the messaging of the Olympics,” Agen said. “The vice president will remind the world that anything the North Koreans do during the Olympics is a charade to disguise the reality of the oppression inside North Korea.” (Ashley Parker, “Pence Leaves for Asia, Focused on Increasing Pressure on North Korea,” Washington Post, February 5, 2018)

In a message sent last night via a cross-border communication channel, North Korea told South Korea that it would send a high-level delegation from February 9-11, the South’s Unification Ministry said. It said the North’s delegation includes Kim Yong-nam and three other officials but gave no further details. Serving as president of the Presidium of the Supreme People’s Assembly, Kim has often been described as the North’s nominal head of state because he receives visiting foreign leaders, approves the credentials of ambassadors and represents North Korea on state visits abroad. The presidential office Cheong Wa Dae welcomed Kim’s visit, saying it showed the North’s willingness to improve inter-Korean ties because Kim is the highest-level North Korean official to visit South Korea since the inauguration of Moon Jae-in. “We believe North Korea showed its sincere and earnest efforts to improve inter-Korean ties and make the Pyeongchang Olympics successful,” Cheong Wa Dae spokesman Kim Eui-kyeom said during a press briefing. The spokesperson also left open the possibility that Kim would meet with South Korea’s President Moon, saying the presidential office is preparing for a “communication opportunity” and its staff
is discussing the level and agenda of the potential talks. (Yeo Jun-suk, “Kim Yong-nam: Ceremonial Leader of Reclusive Regime,” Korea Herald, February 5, 2018)

North Korea has appointed a senior defense official to lead the military's powerful General Political Bureau after dismissing its former head following an inspection, the National Intelligence Service (NIS) said in a parliamentary briefing. Kim Jong-gak, a vice chief of the Ministry of the People's Armed Forces, was picked as the director of the bureau, while Hwang Pyong-so and Kim Won-hong, its former head and vice chief, respectively, have been dismissed. The NIS also reported that the chances are high that the North will unveil an assortment of its missiles during a military parade reportedly scheduled for February 8, according to Rep. Kang Seok-ho of the main opposition Liberty Korea Party, who attended the briefing. "The North's party Organization and Guidance Department had led an inspection in the bureau for three months from October," an NIS official was quoted by Kang as saying. "As a result of the inspection, Hwang was dismissed from the bureau chief post, and he is presumed to be currently taking ideological education at a high-level party school." In November, the NIS told the assembly that the North conducted the rare inspection into the bureau due to its "impure attitude" for the first time in two decades. The bureau is seen as an influential military institution, as it controls the crucial personnel management of other defense establishments. During today's briefing, the NIS restated that Tunnel 3 of the North's Punggye-ri test site in its northeast is available for another test. "Tunnel 2 has been left unattended since the sixth nuclear test (in September), while excavation work is under way at Tunnel 4," the NIS said. "Tunnel 3 is ready for a test at any time." It noted, too, that the North's five-mega-watt nuclear reactor in its main Yongbyon nuclear facility is in normal operation at the moment. "The reactor has been operating for two years. So we are watching for the possibility of reprocessing (spent fuel rods)," the NIS was quoted by Rep. Lee Wan-young of the main opposition party, as saying. Also at the briefing, the NIS said the North has been trying to hack into the South's cryptocurrency exchange to steal virtual money. "Last year, (the North) stole passwords of members of the local cryptocurrency exchange by sending hacking emails to them," the agency said. "The exchange has lost cyber money worth tens of billions of won." (Yonhap, "N. Korea Appoints Top Defense Official to Lead Its Military’s General Political Bureau,” February 5, 2018)

Vice President Mike Pence on Monday did not rule out contact with North Korean officials when he attends the Winter Olympics in South Korea this week, saying, “I have not requested a meeting, but we'll see what happens.” Speaking to reporters in Alaska during a stopover on his way to Japan and South Korea, Pence reiterated the administration’s stance that “all options are on the table” in confronting North Korea about its nuclear weapons and missile programs. He said part of the purpose of his visit was to tell “the truth about North Korea at every stop.” “We’re traveling to the Olympics to make sure that North Korea doesn’t use the powerful symbolism and the backdrop of the Winter Olympics to paper over the truth about their regime,” he said, calling it “a regime that oppresses its own people, a regime that threatens nations around the world, a regime that continues its headlong rush to develop nuclear weapons and ballistic missiles.” He added: “President Trump has said he always believes in talking, but I haven’t requested any meeting. But we’ll see what happens.” Secretary of State Rex W. Tillerson made strikingly similar remarks yesterday during a visit to Peru. “With respect to the vice president’s trip to the Olympics and whether or not there would be an opportunity for any kind of a meeting with North Korea, I think we’ll just see,” Tillerson said. But Pence’s potentially conciliatory comments came as North Korea used its state news media to issue a series of caustic, personal attacks on Trump and his State of the Union speech last week, in which he assailed the North’s “reckless pursuit of nuclear weapons.” KCNA warned the United States against taking such military action: “Dolt-like Trump should know that his backbone would be broken, to say nothing of ‘bloody nose,’ and the empire of America would go to the hell and the short history of the U.S. would end forever, the moment he destroys even a single blade of grass on this land. Rodong Sinmun, said the State of the Union address showed that Trump was “a lunatic.” (Gerry Mullany, “Pence Doesn’t Rule out Meeting North Koreans at Olympics,” New York Times, February 6, 2018)
Mr. Vice President, Elise Labott with CNN. Thank you. Today in Peru, Secretary of State Rex Tillerson was asked about whether there might be any talks with the U.S. delegation and the North Korean delegation. And this morning, we were told by the White House, “No.” Secretary Tillerson said, “We’ll see.” He was really noncommittal. I mean, he has favored diplomacy. There has been a relative period of calm from North Korea that this administration has been looking for. Do you envision any communication with North Korea, even if not yourself on this trip? And if not, how do you see this, kind of — you know, North Korea coming to the Olympics and this relative period of calm moving diplomacy forward? Thank you. PENCE: Well, first and foremost, President Trump asked me to travel to the region for several reasons. Number one, to strengthen the relationship between the United States and our allies in Japan and South Korea. We’ll be meeting in the coming days with Prime Minister Abe, with President Moon, and we’ll be talking about the strength of our alliance. And I look forward to reinforcing the important priority that President Trump and the United States places on the relationship with these two nations. Secondly, we’ll collectively be reiterating our commitment, between the United States, Japan, South Korea, and a broad range of allies and partners around the world to continue to isolate North Korea economically and diplomatically until they abandon their nuclear and ballistic missile ambitions. All options are on the table. But we will reiterate this week — standing beside Prime Minister Abe, standing beside President Moon — the solidarity of all these nations, and nations around the world, to continue to bring maximum pressure on an increasing basis on the rogue regime in North Korea to achieve the global objective of a denuclearization of the Korean Peninsula. Lastly, I’m traveling to the Olympics with my wife and with our delegation certainly to cheer on American athletes, but also, quite frankly, we’re traveling to the Olympics to make sure that North Korea doesn’t use the powerful symbolism and the backdrop of the Winter Olympics to paper over the truth about their regime. A regime that oppresses its own people. A regime that threatens nations around the world. A regime that continues its headlong rush to develop nuclear weapons and ballistic missiles and use those to threaten its neighbors and even threaten the United States of America. We’ll be telling the truth about North Korea at every stop. We’ll be ensuring that whatever cooperation that’s existing between North and South Korea today on Olympic teams does not cloud the reality of a regime that must continue to be isolated by the world community, and it must be brought to a place where it ends its provocations, it ends its development and possession of nuclear weapons and ballistic missile weapons. With regard to any interaction with the North Korean delegation, I have not requested a meeting, but we’ll see what happens. President Trump has — Q Are you saying that, if an opportunity presented itself, sir, that you might avail yourself to, at least, greet any North Korean official that’s there and — PENCE: Well, let me say, President Trump has said be always believes in talking, but I haven’t requested any meetings. But we’ll see what happens. But my message — whatever the setting, whoever is present — will be the same. And that is that North Korea must once and for all abandon its nuclear weapons program and ballistic missile ambitions. And it must accede to the wishes not only of nations across the region and the United States, but nations across the world, to really abandon those ambitions and enter the family of nations. North Korea can have a better future than the militaristic path and the path of provocation and confrontation that it’s on. Better for its own people, better for the region, and better for peace. ... Q Yeah, (inaudible.) Last time you made this trip to Japan, North Korea launched a ballistic missile. Are you seeing any indications at this time of — or, it seems to be, there may be a cooling off or some sort of rapprochement between the North and the South. Are you seeing any indications of any provocations from the North around the Games? And if not, why not? PENCE: Well, we know that the North is planning a major military parade, I think, the day before the Olympic Games, which sends a very different message than the message of cooperation and friendship that they’re projecting to much of the world. I’ll be visiting with our forces in Japan. I’m here at Elmendorf Air Force Base, and we’re simply going to communicate a message of American strength and a message of American resolve. And not just American resolve, because I’ve traveled throughout the region — in Japan, and in South Korea. We will be expressing the resolve of nations, allies, partners across the region and across the world that the time has come for North Korea to once and for all abandon its nuclear and ballistic missile ambitions, to set aside those programs and embrace a better future. It is an urgent message. It’s a message that I’ll be delivering in every setting that I’m given an opportunity. The world needs to hear, again and again, the truth about what North Korea is today, ...
the oppression of its people, the disregard of human rights, the threats and provocations across the region and across the world that come from its nuclear and ballistic missile ambitions. But the world also needs to hear that, if they will choose a different path, there’s a better future for the people of North Korea and the people of the Korean Peninsula with a nuclear-free future.” (White House, Press Gaggle by Vice President Pence, Joint Base Elmendorf-Richardson Anchorage, February 6, 2018)

2/6/18

U.S. launches Trident SLBM off California coast.

2/7/18

Kim Jong-un’s sister Kim Yo-jong will come to South Korea as part a high-level delegation for the Pyeongchang Winter Olympics, the Ministry of Unification said Wednesday. Headed by its ceremonial head of state Kim Yong-nam, the 22-member delegation also includes Choe Hwi, chairman of the National Sports Guidance Committee, and Ri Son-gwon, chairman of the Committee for the Peaceful Reunification of the Country. The move will likely put South Korea in a tricky position, as both Kim and Choe are subject to sanctions imposed on North Korea. Kim, the younger sister of leader Kim and vice director of the Propaganda and Agitation Department of the Workers’ Party of Korea, is under the US’ unilateral sanctions. Choe Hwi is on the US as well as the UN sanctions list that includes a travel ban. How the North’s high-level delegation will travel to the South is also a matter of concern, as taking a ferry or flight could violate sanctions against the communist state imposed by the UN, the US or South Korea. There are speculations that Pyongyang’s high-level delegation will travel to Seoul by Air Koryo, North Korea’s state-owned carrier, which would be in violation of US sanctions. A sanction was placed against Air Koryo in December for its links to weapons proliferation and foreign currency earnings for the reclusive regime. “For Kim, who is 91 years old, it would be too tough to travel by land. He will probably visit South Korea by air,” former South Korean Unification Minister Jeong Se-hyun said in a radio interview yesterday. Seoul’s Foreign Ministry maintains that it will not stoke any controversy with regards to sanctions, saying it is closely coordinating with the US and the international community on the matter. The sanctions against North Korea were already temporarily lifted in two cases to facilitate Pyongyang’s participation in the Olympics. South Korean athletes flew to the North’s Masikryong Ski Resort for joint ski training on a chartered Asiana Airlines plane after the US agreed to make an exception regarding sanctions. Current US sanctions on North Korea prohibit airplanes from landing on American territories within 180 days of taking off from North Korea. North Korea’s 140-member art troupe took the ferry Mangyongbong-92 to South Korea and is using it as accommodation here, which is in violation of South Korea’s sanctions imposed on May 24, 2010, to punish the North’s sinking of a South Korean warship. The sanctions ban inter-Korean exchanges and North Korean ships from making a port call in the South. (Ock Hyun-ju, “N.K. Leader’s Sister Kim Yo-jong to Come to S. Korea This Week,” Korea Herald, February 7, 2018) North Korea has requested South Korea provide additional fuel for its vessel currently docked in the South, as it serves as accommodation for its art troupe visiting the Seoul, South Korea’s Ministry of Unification said, in a move likely to present the South with complications linked to international sanctions. North Korea’s Mangyongbong-92, serving as both means of transportation and accommodation for the 140-member Samjiyon art troupe has been docked at the South Korean eastern port of Mukho since its arrival yesterday. “The North has asked the South to provide fuel (for the ship). The government is currently reviewing the request,” Baik Tae-hyun, ministry spokesman, told a press briefing. (Jung Min-kyung, “N.K. Asks S. Korea to Provide Fuel for Ship That Transported Art Troupe,” Korea Herald, February 7, 2018)

Vice President Pence said the Trump administration plans to roll out its harshest sanctions yet against North Korea during a news conference in Japan. “I’m announcing that the United States of America will soon unveil the toughest and most aggressive round of economic sanctions on North Korea ever — and we will continue to isolate North Korea until it abandons its nuclear and ballistic missile programs once and for all,” Pence said, speaking alongside Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe at his official residence. (Ashley Parker and Anna Fifield, “North Korea to Face Harshest U.S. Sanctions Ever, Pence Vows,” Washington Post, February 7, 2018)
Jo Yong Sam, department director general of the Foreign Ministry of the DPRK, answer to a question put by KCNA “as regards the fact that U.S. authorities say this or that over the issue of contact between the DPRK’s delegation participating in the opening ceremony of the 23rd Winter Olympics and the U.S. vice-president: On Tuesday a spokesperson for the U.S. Department of State told a reporter over the possible contact between the DPRK’s delegation participating in the opening ceremony of the 23rd Winter Olympics and the U.S. vice-president that the U.S. evidently has no plan to contact with the DPRK during and after the Olympics. U.S. Vice-President Pence, too, said that he didn't press for any contact with the DPRK's delegation and asked the south Korean authorities to fix a schedule not to encounter the delegation. And he claimed that they would see what is happening. This is the height of sarcasm. We have never begged for dialogue with the U.S. nor in the future, too. Explicitly speaking, we have no intention to meet with the U.S. side during the stay in south Korea. Our delegation's visit to south Korea is only to take part in the Olympics and hail its successful holding. We are not going to use such sports festival as the Winter Olympics as a political lever. There is no need to do so. The U.S. had better act with discretion, well aware that its imprudent word and deeds will only show itself in a more awkward position.” (KCNA, “DPRK Delegation Has No Intention to Meet U.S. Side,” February 8, 2018)

A day before the opening ceremony of the Pyeongchang Winter Olympics, North Korea held a military parade in Pyongyang, with intercontinental ballistic missiles displayed in the presence of North Korean leader Kim Jong-un. ICBM-class Hwasong-14 and -15 missiles – which were successfully test-fired last year – were shown alongside Hwasong-12 intermediate-range ballistic missiles and Pukkuksong-2, solid-fuel medium-range ballistic missiles, according to footage of the parade, which the South Korean military said it believed started at 11:30 a.m. Some 13,000 soldiers are thought to have participated in the military event at Kim Il-sung Square in central Pyongyang. Troops marched in formation while Kim Jong-un watched from a balcony alongside his wife Ri Sol-ju, who made a rare appearance at the public event. “Invasive forces cannot infringe upon or harass the republic’s sacred dignity and autonomy even by 0.001 millimeters,” said Kim, describing the parade as an opportunity to show North Korea’s emergence as the “world’s military power.” (Yeo Jun-suk, “ICBM Shown at N.K. Military Parade,” Korea Herald, February 8, 2018)

Elleman: “North Korea’s much anticipated military parade on February 8, the 70th anniversary of the Korean People’s Army, was smaller in scale than previous parades, but offered some insights into the North’s growing WMD program. While no new long-range ballistic missiles were unveiled, there was one new solid-fuel, short-range ballistic missile (SRBM) on parade. The size and external features of the new SRBM suggests that it is based on the Russian Iskander (9K720) ballistic missile, though it also shares many features found on South Korea’s Hyunmoo-2 ballistic missile. Additionally, this new missile does appear to be slightly larger than North Korea’s existing solid-fuel, short-range missile system—the Toksa (SS-21)—so would presumably have a longer range, making it roughly equivalent to the Iskander or Hyunmoo-2 systems. Without further details it is impossible to determine its performance characteristics or origins. It is notable, however, that the missiles seen in the parade have data-cable covers that run alongside the exterior surface and extend well into what is believed to be the warhead section, which makes little sense. The cables are used to transmit instructions from the guidance unit (located at the top of the motor, but below of the warhead section) to the steering mechanisms at the back end of the missile. The cables on an Iskander are much shorter, terminating where one would expect it to, at the guidance unit. The new missiles are carried in pairs atop four-axle trucks, which are unlike those that support the Russian Iskander. Of the long-range ballistic missiles displayed, there were four Hwasong-15 intercontinental ballistic missiles (ICBMs) carried on their nine-axle transporter-erector-launchers (TELs). The two-stage, liquid-fuel Hwasong-15 has only been flight tested once, but is assessed to be capable of delivering a nuclear weapon to any target within the continental United States. Additional tests are needed to establish the Hwasong-15’s performance, reliability, and accuracy. North Korea has also yet to demonstrate that it can fashion a warhead that can survive the extreme heat and vibrations of re-entry into the atmosphere. It is curious that only four Hwasong-15 TELs were on display. North Korea imported six WS-51200 vehicles from China,
transforming each of them into a TEL. To carry the giant Hwasong-15, engineers had to add an extra axle, for a total of nine. Perhaps North Korea’s remaining two WS-51200 platforms have yet to be modified to carry this large missile. Regardless, it appears for now that North Korea has a shortage of TELs, a conclusion that is reinforced by the fact that the three Hwasong-14 missiles were conveyed on tractor-trailers, not TELs. Also on display were six Hwasong-12 intermediate-range ballistic missiles (IRBMs), each carried on six-axle TELs, and six solid-fuel Pukguksong-2 medium-range ballistic missiles. The Hwasong-12 can reach targets as far as Guam and has been flight tested six times, the first three tests failed and the last two test launches overflew Japan before crashing into the Pacific Ocean. It may already be deployed to military units, though more development and validation testing are needed to quantify its reliability and accuracy, details that may be less important to the Kim regime. The Pukguksong-2 has been test fired just two times. Interestingly, the parade did not include the TELs carrying large launch canisters that were unveiled last year, nor did it feature the KN-08, KN-14, Musudan, Nodong, or any of North Korea’s many Scud-variants. The absence of the Musudan, which failed seven of its first eight launch attempts, suggests that the design has been shelved for now. The missing KN-08 and KN-14, which are presumed to be powered by the same Isyaev 4D10 engine used by Musudan, is not entirely surprising given the technical challenges posed by this more sophisticated Russian engine.” (Michael Elleman, “North Korea’s Military Day Parade: One New Missile Unveiled,” 38North, February 8, 2018)

The North Korean delegation to the Winter Olympics in Pyeongchang includes an apparatchik who has been blacklisted by the UN Security Council. Sports official Choe Hwi (64) was blacklisted in June last year for his role in directing propaganda. Choe is the eldest son of former Construction Minister Choe Jae-ha, a close aide to regime founder Kim Il-sung. North Korean officials on the blacklist have had their overseas assets frozen and been banned from traveling to any UN member state. If South Korea welcomes him it will be in direct breach of the sanctions.

"The matter is under discussion because we can get an exemption from the UNSC Sanctions Committee," a Foreign Ministry official here said. Kim Yo-jong is on a separate U.S. sanctions list, which the Treasury Department issued last January over the North's human rights abuse. The department says the Workers Party's Propaganda and Agitation Department, where she has worked as a vice director, is restricting information and brainwashing North Korean people. Ri Son-gwon is also not blacklisted, but he is thought to be the right-hand man of Kim Yong-chol, the director of the United Front Department, who masterminded the sinking of the South Korean Navy corvette Cheonan in March 2010. (Ahn Jun-yong, “Blacklisted Apparatchik on N. Korean Olympic Delegation,” Chosun Ilbo, February 8, 2018)

KCNA: “Respected Supreme Leader Kim Jong Un made a congratulatory speech at the military parade for celebrating the 70th founding anniversary of the Korean People's Army (KPA). In his speech he said February 8 when President Kim Il Sung founded the KPA, regular revolutionary armed forces, is a historic day of great significance in building the revolutionary armed forces and accomplishing the revolutionary cause of Juche, like April 25 when the President founded the Korean People's Revolutionary Army (KPA). The KPA is the revolutionary army which inherited the traditions of the anti-Japanese struggle with the indomitable revolutionary spirit, rich fighting experience and superb tactics of the KPA, he said. Thanks to the foundation of the Juche-based regular army, the DPRK has proudly emerged the most dignified people's country with its own strong military guarantee from the first days of its birth and it could defeat the imperialist aggression forces boasting of being "the strongest" in the world and achieve the great victory in the Fatherland Liberation War, he added. ...The People's Army should remain intensely loyal to the leadership of the Workers' Party of Korea (WPK). It should be the first death-defying corps and the first lifeguards defending the Central Committee of the WPK with arms, entrusting its destiny to the WPK. Under the present situation in which the U.S. and its vassal forces make a fuss around the Korean Peninsula, the People's Army should keep high alert and step up combat preparations. And thus it should restrain the aggressors from violating or making a mockery of the dignity and sovereignty of our inviolable country even 0.001 mm. The People's Army should establish blade-like military discipline and more thoroughly take on the appearance as befits the
Vice President Mike Pence avoided encountering North Korea's ceremonial leader Kim Yong-nam during a reception dinner ahead of the opening ceremony of the Pyeongchang Winter Olympics, underscoring chilly relations between Washington and Pyongyang. The two neither faced each other nor shook hands. Pence, who arrived at the reception late, left the venue after a five-minute stay, according to pool reports. Unlike Pence, Abe shook hands with the North's titular head and chatted briefly with him. The details of their conversation were unknown. (Yonhap, “Pence Avoids Encountering Nominal N. Korean Head of State,” February 9, 2018) North Korea must “put denuclearization on the table and take concrete steps with the world community to dismantle, permanently and irreversibly, their nuclear and ballistic missile programs,” Pence said after a meeting with Moon. “Then, and only then, will the world community consider negotiating and making changes in the sanctions regime that’s placed on them today.” Abe Shinzo, prime minister of Japan, asked Moon to hold the exercises soon after the Games end, but Moon told Abe not to meddle in South Korea’s “sovereignty and internal affairs,” South Korean officials said. “Kim Jong-un has no intention of giving up his nuclear weapons,” said Cheon Seong-whun, a former presidential secretary for security strategy and now a visiting research fellow at the Asan Institute for Policy Studies in Seoul. “With his summit proposal, he seeks to incite friction between Seoul and Washington by widening their policy gap.” Moon cannot rush for a summit meeting given Washington’s deep misgivings and because “South Koreans are not as enthused about another summit meeting with North Korea as they used to,” Cheon added. A senior analyst at the Sejong Institute in South Korea, Cheong Seong-chang, agreed that Kim’s latest overtures were aimed at easing its isolation and the impact of sanctions. But South Korea also needed to ease tensions, especially given Trump’s threat to take a military option, he said. “It will not be wise for President Moon to reject dialogue with the North and do nothing but stick to sanctions for the sake of the alliance with the United States,” Cheong said. “South Korea will suffer the most if miscalcation or hostility drives the North and the United States into an armed clash.” The main political opposition, the conservative Liberty Korea Party, warned that Moon was duped by the North’s “false peace offensives.” Moon’s governing Democratic Party heartily welcomed the prospect of an inter-Korean summit meeting. A party spokeswoman, Kim Hyo-eun, went so far as to call for the reopening of a joint factory park in Kaesong. (Choe Sang-hun, “Invitation to South Korea May Undercut the U.S.,” New York Times, February 11, 2018, p. A-1)

The North rescinded its request that the South refuel the Mangyongbong-92, and the ferry will return home February 10, Seoul's unification ministry said. (Yonhap, “N. Korea Rescinds Fuel request for Ferry,” February 9, 2018)

2/10/18 Rogin: “Despite the mutual chilliness between U.S. and North Korean officials in South Korea last week, behind the scenes real progress was made toward a new diplomatic opening that could result in direct talks without preconditions between Washington and Pyongyang. This window of opportunity was born out of a new understanding reached between the White House and the president of South Korea. Vice President Pence, in an interview aboard Air Force Two on the way home from the Winter Olympics in Pyeongchang, told me that in his two substantive conversations with South Korean President Moon Jae-in during his trip, the United States and South Korea agreed on terms for further engagement with North Korea — first by the South Koreans and potentially with the United States soon thereafter. The frame for the still-nascent diplomatic path forward is this: The United States and its allies will not stop imposing steep and escalating costs on the Kim Jong Un regime until it takes clear steps toward
denuclearization. But the Trump administration is now willing to sit down and talk with the regime while that pressure campaign is ongoing. Pence called it “maximum pressure and engagement at the same time.” That’s an important change from the previous U.S. position, which was to build maximum pressure until Pyongyang made real concessions and only then to engage directly with the regime. “The point is, no pressure comes off until they are actually doing something that the alliance believes represents a meaningful step toward denuclearization,” Pence said. “So the maximum pressure campaign is going to continue and intensify. But if you want to talk, we’ll talk.” Pence and Moon worked this out during their bilateral meeting [February 8] at the Blue House and their joint viewing of speed skating heats in Pyeongchang on [this] evening. Pence conferred with President Trump every day he was in Asia. Before these meetings, the Trump and Moon administrations were not aligned on whether Seoul’s new engagement with Pyongyang should continue after the Olympics end. That dissonance showed just before their first meeting, when Moon said he wanted Olympic engagement to lead to real negotiations while Pence talked only about the pressure track. But inside the meeting, there was a breakthrough. Pence told Moon the international community must not repeat the mistakes of the past by giving North Korea concessions in exchange for talking. Pence asked Moon for his idea of how this engagement could be different. Moon assured Pence he would tell the North Koreans clearly that they would not get economic or diplomatic benefits for just talking — only for taking concrete steps toward denuclearization. Based on that assurance, Pence felt confident he could endorse post-Olympic engagement with Pyongyang. “I think it is different from the last 20 years,” Pence said, I asked him what exact steps Pyongyang would have to take to get real sanctions relief. “I don’t know,” he said. “That’s why you have to have talks.” The initial move the United States wants is for North Korea to put denuclearization on the table and take steps toward it, though that is not a condition for preliminary talks. That may be a bridge too far for the Kim regime, which is adamant that the international community accept its nuclear status. Pyongyang is also sure to want concessions from Washington, such as a delay in U.S.-South Korean military exercises, a non-starter for the alliance. There are other spoilers that could torpedo the new opening. In Tokyo, Pence announced new sanctions on North Korea that he promised would be the toughest ever, due to be unveiled soon. In response, the Kim regime may resume testing its nuclear and missile programs, as it has done after past Olympic detentes. That would halt the diplomatic progress in its tracks. Moon is working hard to prevent that from happening. He is entertaining a North Korean offer to visit Pyongyang. He is also urging the North Koreans to sit down with the United States at the earliest opportunity. “Moon told me at the skating rink that he told [the North Koreans], ‘You’ve got to talk to the Americans,’ ” Pence said. The idea of “talks about talks” is not new. In fact, Secretary of State Rex Tillerson has raised the idea multiple times. Trump himself has said he sees nothing wrong with talking with the North Koreans per se. Moving from that to substantive negotiations would still be extremely difficult. But to make any real progress, talking is the first necessary step. The White House’s endorsement of the concept of initial talks without preconditions is hugely significant. It provides a real fix to the break between Washington and Seoul. It also increases the chances the United States and North Korea will soon begin a process that represents the best hope of preventing a devastating international conflict.” (Josh Rogin, “Pence: We’re Ready to Talk to North Korea,” Washington Post, February 12, 2018, p. A-16) The Trump administration, scrambling to avoid a rift with an ally, has told South Korea it is open to holding preliminary talks with North Korea, according to two senior administration officials and a spokesman for the South Korean president, Moon Jae-in. The decision was a victory for South Korea. “The United States, too, looks positively at South-North Korean dialogue and has expressed its willingness to start dialogue with the North,” Moon said on February 12, according to his spokesman, Kim Eui-kyeom. American officials were more guarded, saying they were open to talks but not a full-fledged negotiation. The United States, they said, would reiterate its demands that North Korea make concessions and did not plan to offer any in return. As of now, there are no plans to cancel or further delay joint military exercises by the United States and South Korea, scheduled for after the Olympic Games. Agreeing to talks before the North Koreans have demonstrated a willingness to dismantle their weapons program would be a subtle but potentially significant shift in Washington’s approach — and a win for Moon. “President Moon and I reflected last night on the need to do something fundamentally different,” Pence told reporters on February 9 after meeting with the South Korean leader. The allies, he said, would demand “at the
outset of any new dialogue or negotiations” that North Korea “put denuclearization on the table and take concrete steps with the world community to dismantle, permanently and irreversibly, their nuclear and ballistic missile programs.” “Then, and only then, will the world community consider negotiating and making changes in the sanctions regime that’s placed on them today,” Pence said. (Mark Landler and Choe Sang-Hun, “U.S. Shifts on Holding Discussions with Kim,” New York Times, February 14, 2018, p. A-7)

Vice President Pence departed for a five-day, two country swing through Asia earlier this month having agreed to a secret meeting with North Korean officials while in South Korea at the 2018 Winter Olympic Games. But on Saturday February 10, less than two hours before Pence and his team were set to meet with Kim Yo Jong, the younger sister of North Korean leader Kim Jong Un, and Kim Yong Nam, the regime’s nominal head of state, the North Koreans pulled out of the scheduled meeting, according to Pence’s office. The North Korean decision to withdraw from the meeting came after Pence had used his trip to denounce their nuclear ambitions and announce the “toughest and most aggressive” sanctions against the regime yet, while also taking steps to further solidify the U.S. alliance with both Japan and South Korea. It also came as Kim Jong Un, through his sister, invited South Korean President Moon Jae-in to Pyongyang to begin talks “soon” — a development that would likely cause consternation in Washington, where the Trump administration has been leading a campaign to put “maximum pressure” on the Kim regime to give up its nuclear program. Moon said through a spokesman that he would try to make it happen. Pence’s actions and rhetoric in the lead up to the Olympics contrasted with the image of progress being promoted by the South Koreans, who would also have been eager to involve the United States in direct talks with the North. The vice president’s office promoted his trip as an effort to combat what it said was North Korea’s plan to use the Winter Games for propaganda purposes and portrayed the cancellation of the meeting as evidence his mission was a success. “North Korea dangled a meeting in hopes of the Vice President softening his message, which would have ceded the world stage for their propaganda during the Olympics,” said Nick Ayers, the vice president’s chief of staff, while also pointing to the specific events Pence held to highlight human rights abuses by Pyongyang. “North Korea would have strongly preferred the vice president not use the world stage to call attention to those absolute facts or to display our strong alliance with those committed to the maximum pressure campaign. But as we’ve said from day one about the trip: this administration will stand in the way of Kim’s desire to whitewash their murderous regime with nice photo ops at the Olympics.” The vice president’s office said the North Koreans expressed their dissatisfaction with Pence’s announcement of new sanctions as well as his meeting with North Korean defectors when canceling the meeting. The meeting — which Pence had coyly teased en route to Asia, saying “We’ll see what happens” — was two weeks in the making, and started when the Central Intelligence Agency first got word that the North Koreans wanted to meet with Pence when he was on the Korean Peninsula, according to a senior White House official. A second official said the initiative for the meeting came from South Korea, which acted as an intermediary between the two sides to set up the meeting. Though Pence had agreed to the North Korean invitation before he departed for Asia on Monday February 5, no details were set until the vice president arrived in Seoul on Thursday February 8, according to the White House official. The two sides agreed to meet at South Korea’s Blue House early that Saturday afternoon, the official said. No South Korean officials were scheduled to attend, but the Blue House was to serve as a neutral meeting place, which could also accommodate the security demands of both sides. Pence, a representative from the National Security Council, a representative from the intelligence community and Ayers were planning to attend from the U.S. side. The North Korean side was expected to include Kim Yo Jong and Kim Yong Nam, as well as a possible third official. Within the White House, discussions of the possible meeting were kept to a small group of senior administration officials and the plan was finalized the Friday before the vice president left during an Oval Office meeting with President Trump, Pence, national security adviser H.R. McMaster, White House Chief of Staff John F. Kelly and Ayers. CIA Director Mike Pompeo called in by phone, while Defense Secretary Jim Mattis and Secretary of State Rex Tillerson were also part of the ongoing discussions. The president and vice president were in agreement on the goal of the meeting: Pence would privately meet with the North Koreans not to open any negotiations with Kim’s regime, but to deliver the administration’s tough stance against
North Korea face-to-face, two White House officials said. The administration also took it as a sign of the North Korean’s seriousness that Kim sent his younger sister to South Korea, making her the first member of the Kim family to visit the South since the Korean War. “The president’s view was that they need to understand that what our policy is publicly and what we are saying publicly is actually what we mean,” a senior White House official said, explaining Trump’s decision to greenlight the possibility of a Pence meeting with the North Koreans. White House officials said Trump and Pence had viewed the meeting as a continuation of the administration’s maximum pressure campaign against North Korea, as well as in line with the message Pence had delivered, publicly and privately, all trip. The talks between Pence and the North Koreans, had they happened, were not intended to serve as any sort of de-escalation of the administration’s stance against North Korea, a senior White House official said. Pence used his trip to the region to further underscore the administration’s combative stance. At the Olympic opening ceremony, Pence sat in South Korean President Moon Jae-in’s VIP box along with Moon and Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe — with Kim Yo Jong and Kim Yong Nam sitting almost directly behind him. Pence studiously ignored the North Koreans all evening and photos of the uncomfortable tableau prompted public headlines and private speculation about who, exactly, had won the propaganda war. That Friday, before heading to the Olympics, Pence visited the Cheonan Memorial, a tribute to 46 South Korean sailors who were killed in 2010 by a North Korean torpedo, and he met with four North Korean defectors, urging them to share their stories before the assembled media. He also invited Fred Warmbier — father of Otto Warmbier, the American student who died last year after North Korea detained him for 17 months for stealing a propaganda poster, then sent him home in a coma — to attend the Opening Ceremony as his guest. It was all part of Pence’s effort to cast himself as a warrior against North Korea’s propaganda. Pence seemed to make a point of ignoring the North Koreans at the Opening Ceremony, both at a VIP reception and in Moon’s VIP box. The vice president also only stood to cheer for the U.S. athletes when they marched out, staying seated when the North and South entered the Olympic Stadium together under a united Korean flag. The North’s state-run Korean Central News Agency unleashed a torrent of vitriol against the Vice President February 17. “Pence must know that his frantic acts of abusing the sacred Olympics for confrontational ruckus are as foolish and stupid an act as sweeping the sea with a broom,” the agency said in a report. “If Pence wants to avoid experiencing a hot agony of shame on the stage of the Olympics, he had better stop behaving imprudently and clearly learn about how ardently the compatriots of the north and the south of Korea wish to reunify the country … and quietly disappear,” the report continued. Pence’s stony demeanor and ramrod straight posture at the Opening Ceremony earned snarky reviews in the Korean media, with some grousing that he had snubbed the North Koreans and even disrespected the Olympic Games. The vice president’s team saw it differently. Communications Director Jarrod Agen tweeted a laudatory review of Pence’s evening: “VP stands and cheers for U.S. athletes. VP hangs out with U.S. athletes instead of dining with Kim regime. VP does not applaud N. Korea or exchange pleasantries w/ the most oppressive regime on earth.” Another member of Pence’s staff explained the vice president’s public behavior with, “I don’t think you talk geopolitics over speed skating.” In fact, at that very moment, Pence was still planning to talk geopolitics with the North Koreans the next day, reiterating his week-long public message in private with Kim Yo Jong and Kim Yong Nam. On the morning of Saturday February 10, the North Koreans sent word to Pence’s team that the meeting was still on — but they didn’t like his rhetoric, a senior administration said. (Ashley Parker, “N. Koreans, Pence Were to Have Met in S. Korea,” Washington Post, February 21, 2018, p. A-1) At the time, Trump administration officials explained that they would have been open to a meeting with their North Korean counterparts, but only if Pence delivered a tough message and only if it occurred away from TV cameras. What they did not disclose then was that they believed both of those conditions had been met for an encounter already scheduled to occur. “The vice president was ready to take this opportunity to drive home the necessity of North Korea abandoning its illicit ballistic missile and nuclear programs,” State Department spokesperson Heather Nauert said on February 20. (Gardiner Harris and Choe Sang-Hun, “North Korea Backed Out of Meeting with Pence at Olympics, U.S. Says,” New York Times, February 21, 2018, p. A-5)
North Korea's reclusive leader Kim Jong-un has asked South Korean President Moon Jae-in to visit Pyongyang at the "earliest date" possible for what will be a third inter-Korean summit, Kim's sister told the South Korean leader Saturday. The invitation was delivered in a meeting between Moon and the North Korean leader's sister, Yo-jong. Kim Yo-jong was earlier considered part of a high-level North Korean delegation to the Pyeongchang Winter Olympic Games, but Cheong Wa Dae spokesman Kim Eui-kyeom said she was here as a special envoy of the North Korean leader. "While delivering a letter from Kim Jong-un, chairman of the State Affairs Commission, which stated willingness to improve South-North Korea relations, special envoy Kim Yo-jong orally delivered Chairman Kim Jong-un's invitation (for Moon) to visit the North at a time convenient to him, saying he is willing to meet President Moon Jae-in at the earliest date possible," the spokeswoman told a press briefing. During the meeting, Kim Yo-jong sought to encourage Moon to visit Pyongyang. "I wish I can see you in Pyongyang at an early date. If you meet Chairman Kim Jong-un and exchange views on many issues, the North-South relationship may quickly improve as if yesterday would seem a far distant past," she told the South Korean leader, according to a Cheong Wa Dae official. "I hope the president will put a footprint in history that will be long remembered by the future generation by playing a leading role in opening a new era of unification," she added, according to the official. Moon stressed the need for the communist North to resume dialogue with the United States. "An early resumption of dialogue between the United States and the North is needed also for the development of the South-North Korean relationship," he said, according to his spokesman. Kim Yo-jong is the only member of the North's ruling family to have visited the South since the end of the war. (Byun Duk-kun, "N. Korean Leader Proposes Inter-Korean Summit with Moon," February 10, 2018) "Kim Yo-jong delivered Kim Jong-un’s letter to Moon, and conveyed (Kim Jong-un’s) message that he is open to meeting Moon in the near future," Cheong Wa Dae spokesman Kim Eui-kyeom said. (Kim Yo-jong asked Moon) to visit Pyongyang at a time convenient to him. President Moon responded by saying that the two sides should work on establishing the right conditions to realize the meeting. The Cheong Wa Dae spokesman also said the two sides discussed issues regarding inter-Korean relations under a "friendly atmosphere." “President Moon said that US-North Korea talks should be held in the near future to improve inter-Korean relations, and asked the North to take a proactive approach to the matter,” Kim Eui-kyeom said. (Choi He-suk, “N.K. Leader Kim Invites Moon to Pyongyang,” Korea Herald, February 10, 2018) Kim Yo-jong, the sister of the North Korean leader, delivered Kim Jong-un’s letter and a verbal invitation to Moon on behalf of her brother during a three-hour meeting at the presidential residence in Seoul on October 10, according to the Blue House. “I am willing to meet with President Moon in the near future,” Kim Yo-jong quoted Kim Jong-un as saying, according to presidential spokesman Kim Eui-kyeom. “I request you visit North Korea at your earliest convenience.” According to the spokesman, Moon replied, “Let’s create the conditions and hold the summit.” Moon was quoted by his spokesman as saying, “For the sake of advancing relations between the two Koreas, it is imperative for the North and the United States to talk soon.” Asked if direct talks between the North and United States are the “conditions” that Moon cited for the summit, the official said the Pyongyang-Washington issue is an important factor to improve inter-Korean ties. “The two axles must spin together to make wheels move,” he said. According to the aide, Moon made no direct mention of the North’s nuclear arms program during the meeting. (Ser Myo-ja, “Kim Jong-un Invites Moon Jae-in to Pyongyang,” JoongAng Ilbo, February 10, 2018) Im Jong-seok, a prominent student democracy activist who is now chief of staff of South Korean President Moon Jae-in. In 1989, then a 22-year-old South Korean student caused an uproar when she sneaked into North Korea and was filmed advocating for unification and meeting then leader Kim Il Sung. The unauthorized visit was orchestrated by Im. Nearly 30 years on, the 51-year-old Im is now playing a pivotal role in an inter-Korean detente fostered by the Winter Games in Pyeongchang, officials and experts say. After North Korean leader Kim Jong Un made a surprise invitation for Moon to visit Pyongyang last week, Im is now being floated as a possible special envoy to North Korea to discuss the proposal. But for critics in the South, Im is at the center of concern that Seoul may prioritize cross-border rapprochement over an air-tight alliance with the United States. South Korea’s intelligence service chief Suh Hoon and Unification Minister Cho Myong-gyon are among the other candidates under consideration, according to officials who spoke on the condition of anonymity. Officials, however, said they are leaning more toward Suh or Cho, given conservative criticism of Im. “I know there are many names being
mentioned, but Suh is an expert and would be the best choice,” said Chung Se-hyun, a former unification minister, who regularly advises Moon on inter-Korean affairs. “In inter-Korean relations, it is critical to understand the North’s language, their way of talking and the country’s inner workings.” Suh led a series of talks in the run up to two inter-Korean summits, first in 2000 and then 2007. Suh, as a top spy official, and Moon, then chief of staff to President Roh Moo-hyun, were instrumental in setting up the 2007 meeting. (Hyonhee Shin, “Moon’s Chief of Staff Takes Center Stage in Inter-Korean Détente,” Reuters, February 15, 2018)

KCNA: “The DPRK high-level delegation led by Kim Yong Nam, president of the Presidium of the DPRK Supreme People's Assembly, met with south Korean President Moon Jae In at Chongwadae on Saturday after attending the opening ceremony of the 23rd Winter Olympics. Moon Jae In warmly greeted the DPRK delegation at the main lobby of Chongwadae, exchanging greetings with it, and had photo sessions with Kim Yong Nam and Kim Yo Jong respectively. Then Kim Yong Nam and Kim Yo Jong had a warm talk with Moon Jae In on the first floor of Chongwadae. Moon Jae In said at the talk that the current visit of the delegation of the north side created a spark of improving the inter-Korean relations and ensuring peace on the Korean peninsula and that he extends his heartfelt thanks to Chairman Kim Jong Un for providing today's significant occasion. Kim Yong Nam congratulated Moon Jae In on the successful opening of the Winter Olympics and expressed gratitude to him for sitting together with them while dealing with a great event. At the talk, Kim Yo Jong, first vice department director of the Central Committee of the Workers' Party of Korea, upon authorization of Kim Jong Un, supreme leader of the Party, state and army of the DPRK, courteously handed over his personal letter to President Moon Jae In and verbally conveyed his intention. President Moon Jae In expressed deep thanks to Chairman Kim Jong Un for taking a special step of making the high-level delegation of the north side participate in the Olympics and sending his personal letter and verbal greetings, and asked for certainly conveying his gratitude to Chairman Kim Jong Un. After delivery of the personal letter, the DPRK delegation had a frank and candid talk with the south side over the issue of improving the north-south relations. President Moon Jae In expressed the will to take one step after another for the common prosperity of the south and the north in close cooperation with each other, saying that the inter-Korean relations should be mended by the parties concerned at any cost as indicated by Chairman Kim Jong Un in his New Year Address. Kim Yong Nam said that even unexpected difficulties and ordeals could be surely overcome and the future of reunification brought earlier when having a firm will and taking courage and determination to usher in a new heyday of inter-Korean relations. The talk proceeded in a sincere and cordial atmosphere. Present there were Choe Hwi, chairman of the National Sports Guidance Committee, Ri Son Gwon, chairman of the Committee for the Peaceful Reunification of the Country, and Im Jong Sok, presidential chief of staff of Chongwadae, Jong Ui Yong, chief of the State Security Office, Jo Myong Gyun, minister of Unification, and So Hun, director of the National Intelligence Service. On the same day Moon Jae In hosted a luncheon at Chongwadae in honor of the DPRK delegation. Present there were all members of the DPRK delegation and participants of the south side in the talk and leading persons concerned at the National Intelligence Service and the State Security Office. A welcoming address was made at the luncheon which proceeded in a cordial atmosphere. At the end of the luncheon, there was a photo session with all members of the DPRK high-level delegation at Moon Jae In's request. That day Kim Yong Nam and Kim Yo Jong made entries in the visitor's book of Chongwadae.” (KCNA, “DPRK High-Level Delegations Meets S. Korean President,” February 11, 2018)

"South Korea might run off ahead on a course of dialogue," a senior Foreign Ministry official said in the wake of talks in Seoul between South Korean President Moon Jae In and a high-level North Korean delegation sent to attend the opening ceremony of the Pyeongchang Winter Olympics the day prior. Defense Minister Onodera Itsunori told reporters in Saga Prefecture, southwestern Japan, that dialogue between the two Koreas must be "based on the premise that North Korea will change its basic nuclear and missile policies." Officials in Tokyo suspect North Korea is trying to chip away at the united front of the United States and its East Asian allies as international sanctions bite the hermit country. The Abe administration is in favor of maintaining the diplomatic
and economic pressure campaign regardless of the thaw between the two Koreas over the Olympics, arguing that yielding to dialogue on North Korea's terms would mean effectively accepting it as a nuclear power. "North Korea seems to have no intention of abandoning its nuclear [program]," a Japanese government official said. "It's clear to see that Kim Jong Un's agenda is to get a dialogue offensive under way," a Japanese government source said. "By sending the sister to South Korea and seeking a visit by the president, North Korea is probably trying to give the impression that it's taking the lead on dialogue," another source close to the government said.

According to a diplomatic source, some in the Abe administration "would not oppose the very idea of talks" between Moon and Kim "if they would entail [Moon] pressing North Korea to denuclearize." But most, a source close to the prime minister's office said, feel that "dialogue is meaningless unless North Korea says it will abandon nuclear weapons in a verifiable and irreversible manner." (Kyodo, “Japan Gov’t Worried S. Korea Moving toward Talks with North,” February 10, 2018) "In the past, both Japan and South Korea have gone along with conciliatory policies proposed by North Korea, but the only result has been to allow North Korea to continue with its nuclear weapon and ballistic missile development programs," Defense Minister Onodera Itsunori told reporters in Saga Prefecture. "It is inconceivable that Moon would visit North Korea when Pyongyang has shown no signs of specific action toward denuclearization," said a high-ranking Japanese Foreign Ministry official. According to sources knowledgeable about Japan-U.S. ties, immediately after Abe met with Moon on February 9, U.S. officials requested and were granted a hurriedly called meeting between Abe and Vice President Mike Pence, who was also in Pyeongchang to take in the Opening Ceremony. That meeting was held on top of a February 7 meeting in Tokyo between Abe and Pence. Moreover, the two further discussed what steps could be taken by Japan and the United States during the drive to a reception hosted by Moon. Pence invited Abe to ride with him to the reception site, sources said. "There will be a need for Japan and the United States to work closely to continue to remind South Korea that it should not move any closer toward North Korea," a Japanese government source said. (Matsui Nozomi, “Tokyo Takes Exception to Conciliatory Tone of Two Koreas,” *Asahi Shimbun*, February 11, 2018)

Secretary of State Rex Tillerson left open the door to dialogue with North Korea, saying it will be up to Pyongyang to decide when they are ready. Tillerson was speaking at a press conference with his Egyptian counterpart in Cairo, where he was asked whether he sees the start of a diplomatic process with North Korea. "As to the vice president's comments about potentially having talks and whether it's the start of a diplomatic process, I think it's too early to judge," Tillerson said. "As we've said for some time, it's really up to the North Koreans to decide when they're ready to engage with us in a sincere way, a meaningful way." North Korea knows "what has to be on the table for conversations," he said, apparently referring to a denuclearization commitment. "We've said for some time that I think it's important that we have -- we're going to need to have some discussions that precede any form of negotiation to determine whether the parties are, in fact, ready to engage in something this meaningful, in order for us to then put together the construct of a negotiation," the top US diplomat said. "So we'll just have to wait and see." (Yonhap, “Tillerson: Up to N. Korea to Choose Talks with U.S.,” February 13, 2018)

KCNA: “Kim Jong Un, chairman of the Workers' Party of Korea, chairman of the State Affairs Commission of the DPRK and supreme commander of the Korean People's Army, Monday met members of the DPRK high-level delegation which visited the south side's area to attend the opening ceremony of the 23rd Winter Olympics. Present at the meeting were the members of the delegation including Kim Yong Nam, president of the Presidium of the DPRK Supreme People's Assembly, Kim Yo Jong, first vice department director of the WPK Central Committee, Choe Hwi, chairman of the National Sports Guidance Committee, Ri Son Gwon, chairman of the Committee for the Peaceful Reunification of the Country, and suite members. On hand were Vice-Chairman Kim Yong Chol and Vice Department Director Jo Yong Won of the C.C., WPK. Respected Supreme Leader Kim Jong Un highly appreciated the efforts of the members of the delegation and suite members, shaking their hands one by one and listened to the detailed report by them. Kim Yong Nam made a detailed report on the activities of the delegation including its participation in the opening ceremony of the 23rd Winter Olympics and visit to Chongwadae. Kim
Yo Jong, who conducted her activities at the special instruction of the respected Supreme Leader, made a detailed report on her contacts with the south side's high-level figures including President Moon Jae In and the south side's intention and movement of the U.S. side and others which she grasped through her activities. After receiving the delegation's report, Kim Jong Un expressed satisfaction over it. And he said that impressive was the south side which specially prioritized the visit of the members of the DPRK side who took part in the Winter Olympics including the high-level delegation and has made all its sincere efforts for their convenience and activities, and expressed his gratitude for it. Saying it is important to continue making good results by further livening up the warm climate of reconciliation and dialogue created by the strong desire and common will of the north and the south with the Winter Olympics as a momentum, he set forth in detail the future orientation of the improvement of the north-south relations and gave important instructions to the relevant field to take practical measures for it. He had a photo session with the members of the delegation.” (KCNA, “Kim Jong Un Meets DPRK High-Level delegation,” February 13, 2018)

Institute for Disarmament and Peace of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the DPRK director-general’s statement “over the fact that the United States and Japan, taken aback by stirring atmosphere of improvement and reconciliation in the inter-Korean relations, are running amuck to put whatever obstacles on this development. ...The U.S. and Japan incited confrontation and hostility towards the DPRK at the opening ceremony of the current Winter Olympics where the whole world has extended warm congratulations in delight and joy to the north and the south of Korea for being one. ...The reckless moves of the U.S. and Japan constitute an open challenge to our sincere efforts for improving the inter-Korean relations and creating peaceful climate on the Korean peninsula as well as to the world public aspiring to the regional and global peace and stability. Whenever the north and the south of Korea were engaged in talks to improve their relations, which led to the heightened atmosphere for national reunification, the U.S. and Japan did never fail to create huge obstacles by conducting such deliberate aggressive maneuvers as the large-scale joint military exercises. The above facts demonstrate once again that the U.S. and Japan are the very culprits of destroying peace, aggravating situation and obstructing national reunification on the Korean peninsula. If the U.S. and Japanese reactionaries continue to move in a self-centered manner against our national aspirations for peace and reunification and the international support to it, they will gain only isolation. The U.S and Japan should bear in mind that their vicious words and actions will only reveal their sinister and crafty intentions and invite international opposition and denunciation, and they would be well advised to stop their imprudent and reckless actions.” (KCNA, “U.S. and Japan Flayed for Hampering Improvement of Inter-Korean Relations,” February 13, 2018)

The U.S. director of national intelligence warned, “Decision time is becoming ever closer in terms of how we respond to this.” North Korea presents “a potentially existential” threat to the United States and is likely to conduct more weapons tests this year, Dan Coats said at the Senate Intelligence Committee’s annual hearing on “Worldwide Threats.” Coats said North Korea’s repeated statements that nuclear weapons were the basis for its survival suggest government leaders there “do not intend to negotiate them away.” “In the wake of accelerated missile testing since 2016, North Korea is likely to press ahead with more tests in 2018, and its Foreign Minister said that Kim (Jong Un) may be considering conducting an atmospheric nuclear test over the Pacific Ocean,” he said. Democratic Senator Dianne Feinstein asked whether U.S. intelligence has looked into what it might take to bring North Korea to the negotiating table, but Pompeo declined to discuss the subject during a public hearing. Feinstein said she had participated in a classified briefing recently on North Korea and described it as “difficult and harsh.” (Patricia Zengerle and Doina Chiacu, “U.S. Intelligence Chief Says North Korea ‘Decision Time’ Is Near,” Reuters, February 13, 2018)

Vice President Mike Pence drew the line between talks and negotiations with North Korea, saying President Donald Trump "believes in" the former. In an interview with Axios, Pence said Trump "always believes in talking (with North Korea), but talking is not negotiating." His remark appears
to leave open the possibility of a preliminary dialogue between Washington and Pyongyang that would set the tone for any future negotiations over the communist regime's nuclear and ballistic missile programs. Still, Pence said nothing will change until the North abandons its nuclear ambitions, and the U.S. and the international community will "consider any change in posture" only when the regime "completely, verifiably and completely" discards its missile programs. The U.S. has led a "maximum pressure" campaign to increase economic and diplomatic sanctions on North Korea until the regime comes forward to discuss its denuclearization. Pence led the U.S. delegation to the opening ceremony last week, where he was seated directly in front of the North Korean leader's sister, Kim Yo-jong. "I didn't avoid the dictator's sister, but I did ignore her," Pence told Axios. "I didn't believe it was proper for the USA to give her any attention in that forum." He also called the North "the most tyrannical and oppressive regime on the planet," which is "nothing short of a prison state." Pence warned the North of U.S. military capabilities. "The United States has viable military options to deal with the threat of nuclear and ballistic missiles from North Korea," he said. "We want to exhaust every opportunity to make sure North Korea understands our intentions and the seriousness of the USA and our allies." (Yonhap, Pence Draws Line between Talks, Negotiations with N. Korea," February 14, 2018) The National Security Council (NSC) said the U.S. was "willing to engage North Korea" to emphasize its position that the complete and verifiable denuclearization of the Korean Peninsula was non-negotiable. While stating the U.S. was open to talks with Pyongyang, it made clear it would also maintain pressure on the regime to give up its nuclear weapons. "The maximum pressure campaign will intensify until the North Korean regime denuclearizes," an NSC official was quoted as saying by Yonhap. "We are in close contact with the Republic of Korea about our unified response to North Korea including the need to maintain maximum pressure to achieve a denuclearized Korean Peninsula." The U.S. State Department echoed the view on simultaneous "maximum pressure and engagement" in a February 13 briefing. It said preliminary talks, or "talks for talks" with Pyongyang, were possible. (Kim Jae-kyung and Kim Bo-eun, "U.S. May Talk to North Korea," Korea Times, February 14, 2018) Japanese Prime Minister Abe Shinzo and U.S. President Donald Trump agreed to keep up pressure on North Korea until Pyongyang abandons its nuclear and missile programs, Japan's foreign ministry said. The two leaders confirmed in phone talks tonight that there would be "no meaningful dialogue" unless North Korea agreed on "complete, verifiable and irreversible denuclearization," the ministry said in its statement. "Dialogue for the sake of dialogue would be meaningless," Abe told reporters after the phone talks. (Reuters, "Japan’s Abe, Trump Agree to Keep up Pressure on North Korea;," February 14, 2018) The South Korean government decided to use the Inter-Korean Cooperation Fund to cover the cost of the North Koreans' stay in the South during the Pyeongchang Winter Olympics, the Ministry of Unification said. The Inter-Korean Exchange and Cooperation Committee under the ministry said it approved about 2.86 billion won ($2.64 million). This is to cover costs of the North Korean cheering squad, the art troupe and the taekwondo demonstration team. The government will pay the money to the Pyeongchang Organizing Committee for the 2018 Olympics and Paralympics, the Korean Sports and Olympic Committee, World Taekwondo, and other relevant bodies that hosted events involving the North Korean delegation. "The funding is in accordance with the inter-Korean agreements on Jan. 9 and 17, under which Seoul promised to provide conveniences for the North Korean delegates," the ministry said. "Given the international economic sanctions against the North, we will closely consult with international society." The fund, set up in 1990, is committed to back up effective inter-Korean exchanges, including reunions of divided families, humanitarian relief and support for joint economic initiatives. Separately, another review committee under the ministry approved spending of 27 million won for two North Korean delegations that came before the Olympics to check the facilities for the art troupe and athletes. Meanwhile, Vice Unification Minister Chun Hae-sung had closed-door meetings with envoys from neighboring countries to explain the developments following the high-level North Korean delegates' recent visit to the South, including North Korean leader Kim Jong-un's sister Kim Yo-jong. Today, Chun had talks with Chinese Ambassador to South Korea Qiu Guohong and acting
U.S. Ambassador Marc Knapper in separate meetings. He told them about the delegates' messages, including Kim Jong-un's offer to have a summit soon with President Moon Jae-in in Pyongyang. Chun also asked for the countries' cooperation in improving inter-Korean relations and peacefully resolving the issue of the North's nuclear and missile programs. (Choi Ha-young, “Government Approves $2.5 Million for North Koreans’ Stay,” Korea Times, February 14, 2018)

The United States doesn’t have a “bloody nose” strategy for North Korea, senators of both parties and a Trump administration official said, rejecting claims the U.S. wants to strike the North’s nuclear program in a way that avoids an all-out war. The harmonized message could quell speculation that President Donald Trump is contemplating limited military action to demonstrate U.S. resolve toward North Korea without provoking a wider conflict. Such a strategy would be widely seen as dangerous given the North’s capability to inflict a devastating retaliation on U.S. ally South Korea. A senior White House official, at a briefing yesterday, told lawmakers no such approach has been adopted, Sens. Jeanne Shaheen, D-N.H., and James Risch, R-Idaho, said at a Senate hearing today. An administration official who was testifying confirmed their accounts. The White House had “made it very clear there is no bloody nose strategy for a strike against North Korea,” Shaheen told the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, which was considering the nomination of Susan Thornton, Trump’s choice to be the top diplomat for East Asia. “We were told clearly by administration people about as high up as it gets that there is no such thing as a ‘bloody nose’ strategy, that they’ve never talked about, they’ve never considered it, they’ve never used that term, and it’s not something that that people ought to be talking about,” Risch said. (Matthew Pennington, “U.S. Denies Plan for ‘Bloody Nose’ Strike on North Korea,” Associated Press, February 15, 2018)

An official at the White House National Security Council said in an e-mail interview with Dong-A Ilbo that Washington was willing to engage North Korea in order to emphasize its position that the “complete and irreversible denuclearization of the Korean Peninsula is not negotiable.” The official also stressed that Washington would strengthen its “maximum pressure” until the North Korean regime abandons its nuclear program. The response suggests that while Washington will continue the maximum pressure campaign, it would also be possible to hold dialogue with the North to achieve the goal. Asked if there would be any change in Washington’s position on a military option against the North, the official said that both the military and non-military options are on the table, adding that the United States will take all measures necessary to defend itself and its allies and respond to any North Korean provocation. The U.S. Department of State officially admitted the possibility to expand the dialogue phase. U.S. State Department spokeswoman Heather Nauert told a regular news briefing on February 12 that Pence had said “maximum pressure and engagement can be done at the same time.” She stressed that Pence had said, “The maximum pressure campaign is going to continue and intensify. But if you want to talk, we’ll talk.” (Gi-Jae Han and Jeong-Hun Park, “U.S. Hints at Dialogue with N. Korea for Denuclearization,” Dong-A Ilbo, February 15, 2018)
The powerful intercontinental missile, dubbed Hwasong-15, tested by North Korea late last year is “highly likely” to have been built with foreign blueprints or parts, according to a new technical analysis by U.S. and German experts that describes multiple similarities between Pyongyang’s new missile and ones built by the Soviet Union decades ago. The foreign assistance — the precise nature of which is still unclear — could explain why North Korea apparently was able to skip the months and even years of preliminary testing normally associated with any advanced new missile system, the report says. Intelligence agencies have long believed that North Korea incorporated Soviet designs in many of its missiles, including a submarine-launched ballistic missile successfully tested in 2016. But experts have been mystified over North Korean leader Kim Jong Un’s rapid gains in long-range missile technology, including back-to-back successful tests of two different ICBMs last year. The new report builds an elaborate, if partly circumstantial, case linking North Korea’s newest missile to Soviet designs dating as far back as the mid-1960s. The evidence includes striking similarities between the Hwasong-15 and a family of Soviet-era missiles, including one that was developed by Russian engineers but abandoned before production began, according to the report prepared for Jane’s Intelligence Review, a British-based journal that focuses on international security threats. A draft of the report was provided to the Washington Post. “It is highly likely that North Korea made use of external knowledge, technology, or hardware, in the development of the Hwasong-15 ICBM,” states the report, authored by Markus Schiller, a Munich-based space technology analyst, and Nick Hansen, an imagery specialist with a 47-year career with U.S. intelligence community. Based on new computer modeling and enhanced images of the North Korean missile, the researchers concluded that the foreign support “was derived from the Soviet-era ballistic missile program,” though it is unclear exactly when or how the transfer took place, the report says. The researchers found, for example, that the North Korean missile’s size and shape echo those of the UR-100, a two-stage solid-fuel missile built by the Soviet Union in the 1960s and 1970s, with a few differences. Its engine shares the same distinctive dual-nozzle configuration as the Soviet-made RD-250 missile engine first built in 1965, and appears to use the same potent fuel mixture — a high-energy liquid propellant that only recently came into use in North Korea. The similarities appear to implicate the former Soviet Union as the original source of the technology, and not China or Iran, as some analysts have speculated, the researchers said. “By any dimension, this looks Soviet to me, not Chinese,” Schiller said in an interview via Skype. While the similarities with the UR-100 are striking, the authors posit that the Hwasong-15 may actually be a clone of a different Soviet-era missile that was never brought into full production. That missile, the R-37, was developed as part of a competition between two rival missile-design bureaus as the Soviet Union searched for an answer to the Minuteman ICBM developed by the United States in the 1960s. The UR-100 won the competition, and the R-37—which was similar in size and shape and apparently used the RD-250 engine—was canceled. Though acknowledging he has no proof, Schiller believes the Hwasong-15 may have been assembled from actual parts of the R-37, or a similar Soviet-era missile that was stolen or sold on the black market. Otherwise, he says, it is difficult to explain how the North Koreans were able to field their new ICBM so quickly, apparently skipping the extensive testing normally associated with a new missile design. U.S. intelligence officials have expressed skepticism about previous claims that North Korea’s newest missiles are foreign imports. A Defense Department statement last August asserted that North Korea “is not reliant on the imports of engines,” but rather possesses the “ability to produce the engines themselves.” U.S. agencies have not ruled out the possibility that missile-engine designs from Russia were passed to North Korea, perhaps by former Soviet scientists who traveled to Pyongyang to work as consultants in the 1990s. Schiller says it is possible that missile secrets were passed to North Korea in the form of blueprints and scientific expertise. But he says he personally believes that missile parts were included in the exchange. “If you look at any other missile program, you usually see hundreds of static engine tests,” Schiller said. “With this one, we didn’t see hundreds. We saw one or two.” Yet, despite the dearth of known tests, the North Koreans were sufficiently confident of their new missile that they arranged for the maiden launch to occur “in a field, in the middle of the night, with what appeared to be a military crew, in approximately four hours,” Schiller writes in the report. Schiller also noted that, since the November 28 launch, no other Hwasong-15s have been observed publicly. The only exceptions were four purported missiles that were hauled through central Pyongyang in a military parade earlier this month. Parade missiles, Schiller said, are “nearly always fake.” (Joby
With talk of a “bloody nose” strike against North Korea being debated in Washington, public attention has focused on conventional military preparations for a U.S. attack on Pyongyang. Less noticed, but possibly even more telling, is the surge in recent months of intelligence resources. Senior officials have made no secret of the fact that the administration is ramping up its intelligence capabilities to focus on the Korean Peninsula, but six sources familiar with U.S. planning described a nearly unprecedented scramble inside the agencies responsible for spying and cyber warfare. In fact, the initial strike against the North Korean regime could be digital rather than physical, according to two former intelligence officials with knowledge of the preparations. “The first shot will be cyber,” one of the former officials said. As North Korean leader Kim Jong Un flaunts his nation’s strides in missile development, the U.S. government for the past six months has covertly begun laying the groundwork for possible cyberattacks on North Korea in countries including South Korea and Japan. This process involves installing fiber cables as bridges into the region and setting up remote bases and listening posts, where hackers may attempt to gain access to a North Korean internet that’s largely walled off from external connections. Preparations for a cyberattack reflect a larger issue: America’s spies are pivoting the magnifying glass, funneling much of the weight of billions of dollars in technical infrastructure and trained professionals toward Pyongyang, current and former intelligence officials told Foreign Policy. “The national technical focus is being switched,” one former intelligence official with knowledge of the developments told FP. There are “wholesale” shifts worth billions of dollars redirecting signals intelligence, overhead imagery, geospatial intelligence, and other technical capabilities, toward Pyongyang. Regional analysts are also getting reassigned. “If you’re an Africa analyst, you’re fucked,” the former official said. The preparations, according to those sources, include military intelligence analysts on reserve status being called back into service to focus on North Korea. Military and intelligence contractors have posted a number of job announcements in recent months seeking analysts with Korean-language skills, including positions to identify and recruit human intelligence sources. In November 2017, rumors flew around the halls at CIA headquarters in Langley, Virginia, that the agency would also be surging analysts of all disciplines to work at the brand-new Korea Mission Center, established in May of that year, a symbol of serious potential for military action, one former intelligence official told FP. CIA Director Mike Pompeo has publicly confirmed that he’s funneling workers there. “The Administration has made North Korea a top priority, and the CIA established its Korea Mission Center to harness the full resources, capabilities, and authorities of the Agency to address the threat posed by Kim Jong Un and his regime,” CIA spokesman Jonathan Liu wrote in an email. “We shift resources as appropriate to tackle our most pressing challenges.” The Defense Intelligence Agency had an “oh, shit” moment after the holidays, another source described to FP, when contingency planning to shift resources toward East Asia kicked off in earnest. Some experts working on areas such as counterterrorism and counter-narcotics are suddenly getting new assignments, or fear they soon might, and are being told to shift their gaze to the Korean Peninsula instead, yet another source indicated. The Defense Clandestine Service, an espionage wing of the DIA, has ratcheted up its presence in the region. The government is working on “putting the elite of the elite on the peninsula to collect and respond,” a separate former military intelligence official told FP. Pivoting to high-priority regions to serve the military is the DIA’s calling, said an agency spokesman, James Kudla. “DIA has the unique role of ensuring warfighters, defense planners and national policy makers understand foreign military capabilities and operational environments so they can prevent or decisively win wars,” he wrote in an email to FP. Former intelligence officials told FP, there is concern that the laser focus on North Korea could come at the expense of other hot spots, such as Syria or Iran. “How does that leave us vulnerable?” one military intelligence source asked. The defense budget passed by Congress ultimately doesn’t end up matching the areas where the United States is spending the most, and resources aren’t unlimited. “We have what we have.” The CIA described the concern about limited resources as misplaced. “The CIA is no stranger to tackling multiple priorities and executing its mission aggressively. We are always mindful of our obligation to keep America safe from threats from all over the world,” wrote Liu, the agency spokesman. Joseph DeTrani, the former associate director of national intelligence and mission
manager for North Korea, said the intelligence community’s focus on North Korea has ebbed and flowed over the years. “I think we surged slightly a little more in 1999, when we confronted them with the uranium enrichment program,” he said. In 2017, North Korea made rapid progress in developing advanced missiles — testing more than 20, though not all were successful. Kim Jong Un is a showman when it comes to missile testing, according to DeTrani. “[The North Koreans] want us to know they have these missile and nuclear capabilities,” he added. DeTrani, who served as U.S. special envoy at the six-party talks with North Korea between 2003 and 2006, said the Donald Trump administration is making the regime and its nuclear program “very clearly priority No. 1.”

The Office of the Director of National Intelligence confirmed the increasing focus on North Korea but declined to provide specifics. (Earlier this month, the office posted an announcement seeking a Korea director to, in part, “oversee and monitor efforts to assess the state of collection, analysis, intelligence operations, and resource gaps” in the region.) “North Korea has long been a very high priority for the Intelligence Community,” Timothy Barrett, a spokesman for the office, wrote in a statement to FP. “Given this challenge and the high policy focus on this topic, the Intelligence Community has added priority, focus, and resources to our North Korea efforts over the past several years,” he continued. “We continue to make adjustments to our North Korea-focused resources as the situation warrants.” The CIA has been particularly vocal on its Korea focus. In January, Pompeo told an audience at an event hosted by the American Enterprise Institute in Washington that supporting the U.S. “pressure campaign” on North Korea was “the kind of task that the CIA was designed for.” While Pompeo would not go into detail about missions in East Asia, he noted that the CIA was helping support sanctions efforts to create economic pressure and was “working to prepare a series of options” in case diplomacy fails. One of those options, a former intelligence official with knowledge of recent planning told FP, could be targeting North Korea’s heavy use of cryptocurrency. “Now they have a reason to hack Bitcoin,” the former official said. The source predicted that a massive attack on the bitcoin exchanges could be a “shot across the bow.” U.S. Cyber Command, which conducts offensive digital operations, declined to comment on its plans, or any options that may have been presented. “One of U.S. Cyber Command’s key responsibilities is to generate a full-spectrum of integrated military cyberspace options for policymakers and supported commanders,” Masao Doi, a spokesman for the command, wrote in an email to FP. North Korea relies to some extent on cryptocurrency to evade international sanctions, and Pyongyang has also been actively targeting South Korea’s Bitcoin exchanges, according to Priscilla Moriuchi, who until last year led the National Security Agency’s East Asia and Pacific cyber threats office. Moriuchi, who now works for Recorded Future, a private digital intelligence firm, said she was able to identify several specific thefts of thousands of bitcoin and other forms of digital currency. But because not all exchanges report theft and it’s hard to attribute every attack, “it’s difficult to identify how many coins North Korea has at any one time,” she said. Just from the thefts Moriuchi was able to identify, North Korea could have made between $15 million and $200 million, depending on when it cashed the digital coins in for real currency. “It’s evident that North Korea is evading sanctions,” she said. “It could be a substantial source of revenue — we just don’t know when they’re cashing out.” Moriuchi said hacking North Korea’s cryptocurrency reserves or planning some other intelligence operation around them could prove tricky, since it’s difficult to track the individual users and the long trail from mining to stealing to laundering the reserves into cash. But keeping digital currency and operations in mind could be an important middle ground between physical military strikes and harsh rhetoric. The United States needs to “find different levers” to contain North Korea, since sanctions alone aren’t enough to stop Kim Jong Un from continuing missile development. “Cryptocurrencies could give us a different lever,” Moriuchi said. (Jenna McLaughlin, “All Eyes on North Korea,” Foreign Policy, February 15, 2018)

Secretary of State Rex Tillerson has reiterated the United States' willingness to engage North Korea diplomatically, saying he is listening for Pyongyang to tell him if it is ready to talk. "That's who we will have to work with to achieve this diplomatically," Tillerson said in an interview with CBS-TV released today. "What we have to determine now is: are we even ready to start? Are they ready to start?" the top American diplomat noted. "If they're not, we'll just keep the pressure campaign underway, and we will increase that pressure." Tillerson said his job as the chief diplomat is to ensure North Koreans know the U.S. keeps its channels open, urging the North to
come to the negotiating table. "I am listening for you to tell me if you are ready to talk," he said. Washington is using "large sticks" rather than carrots to convince North Korea to come to the negotiating table, the secretary said as well, pledging that he will continue his efforts to solve the North Korean nuclear problem diplomatically. "I'm gonna use all the time available to me. Our diplomatic efforts will continue until that first bomb drops," he said. "My job is to never have a reason for the first bomb to drop." (Yonhap, “Tillerson Says He Is Listening for N.K. to Tell Him It Is Ready to Talk,” February 19, 2018)

Tillerson interview: “Margaret Brennan: In his New Year's Day speech Kim Jong Un said the entire area of the U.S. mainland is within our nuclear strike range. That's gotta make you nervous. Rex Tillerson: It does make us nervous. It-- it also-- it also stiffens our resolve. That kind of a threat to the American people by a regime like this is not acceptable. And the president's meeting his responsibilities as commander in chief of asking our military, Secretary Mattis at the Defense Department, to ensure we are prepared for anything. Brennan: And those military options are there in case you fail. Tillerson: In case I fail. I say to my Chinese counterpart, "You and I fail these people get to fight. That's not what we want." Brennan: But you are willing to work with and potentially negotiate with Kim Jong Un. Tillerson: Well, that's who we will have to work with to achieve this diplomatically. What we have to determine now is, are we even ready to start? Are they ready to start? And if they're not, we'll just keep the pressure campaign underway and we will increase that pressure. And we are doing that every month. There are new sanctions rolled out. The world wants North Korea to change. Brennan: Well, there's some questions about how badly China wants them to change. You've really needed their help to put economic pressure on Kim Jong Un. What reassurances have you given to China so that they actually follow through? Tillerson: What I think-- we got a common understanding with China is that North Korea represents a serious threat to China as well. And we've been very clear with them that they are going to have an important role to play once we get to the negotiating table. Brennan: So I-- I hear you saying there-- these wouldn't be one on one talks. China would be at the table. Tillerson: Early on they might be one on one discussions for the U.S. first and North Korea to determine is there a reason to begin to put the construct for negotiations in place. Brennan: What is the carrot that you're dangling for North Korea to convince them to talk? Tillerson: We're not using a carrot to convince them to talk. We're using large sticks. And that is what they need to understand. This pressure campaign is putting-- is having its bite on North Korea, its revenue streams. It's having a bite on its military programs. Brennan: But to say full denuclearization, why would they agree to give up something they've already got that they think is an insurance policy? Tillerson: Because it buys them nothing. It buys them more of being the hermit kingdom, isolated, isolated from the world diplomatically, isolated from the world economically. Brennan: Senator Bob Corker, chairman of Senate Foreign Relations Committee said "Every one of us should pray Rex Tillerson and Jim Mattis are successful over the course of the next eight to ten months, diplomatically, or our nation is going to be facing one of the greatest military decisions that we face." Eight to ten months. That's how much time you have to get this done? Tillerson: I'm gonna use all the time available to me our diplomatic efforts will continue until that first bomb drops. My job is to never have a reason for the first bomb to drop And we don't know precisely how much time is left on the clock. Brennan: You seem to have convinced the president that diplomacy is the way to go on this. But it wasn't always so clear. Back in October, you said you were working to get a dialogue going with the North Koreans and the president tweeted, "Rex, stop wasting your time trying to negotiate with little rocket man." Have you asked him not to call him little rocket man? Is that a diplomatic term? Tillerson: The president's going to-- the president's gonna communicate the way he communicates. My job as chief diplomat is to ensure that the North Koreans know we keep our channels open, I'm listening. I'm not sending a lotta messages back 'cause there's nothing to say to them at this point. So I'm listening for you to tell me you're ready to talk. Brennan: How will you know? Tillerson: They will tell me. They will tell me. Brennan: That explicitly? Tillerson: We-- we receive messages from them And I think it will be very explicit as to how we want to have that first conversation. ... (Margaret Brennan, “Rex Tillerson Opens up in Rare Wide-Ranging Interview, CBS “Sixty Minutes,” February 18, 2018)
When the North Korean figure skaters Ryom Tae-ok and Kim Ju-sik took to the ice this week, cheerleaders chanting their names stowed the unified Korean flags they had waved at other events here at the Pyeongchang Olympics and whipped out their national flag. After that unmistakable outburst of patriotic fervor, it was all the more incongruous when the pair began skating to a distinctly Western song: “A Day in the Life” by the Beatles, in a cover by Jeff Beck. “I have no clue how they chose it,” said Bruno Marcotte, a prominent French Canadian coach. He worked with the pair, who placed 13th, for eight weeks last summer in Montreal and said their North Korean coach had selected the song. “I think the fact that everybody was, like, ‘Huh?’ makes it even more special.” The musical choice seemed to belie the assumption that North Koreans, citizens of the most isolated country on earth, are cut off from knowledge of the outside world by the restrictions imposed by their autocratic leader, Kim Jong-un. With 22 athletes and an entourage of around 500 cheerleaders, arts performers, journalists and security minders here at the Winter Games, the North Koreans have been subjected to endless scrutiny about what they are seeing here, and whether it is, well, blowing their minds. More broadly, analysts and officials wonder if engaging with the outside world could have a political effect back home. The subtext of some of the curiosity is whether the North Koreans, exposed to glimpses of popular culture or the higher standard of living in the South, might be tempted to defect, as athletes from other Communist countries have done at previous Olympic Games. No North Korean athletes have defected during an Olympics, although one defected in 1991 during a world judo championship in Spain. Some analysts theorize that exposure to the outside world could eventually drive change back home. “It might be better to think that an information inflow will slowly alter the preferences of North Koreans by inevitably poking holes in the ideology,” said Robert E. Kelly, a professor of political science at Pusan National University in South Korea. “Over time, this should change the regime and make it easier to deal. That’s the hope anyway.” Some American officials espouse a version of this view. “Our sense is the more North Koreans that come here and can see how successful the South has been, the better,” Marc Knapper, the deputy chief of mission at the United States Embassy in Seoul, said during a news conference before the Games. “Maybe they’ll discover what good things accrue when they decide to rejoin the international community and make the right decisions,” Knapper added. Yet even North Korea watchers who support greater athletic and cultural exchanges say none of it will slow down the country’s nuclear ambitions. “Of course they will proceed with their nuclear program,” said Andrei Lankov, a North Korea expert at Kookmin University in Seoul. “Nothing can be done, short of a military invasion, to reverse it. The best we can hope for is to achieve some kind of freeze.” Critics say countries hosting North Koreans become susceptible to propaganda designed to soften the North’s image. They point to the regime’s charm offensive at the Olympics, including a visit by Kim Yo-jong, Kim Jong-un’s sister. “While North Korea, the target of engagement, remains a menacing nuclear state, the outsiders have become beholden to the enchanting possibility of their efforts bearing fruit one day,” said Lee Sung-yoon, a professor of Korean studies at the Fletcher School at Tufts University. Those who promote more engagement with the North say change will be evolutionary, not revolutionary. “North Koreans, including North Korean officials, will see they are lagging very behind the world,” Lankov said. “Some of them will say, ‘Let’s overthrow the government,’ but many more will say, ‘Let’s change our policy a bit.’” It is not even clear how much the North’s athletes and supporters have seen or heard while at the Games. The dozen female players on the joint ice hockey team sleep in separate dorms and ride a separate bus from their South Korean teammates. The North Korean cheerleaders and journalists are staying in a remote resort in Inje County, at least a 90-minute drive from many of the Olympic venues. The cheerleaders are not even allowed to slip to the bathroom on their own, and minders from the North Korean delegation, as well as South Korean police officers, are constantly monitoring them, the athletes and performers. “Leaving North Korea is even harder than leaving the mafia,” said Sue Mi Terry, Korea chairwoman at the Center for Strategic and International Studies in Washington. Would-be defectors “know their entire family, extended relatives, friends will get executed or rounded up and sent to labor camps,” she said. What’s more, she said, the athletes and cheerleaders at the Olympics are “carefully handpicked and vetted North Koreans, children of the elite ruling class” who have decent living standards. “Why risk bringing serious harm to your loved ones when you are living a pretty good life?” Terry said. Analysts say it is also presumptuous to assume any North Korean who goes abroad would immediately want to move. “If you use the analogy of
someone coming from the Midwest or a small town and you go to New York for a weekend, and 
there’s all of a sudden all of this stuff — a lot of people that I know from quieter cities tend to get 
very overwhelmed,” said Jenny Town, assistant director of the US-Korea Institute at the Johns 
Hopkins School of Advanced International Studies. Defectors say those who have been abroad are 
likely to receive some kind of ideological “re-education” session upon returning home. Still, some 
experts say exposure to the outside world may ultimately undermine the regime’s efforts to keep 
citizens in line. Ideological education “can’t take away people’s thoughts after they experience 
what it’s like in a democratic society,” said Kang Dong-wan, professor of North Korean culture 
and politics at Dong-A University in Busan, South Korea. “Wouldn’t the cheerleaders and the 
athletes wonder why they are being controlled while other South Koreans in the crowd sitting right 
next to them are cheering naturally and moving about freely?” Some spectators riveted by the 
North’s synchronized cheerleaders acknowledged it was likely some actually wanted to go back. 
“Many South Koreans worked abroad after the Korean War, when things were tough for South 
Korea,” said Kim Myo-jong, 34, an orthopedic surgeon in the stands for the pairs skating short 
program. “But instead of staying abroad because it was easier to make money there, they decided 
to return to help South Korea’s development. Maybe the North Korean elites who have outside 
exposure might feel the same.” (Mokoto Rich, “Isolated Nation Could Feel Winds of Change,” 
New York Times, February 18, 2018, p. SP-10)

Pabian, Bermudez, Liu: “Commercial satellite imagery from 2017 through February 11, 2018 
indicates steady progress has been made towards the operationalization of the (100 MWe/30 
MWe) Experimental Light Water Reactor (ELWR) at North Korea’s Yongbyon Nuclear Scientific 
Research Center. Having been under construction since 2010, the ELWR seems to be nearing 
operational status based on improvements made over the past year, including new provisions for a 
more consistent cooling water supply, installation of internal equipment and the connection of the 
reactor to the local electrical grid. The latest imagery from February 11 shows the ELWR is 
externally complete, while the two adjacent construction support yards now appear relatively quiet 
as opposed to mid-2017 when equipment was actively being transferred from the yards into the 
reactor dome. … The 2017 International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) safeguards report noted 
indications of an increase in activities in the ELWR’s construction yard consistent with the 
fabrication of certain reactor components. Based on satellite imagery alone, it is difficult to 
identify what these specific “reactor components” were, however, significant movement of 
equipment was observed over the past year at the two construction support yards (primary and 
secondary) presumably in preparation for installation in the reactor. …Although satellite imagery 
indicated the ELWR’s electrical switchyard was completed by May 2016, footings for the key 
transmission tower were first noted in March 2017. A 3-phase transmission line was later strung 
between that newly erected tower and another located to the east across the Kuryong River 
through a newly tree-cleared path to connect with an existing north-south transmission line that 
serves the Radiochemical Laboratory and the Uranium Enrichment Plant (UEP).” (Frank V. 
Pabian, Joseph S. Bermudez Jr., and Jack Liu, “Progress at North Korea’s Experimental Light-
Water Reaction at Yongbyon,” 38North, February 19, 2018)

Rodong Sinmun commentary: “The Trump group is spouting rubbish that if the DPRK’s nuclear 
issue is not settled through diplomatic way, it cannot but take a military option, while clamoring 
for "possibility of dialogue" with the DPRK. This is an open threat to mount a military attack if 
the DPRK does not respond to the denuclearization negotiations. It is foolhardy for the U.S. to try 
to threaten the DPRK with such nonsense and it is nothing but a reckless act ignorant of the faith, 
will and pluck of Juche Korea. The DPRK is a self-defensive nuclear power no one can dare 
provoke, and we are not afraid of sanctions and pressure as we are exploring our future under the 
banner of self-reliance and self-development. We are ready for both dialogue and war. If the 
U.S. attacks the DPRK, it will not be safe in face of a stern punishment by the Korean army and 
people. Recently the trump group is advising the Americans to leave last messages if they want to 
travel Korea. They had better pay heed to our warning, not making such nonsensical rubbish. If 
the U.S. dare provokes a war, there will never be a man left who would keep last messages and 
bury the coffins. This is our answer. The U.S. has to stop going ill-mannered, clearly
North Korea is quietly expanding both the scope and sophistication of its cyber weaponry, laying the groundwork for more devastating attacks, according to a new report published today. It appears that North Korea has also been using previously unknown holes in the Internet to carry out cyber espionage — the kind of activity that could easily metamorphose into full-scale attacks, according to a report from FireEye, a California-based cybersecurity company. “Our concern is that this could be used for a disruptive attack rather than a classic espionage mission, which we already know that the North Koreans are regularly carrying out,” said John Hultquist, director of intelligence analysis for FireEye. FireEye said it has “high confidence” that a cyber espionage group it has identified as APT37 is responsible for a number of attacks, not just in South Korea but also in Japan, Vietnam and the Middle East. These include “zero-day vulnerability” attacks in which hackers find and exploit flaws in software before the developers have had an opportunity to create patches to fix them. “It’s like your security system is a big wall, but someone knows that there’s a hole somewhere in that wall and can crawl through it,” Hultquist said. “It’s fairly rare.” It’s also a sign of sophistication, as hackers are able to obtain access and defeat mature security programs, he said. The APT37 group appears to have been operating under the radar, exploiting holes in South Korean cybersecurity since 2012 to covertly gather intelligence on issues of concern for the North Korean regime: the government, military, media and human rights groups among them. These targets, combined with the times of day that attacks happen, strongly point to North Korea, FireEye said. Last year, however, APT37 appeared to have targeted a Japanese entity involved in imposing sanctions on North Korea, a Vietnamese company and one in the Middle East. FireEye did not name any of the targets for legal reasons, but its description of the attack on the company in the Middle East perfectly describes Orascom, an Egyptian telecommunications company that had started a cellphone company in North Korea, only to have almost all its profits retained by the regime. In addition to expanding its geographical reach, APT37 also appears to be targeting a wider range of industries, including chemicals, electronics, manufacturing, aerospace, automotive and health-care entities, the report said. While the damage is currently much lower than that caused by the huge cyberattacks blamed on North Korea, it suggests the regime is looking for new ways to launch stealthy attacks when it wants to. The Worldwide Threat Assessment published by the U.S. intelligence community last week forecast that the potential for surprise cyberattacks would increase over the next year. Intelligence agencies expect North Korea to use cyber-operations to gather intelligence or launch attacks on South Korea and the United States. “Pyongyang probably has a number of techniques and tools it can use to achieve a range of offensive effects with little or no warning, including distributed denial of service attacks, data deletion, and deployment of ransomware,” the assessment said. Hultquist said APT37 was just the kind of tool North Korea could use for a surprise attack, partly because it has been operating at a relatively low level. “Lazarus and the other actors that are well known all started as espionage. That’s the classic story again and again,” he said. He added that the Kim regime does not seem to care about consequences. “North Korea has flouted global norms and taboos,” Hultquist said. “They are not necessarily concerned about retribution. They have adopted this criminal MO which flies in the face of just about any kind of international norm.” (Anna Fifield, “North Korea Poised to Launch New Cyberattacks, report Says,” Washington Post, February 20, 2018)

For the past several years, humanitarian groups and nongovernmental organizations have combed commercial satellite imagery in North Korea, looking for evidence of human rights abuses, such as mass graves. Now, some will have access to satellite photos and analysis from an American spy agency. The National Geospatial-Intelligence Agency, which maps the earth’s surface with data from drones, satellites, and other airborne craft, will provide raw imagery, expert review, and the use of an already developed digital app and publishing platform to several nonprofit organizations and think tanks. These first partnerships will focus on North Korea, Chris Rasimusen, a longtime military intelligence analyst and data expert with NGA, told Foreign Policy in an interview. The NGA maps everything from coastline data to the far reaches of the Arctic; some of that imagery and those maps are already public. But rarely does the U.S. government share imagery of North
Korean leader Kim Jong Un’s isolated regime, let alone an intelligence agency’s analysis of sites there. The decision to work with NGOs to highlight the human rights abuses by the regime in Pyongyang comes at a critical time. The Trump administration has charted a confrontational course with Kim over his nuclear program, and the intelligence community has ramped up its focus on the country. Highlighting Pyongyang’s human rights abuses is also part of the Trump administration’s larger strategy toward North Korea. Rasmussen said he and his coworkers, and their future partners in the public sector, are “motivated by public service to produce original research on high-priority strategic and humanitarian intelligence issues.” Rasmussen declined to mention which specific partners NGA would be working with, saying the agreements have not been formalized yet. Rasmussen recently presented the program, many months in the works, to the Intelligence Community Transparency Council, which was created after Edward Snowden’s leaks in 2013. While NGA declined to describe specifics about what issues it would be helping outside organizations to study, there are numerous human rights concerns in North Korea. Having NGA’s assistance will give this kind of work a major boost, going beyond traditional contracting partnerships to something public and sharing information without requiring onerous security clearances or secrecy, Rasmussen explained, without mentioning specific issues NGA will help examine. The intelligence community often publishes declassified historical information, but that can take years. Doing something with current imagery is something new. No government assets, like imagery from government satellites, will be used initially, which means the pictures for now will be limited to the commercial imagery NGA purchases—but even those could be beneficial to outside groups. “I want to see this turn into the CIA World Factbook of high-quality authoritative original research on intelligence. I want to see this turn into the CIA World Factbook of high-quality authoritative original research on intelligence,” Rasmussen said. He called the opportunity to put NGA’s skills on the humanitarian problems of the world and create detailed, original reports about these issues with NGOs and think tanks “incredibly exciting.” Scott Edwards, a senior advisor at Amnesty International, said the group has a blanket prohibition on working with governments, based on the possibility that critics could argue the research is somehow tainted. However, when smaller organizations agree to partner with NGA and publish information on human rights abuses, Amnesty International would applaud them. “Any shini ng of a light on a human rights abuse is a good thing,” Edwards told FP. “I’d be remiss to critique any other NGOs for innovative ways of getting to findings of fact,” he said. He cautioned, however, that Amnesty would seek to verify that analysis based on its own independent assessment of the imagery. Amnesty would look to purchase the imagery and replicate the analysis ourselves, to make sure the findings of fact can’t be dismissed . . . as a ploy by the U.S. government,” he said. Scott Stevens, the administrative director of the Transitional Justice Working Group, based in Seoul, found the possibility of partnership with the U.S. government appealing, though fraught with a few potential concerns. “High resolution satellite imagery for specific locations is expensive,” he wrote in an email to FP. “With higher resolution imagery, we could take a closer look at the suspected human rights crime scenes we’ve identified. Better imagery might mean better analysis.” However, Stevens said there’s danger in revealing the location of the sites to anyone outside the organization, even if the intelligence community does keep information very safe and secure. “Revealing which sites we have identified to date would give those opposed to our work a short list of priorities for any clearing operations. I would assume that the NGA’s security protocols are strong, but there is always a risk in transferring information outside of our organization’s security environment.” The group would have to balance existing privacy agreements it has with defectors whose information they receive, particularly if working with NGA required signing any additional agreements. It would also take a lot of work to incorporate new information into their workflow, Stevens explained. Rasmussen stressed that NGA won’t be writing any of the reports; the organizations NGA partners with will maintain full editorial independence over the issues they cover, he said. This isn’t Rasmussen’s first push to open up the intelligence world. At NGA, Rasmussen pushed for software that would allow intelligence community employees to view unclassified summaries of reports on their smartphones, rather than having to be at their desk in a secured facility. That effort turned into Tearline, a smartphone application for government employees, now available in the Apple app store and the Google Play store. He also headed up the Pathfinder project, which has been focused on acquiring more open-source intelligence from public companies, pushing NGA to do more unclassified analysis. New
reports from NGA’s partners on North Korea will be available in multiple locations, including the public Tearline smartphone application and website, where a preview page is already available, and most likely on a new website from the Office of the Director of National Intelligence called the Public’s Daily Brief, a riff on the President’s Daily Brief, the high-level intelligence report the president has received almost every day since 1946. NGA is in a unique position, according to Rasmussen. The CIA and National Security Agency can’t publish intercepted communications or human source reporting. But NGA has access to a massive repository of satellite imagery that isn’t all classified and could serve the public, not just the intelligence community. “The targets aren’t flagged as sensitive,” Rasmussen said. Rasmussen was a part of the process to update the classification policies, an effort he said “paved the pathway” for projects like the partnership to monitor the North Korean humanitarian issues. This kind of collaboration has never been done before with an intelligence agency… at least that I’m aware of,” Rasmussen said. As for future projects in other areas of the world? Rasmussen is hopeful. “If we get a million downloads, it’s going to make it easier for me to say, let’s expand to other areas,” he said. (Jenna McLaughlin, “U.S. Spies to Partner with Human Rights Groups to Keep an Eye on North Korea,” Foreign Policy, February 21, 2018)

North Korea said that a high-ranking official, who many in the South believe orchestrated a deadly attack in 2010, would lead a delegation to the Winter Olympics closing ceremony in the South, another sign the two Koreas are trying to work out a road map toward improving ties. The North’s delegation will be led by Kim Yong-chol, a vice chairman of the ruling Workers’ Party’s Central Committee. The eight-member delegation will start a three-day trip on February 25 that will include attending the closing ceremony in Pyeongchang, South Korean officials said. Also scheduled to attend Sunday’s closing ceremony is President Trump’s daughter, Ivanka Trump, who will lead the American delegation. United States officials said Ms. Trump had no plans to meet anyone representing the North. Kim Yong-chol, a former head of the North’s main intelligence agency, now leads a Workers’ Party department in charge of relations with South Korea. He was widely believed to have helped engineer the sinking of a South Korean naval ship in 2010, which killed 46 sailors. Kim had been on sanctions lists in both South Korea and the United States for his alleged involvement in the North’s military provocations and nuclear weapons development. South Korea is talking with Washington to clear Kim’s trip to the Olympics, said Noh Kyu-duk, a spokesman for the South Korean foreign ministry. Still, the South Korean government said it would allow Kim to lead the delegation across the border. “We expect the high-level delegation’s participation in the closing ceremony of the Pyeongchang Winter Olympics to help advance the process of settling peace on the Korean Peninsula including the improvement of inter-Korean relations and denuclearization,” the Unification Ministry, a South Korean government agency, said in a statement. “Against this backdrop, from this standpoint, we will accept the visit of North Korea’s high-level delegation to the South.” Kim Yong-chol is expected to meet with Moon to discuss the details of a potential summit meeting. Kim Yong-chol is a familiar figure to South Korean negotiators. In 2014, Kim, who is also a military general, led a delegation to discuss ending hostilities after North and South Korean soldiers exchanged fire across the border. In 2010, when two North Korean agents were caught in the South while on a mission to assassinate a high-ranking defector from the North, they said they were dispatched by Kim’s General Bureau of Reconnaissance, the North’s main spy agency, South Korean officials said. The spies told South Korean authorities that Kim personally assigned them to the assassination mission, throwing them a dinner party before they left for the South. (Choe Sang-hun, “Former Spymaster to Lead North Korea’s Olympics Ceremony Delegation,” New York Times, February 22, 2018)

Saying it was imposing its largest package of sanctions against North Korea, the U.S. Treasury sanctioned one person, 27 companies and 28 ships, according to a statement on the U.S. Treasury Department’s website. The actions block assets held by the firms in the United States and prohibit U.S. citizens from dealing with them. The Treasury’s Office of Foreign Assets Control announced the measures, which are designed to disrupt North Korean shipping and trading companies and vessels and to further isolate Pyongyang. Treasury Secretary Steve Mnuchin said in a statement
whether they're Chinese previously designated Russian entities with links to North Korea. "Whether they're Russian ships, official said the United States had raised concerns about smuggling with Russia and had countries to hail and board North Korean ships in international waters. A senior administration official said at a background briefing for reporters. At another briefing in Washington, Treasury Secretary Steve Mnuchin stood next to enlarged photos he said showed December 2017 images that revealed ship-to-ship transfers of fuel and other products destined for North Korea in an attempt to evade sanctions. “This is very impactful. We’re going to do everything to stop these ship-to-ship transfers,” Mnuchin said. Washington “also issued an advisory alerting the public to the significant sanctions risks to those continuing to enable shipments of goods to and from North Korea.” The new U.S. sanctions were announced while Trump’s daughter, Ivanka, is visiting South Korea. She had dinner with Moon after a closed-door meeting with the president. At a dinner with Moon at Seoul’s presidential Blue House, she said the purpose was also to “reaffirm our commitment to our maximum pressure campaign to ensure that the Korean Peninsula is denuclearized.” Moon said North Korea’s participation in the Olympics had “led to lowering of tensions on the peninsula and an improvement in inter-Korean relations” and were thanks to President Trump’s “strong support for inter-Korean dialogue.” Moon, cited by his spokesman, Yoon Young-chan, said at a news conference South Korea cannot acknowledge North Korea as a nuclear state and talks with the North on denuclearization and improving inter-Korean relations must go hand in hand. He said close cooperation between the United States and South Korea is important for the talks. Moon made the comments to Ivanka Trump. Her visit to South Korea coincides with that of a sanctioned North Korean official, Kim Yong Chol, blamed for the deadly 2010 sinking of a South Korean navy ship that killed 46 sailors. His delegation will attend the closing ceremony and also meet Moon. The Blue House has said there are no official opportunities for U.S. and North Korean officials to meet. South Korea’s decision yesterday to allow in Kim Yong Chol, currently sanctioned by the United States and South Korea, sparked protest from family members of the dead sailors and opposition parties. (Christine Kim and Steve Holland, “U.S. Imposes More North Korea Sanctions; Targets Ships, Firms,” Reuters, February 22, 2018) "If we can make a deal, it will be a great thing," Trump said at a news conference with Prime Minister Malcolm Turnbull of Australia. “And if we can’t, something will have to happen.” “If the sanctions don’t work, we’ll have to go Phase 2," he said, alluding to the threat of military action. “Phase 2 may be a very rough thing — may be very, very unfortunate for the world.” The timing of the announcement was striking, coming just a few hours after South Korea’s president, Moon Jae-in, played host at a dinner for Trump’s daughter Ivanka, who is leading the American delegation to the closing ceremony of the Games. Mnuchin said Ms. Trump discussed the sanctions with Moon before their dinner. In the past, the United States has gone after ships suspected of transporting missiles and nuclear proliferation material. But stopping vessels suspected of carrying commercial goods, experts said, would be a major step up in the pressure campaign against Pyongyang. “That goes into the realm of an economic blockade,” said Abraham M. Denmark, a former Pentagon official who is now the director of the Asia program at the Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars. “It would be moving beyond proliferation and going after things that sustain North Korea’s economic lifeline.” Such a move, he predicted, will meet resistance from China and Russia. Those countries thwarted an effort in December by the administration to put a provision into the latest United Nations Security Council resolution on North Korea that would permit countries to hail and board North Korean ships in international waters. A senior administration official said the United States had raised concerns about smuggling with Russia and had previously designated Russian entities with links to North Korea. “Whether they’re Russian ships, whether they’re Chinese ships — we don’t care whose ships they are,” Mnuchin said. “If we have
intelligence that people are doing things, we will put sanctions on them.” As Mnuchin spoke in the White House briefing room, large boards behind him showed satellite images of a ship-to-ship transfer in December involving a North Korean and a Panamanian vessel. The identity of the North Korean ship had been masked with a Chinese name and home port. The American military has begun contingency planning to stop and board suspect vessels bound for North Korea. But it is a perilous undertaking. Navy or Marine warships would deploy small boats carrying troops who are trained in what the Pentagon calls visit, board, search and seizure operations. Once aboard, military officials said, the search party would have two options: sweep the ship and turn it back over to its crew or, if ordered by their commanders, seize it. The military, however, has options short of boarding, officials said. It could track suspect vessels, by sea or with P-3 or P-8 surveillance planes, until they make port. The United States or its allies could then call on that nation to inspect the ship’s cargo to determine whether it violated existing United Nations sanctions. Evan S. Medeiros, an Asia director in the National Security Council during the Obama administration, said, “The administration is walking right up to the line of what’s permissible under international law to aggressively increase the pressure on North Korea.” (Mark Landler, “Trump Imposes More Sanctions on Pyongyang,” New York Times, February 24, 2018)

The Trump administration and key Asian allies are preparing to expand interceptions of ships suspected of violating sanctions on North Korea, a plan that could include deploying U.S. Coast Guard forces to stop and search vessels in Asia-Pacific waters, senior U.S. officials said. Washington has been talking to regional partners, including Japan, South Korea, Australia and Singapore, about coordinating a stepped-up crackdown that would go further than ever before in an attempt to squeeze Pyongyang’s use of seagoing trade to feed its nuclear missile program, several officials told Reuters. While suspect ships have been intercepted before, the emerging strategy would expand the scope of such operations but stop short of imposing a naval blockade on North Korea. Pyongyang has warned it would consider a blockade an act of war. The strategy calls for closer tracking and possible seizure of ships suspected of carrying banned weapons components and other prohibited cargo to or from North Korea, according to the officials, who spoke on condition of anonymity. Depending on the scale of the campaign, the United States could consider beefing up the naval and air power of its Pacific Command, they said. “There is no doubt we all have to do more, short of direct military action, to show (North Korean leader) Kim Jong Un we mean business,” said a senior administration official. The White House declined official comment. The effort could target vessels on the high seas or in the territorial waters of countries that choose to cooperate. It was unclear, however, to what extent the campaign might extend beyond Asia. The initiative, which is being developed, would be fraught with challenges that could risk triggering North Korean retaliation and dividing the international community. China and Russia, which have blocked U.S. efforts at the United Nations to win approval for use of force in North Korea interdiction operations, are likely to oppose new actions if they see the United States as overstepping. A Chinese official said such steps should only be taken under United Nations auspices. China’s Foreign Ministry, in a statement to Reuters, said they did not know anything about the plan, but that in principle China believes U.N. resolutions on North Korea should be fully and thoroughly implemented. “At the same time, we hope relevant countries act in accordance with Security Council resolutions and international law,” it added, without elaborating. But Washington is expected to start gradually ratcheting up such operations soon even if discussions with allies have not been completed, according to the senior U.S. official. U.S. experts are developing legal arguments for doing more to stop sanctions-busting vessels, citing the last U.N. Security Council resolution which they say opened the door by calling on states to inspect suspect ships on the high seas or in their waters. Washington is also drawing up rules of engagement aimed at avoiding armed confrontation at sea, the officials said. A Japanese ruling party lawmaker briefed by the government said discussions with the United States were focused on the need for stepped up cooperation on surveillance and information-sharing between Washington, Tokyo and Seoul regarding ship-to-ship transfers suspected of violating sanctions, and on the need to notify authorities in ports of origin. The lawmaker as well as a Japanese defense ministry official involved in policy planning said that under current U.N. sanctions, the agreement of the flag state and ship captain was necessary to conduct inspections on the high seas. “I think it is unlikely that the U.N. will strengthen the sanctions so that inspections on high seas...
are possible without agreement,” the Japanese defense official said. “From the viewpoint of the
country in question, that would be an act of war,” he said, referring to North Korea. Some U.S.
officials believe the risk could be minimized if Coast Guard cutters, which carry less firepower
and technically engage in law-enforcement missions, are used in certain cases rather than
warships. The Coast Guard declined to address whether it might deploy ships to the Asia-Pacific
region but acknowledged its ties to countries there. “Future ship deployments would depend on
U.S. foreign policy objectives and the operational availability of our assets,” said spokesman
Lieutenant Commander Dave French. A senior South Korean government official said there had
been discussions over “intensified maritime interdictions,” including at a foreign ministers’
meeting in Vancouver last month where U.S. Secretary of State Rex Tillerson pressed counterparts
on the issue. “We are discussing with various countries including the U.S. and South Korea how to
fully implement the sanctions, but I have not heard talk of creating a framework or a coalition,”
said the Japanese defense ministry official involved in policy planning. Japan’s foreign ministry,
in reply to a question from Reuters, repeated Tokyo’s call for “maximum pressure” on Pyongyang.
The ministry declined to comment on specific discussions with other countries, but said Japan
continued its “close collaboration with the U.S., ROK (South Korea) and the international
community including China and Russia to secure the effectiveness of U.N. Security Council
Resolutions” to achieve the denuclearization of the Korean peninsula. The Trump administration
has also sought greater cooperation from Southeast Asian countries, which may have little military
capability to assist but are seen as sources of intelligence on ship movements, U.S. officials said.
“The more partners we have, the more resources we have to dedicate to the effort,” said Chris
Ford, assistant secretary of state for international security and nonproliferation. He declined to talk
about discussions with specific countries. Washington is especially interested in detecting of ship-
to-ship transfers at sea of banned goods, something North Korea has increasingly resorted to as
vessels have faced greater scrutiny of their cargo in Asian ports, the officials said. Reuters
reported in December that Russian tankers had supplied fuel to North Korea at sea in a violation of
sanctions. Washington also said at the time it had evidence that vessels from several countries,
including China, had engaged in shipping oil products and coal. China denied the allegation. U.S.
interception of ships close to Chinese waters is something likely to be avoided, in favor of
informing Chinese authorities of banned cargo onboard and asking them do the inspection, one
official said. “It’s probably impossible to stop everything, but you can raise the cost to North
Korea,” said David Shear, former deputy secretary of defense for Asia under President Barack
Obama. (Matt Spetalnick, Phil Stewart, and David Brunnstrom, “U.S. Prepares High-Seas
Crackdown on North Korea Sanctions Evaders – Sources,” Reuters, February 23, 2018)

North Korea has “ample intentions” to hold talks with the U.S., Kim Yong-chol, vice chairman of
North Korea’s ruling Workers’ Party Central Committee, told President Moon Jae-in, according to
Cheong Wa Dae. Moon had held an hour-long meeting with, in Pyeongchang ahead of the closing
ceremony of the Olympics, according to the presidential office. “President Moon pointed out that
US-North Korea dialogue must be held at an early date even for an improvement in the South-
North Korea relationship and the fundamental resolution of Korean Peninsula issues,” Cheong Wa
Dae spokesman Kim Eui-kyeom said of the meeting. “The North Korean delegation too agreed
that North Korea-US relations must develop along with the South-North Korea relationship, while
noting (the North) has enough intention to hold North Korea-US dialogue,” he added. Speculation
mounted over possible interaction between officials from the US and North Korea on the sidelines
of the Olympics, as it was revealed that North Korea had included one of its top officials dealing
with North Korea-US relations in its delegation for the closing of the Olympics. The eight-
member delegation crossed the inter-Korean border today for a three-day visit. Among the
delegation is Choe Kang-il, deputy director-general for North American affairs at the North’s
Foreign Ministry, the Unification Ministry confirmed. Choe has represented North Korea’s
position on nuclear weapons, handled the country’s relations with the US and recently met with
former US officials at a security-related forum in Switzerland in September last year, according to
news reports. Accompanying Trump was Allison Hooker, the National Security Council official in
charge of Korean affairs, fueling speculation that some kind of meeting might be in the works
behind the scenes. Hooker, a former East Asia and Pacific affairs analyst with the US State
Department Bureau of Intelligence and Research, accompanied James Clapper, then-director of
national intelligence, to North Korea in 2014 to secure the release of two Americans detained by the reclusive regime. North Korea and the US, however, had each dismissed the possibility of any interaction between their officials. Sarah Huckabee Sanders, one of the US delegates and the White House spokesperson, told reporters during a press briefing Saturday in Pyeongchang that the US officials have “no planned meetings or interactions with North Korea.” KCNA quoted the North’s Korea Asia-Pacific Peace Committee as saying, “We will never have face-to-face talks with them even after 100 years or 200 years.” The Trump administration two days ago announced what it called the “heaviest sanctions ever” placed on Pyongyang. In response, Pyongyang blasted Washington for heightening the possibility of “confrontation and war” on the Korean Peninsula. “Like we have said repeatedly, we would consider any restrictions on us as an act of war, and we will not stop the US if it really has the guts to confront us in a ‘rough’ manner,” the state-run KCNA news agency quoted the North’s Foreign Ministry statement as saying. (Ock Hyun-ju, “Chief Delegate Says N.K. Willing to Hold Talks with U.S.,” Korea Herald, February 25, 2018)

South Korean conservatives staged an overnight sit-in at a border crossing to try to prevent the North Korean official from entering the country. Kim is widely accused of masterminding two deadly attacks in 2010: a torpedo attack on the Cheonan naval corvette, which killed 46 South Korean sailors, and the shelling of an island, which killed four people. But their efforts were stymied: The delegation crossed Sunday morning using a military road, attending the meeting with Moon and then the Closing Ceremonies. Speculation about secret talks mounted when Choe Kang Il, deputy director of the U.S. affairs division in North Korea’s Foreign Ministry, arrived with the group of traveling North Korean officials. Choe has taken part in talks with former U.S. officials in recent years, including at a security-related forum in Switzerland last September. There, he delivered a strong message: that North Korea’s nuclear weapons were not up for discussion. His attendance surprised analysts, because his role has nothing to do with either sports or inter-Korean relations. Meanwhile, traveling with Trump was Allison Hooker, the Korea director on the National Security Council and a key player in the White House’s policy on North Korea. Her name was not on the White House’s list for the delegation. Some analysts said that a meeting between Hooker and Choe would be a good way to start easing the tensions that have risen over the past year, as North Korea has fired missiles and conducted a nuclear test, and the Trump administration has threatened military action in response. “There is no reason for Allison Hooker to come, nor is there any reason for Choe Kang Il to be here,” said John Delury, a professor of international relations at Yonsei University in Seoul. “They’re both superfluous to the Olympic ceremonies and to inter-Korean relations.” They would, however, be the right officials to meet and have a “preliminary discussion,” Delury said. “They could and they should do this.” White House press secretary Sarah Huckabee Sanders, who is traveling in South Korea with Trump and Hooker, said before the Closing Ceremonies that no meetings were scheduled. But afterward, in a statement released by the White House, she said the Trump administration “is committed to achieving the complete, verifiable, and irreversible denuclearization of the Korean Peninsula.” She added: “There is a brighter path available for North Korea if it chooses denuclearization. We will see if Pyongyang’s message today, that it is willing to hold talks, represents the first steps along the path to denuclearization. In the meantime, the United States and the world must continue to make clear that North Korea’s nuclear and missile programs are a dead end.” (Anna Fifield, “As Winter Games Close, North Korea Says It Is Willing to Talks to the U.S., According to Seoul,” Washington Post, February 25, 2018)

DPRK FoMin spokesman’s statement: “Respected Supreme Leader Comrade Kim Jong Un affirmed his will in his New Year Address to make strenuous efforts to improve inter-Korean relations, create a peaceful environment on the Korean peninsula and ensure a successful holding of Pyeongchang Winter Olympics. Thanks to our supreme leadership’s noble love for the nation and strong determination for peace, long-awaited inter-Korean dialogue and cooperation have been realized and the Olympics took place successfully by the inter-Korean collaboration. However, on the eve of closing of the Olympics, United States is running amok to bring another dark cloud of confrontation and war over the Korean peninsula by announcing enormous sanctions against the DPRK. Trump has announced new sanctions, the core of which is to completely block
Kim Yong-chol, the North's point man on South Korea, said that the reclusive state is willing to hold talks with the United States, according to an official from Seoul's presidential office. The remarks from Kim came in a meeting with Chung Eui-yong, chief of South Korea's National Security Council and the top security advisor to President Moon Jae-in. "Kim said the door remains open for dialogue with the United States. He said the North has also repeatedly expressed such a stance," a ranking Cheong Wa Dae official told reporters. The U.S. seemed to remain cautious, with White House spokeswoman Sarah Sanders saying Washington will first see if Kim's remarks represented the North's first step toward denuclearization. Moon has repeatedly stressed the need to continue fostering the recent rapprochement between the two Koreas, so they may soon lead to a resumption of international negotiations on ending the North's nuclear ambition. He insists such efforts will first require direct talks between the U.S. and North Korea. "The United States needs to lower its bar for dialogue and North too must show its willingness to denuclearize. It is important so that the U.S. and North Korea may sit down face to face," Moon said while meeting Chinese Vice Premier Liu Yandong at his office in Seoul earlier in the day. Kim underscored the importance of support and cooperation from the United States, as well as China, Japan and Russia, to get the denuclearization dialogue moving forward again, according to the Cheong Wa Dae official. During his meeting with the North Korean official, Chung said the Moon Jae-in government has made efforts to improve ties with state neighbors and such efforts have contributed to paving the way for peace on the Korean Peninsula. "I appreciate such efforts by President Moon," Kim said in response. When questioned if the North has any intention to discuss denuclearization during talks with the U.S., Kim said dismantling is the endpoint of denuclearization but there can be many ways of starting the process. He, however, didn't specify what the "many ways" are, according to the Cheong Wa Dae official. (Yonhap, “N.K. Delegate Reiterates Door Open for Dialogue with U.S.: Cheong Wa Dae,” February 26, 2018)
toward a denuclearized Korean peninsula,” Nauert said. Yun’s abrupt departure raises questions to isolate the DPRK (Democratic People’s Republic of Korea) until it agrees to begin credible talks diplomatic efforts regarding North Korea will continue based on our maximum pressure campaign to isolate the DPRK (Democratic People’s Republic of Korea) until it agrees to begin credible talks toward a denuclearized Korean peninsula,” Nauert said. Yun’s abrupt departure raises questions
and adds to uncertainty over US President Donald Trump's North Korea policy as ally South Korea engages in talks with the North for the first time in years. The veteran diplomat had a reputation as a proponent of dialogue when it comes to dealing with North Korea. (Eliana Lee and Joshua Berlinger, “U.S.’ Top Diplomat Announces Surprise Retirement,” CNN, February 27, 2018)

Japan has softened its stance on talks with North Korea and now plans to take part in informal meetings that do not include substantive negotiations on Pyongyang’s nuclear arms program, government sources have said. The shift puts Japan in line with the United States, which tried to organize high-level talks with North Korea earlier this month on the sidelines of the Pyeongchang Winter Olympics in South Korea. The administration of Prime Minister Abe Shinzo has repeatedly said that no meaningful dialogue can be held with the North until it takes concrete steps toward scrapping its nuclear arms program. But the position now is that such a commitment would not be required to hold talks in which the parties merely exchange greetings or repeat their existing positions on issues, the sources said. Japan will continue to refuse to take part in any dialogue that would recognize North Korea as a nuclear power, the sources added. “North Korea will play the nuclear card in its favor (if we enter into those negotiations). The United States won’t engage in that kind of discussion either,” a senior Foreign Ministry official said in Tokyo. The policy shift is the result of coordination between Tokyo and Washington. According to a diplomatic source, the two governments confirmed earlier this month that they will not engage in “dialogue” with North Korea but could accept a “chat.” At that time, the United States was attempting to set up a meeting between Vice President Mike Pence and Kim Yo Jong, North Korean leader Kim Jong Un’s younger sister, while both were visiting South Korea for the Pyeongchang Games. Pence was reportedly planning to convey Washington’s intention to keep up pressure on the isolated country. “If the United States and North Korea go into negotiations (on their own), Japan will be left out of the loop and the abduction issue could be abandoned,” a source close to North Korea-Japan relations said. In a hint at the shift, Abe shook hands and briefly exchanged words with North Korea’s nominal head of state, Kim Yong Nam, at a reception dinner ahead of the Winter Olympics opening ceremony earlier this month. “Japan believes it is important to directly communicate our thoughts to North Korea,” Chief Cabinet Secretary Suga Yoshihide, the government’s top spokesman, said today. But according to the Foreign Ministry official, there are “no plans at the present time” for further interactions between Tokyo and Pyongyang. In Washington today, President Donald Trump weighed in on the prospect of talks with the North. “They want to talk. And we want to talk also, only under the right conditions. Otherwise, we’re not talking,” Trump told a meeting of U.S. governors at the White House in Washington. “We’ll see what happens,” Trump said. “That’s my attitude: We’ll see what happens. But something has to be done.” (Kyodo, “Japan Softens Stance on Prospect of ‘Chat’ with North Korea, Sources Say,” Japan Times, February 27, 2018)

North Korea has been shipping supplies to the Syrian government that could be used in the production of chemical weapons, United Nations experts contend. The supplies from North Korea include acid-resistant tiles, valves and thermometers, according to a report by United Nations investigators. North Korean missile technicians have also been spotted working at known chemical weapons and missile facilities inside Syria, according to the report, which was written by a panel of experts who looked at North Korea’s compliance with United Nations sanctions. The report highlights the potential danger posed by any such trade between Syria and North Korea, which could allow Syria to maintain its chemical weapons while also providing North Korea with cash for its nuclear and missile programs. The possible chemical weapons components were part of at least 40 previously unreported shipments by North Korea to Syria between 2012 and 2017 of prohibited ballistic missile parts and materials that could be used for both military and civilian purposes, according to the report, which has not been publicly released but which was reviewed by the New York Times. Though experts who viewed the report said the evidence it cited did not prove definitively that there was current, continuing collaboration between North Korea and Syria on chemical weapons, they said it did provide the most detailed account to date of efforts to circumvent sanctions intended to curtail the military advancement of both countries. William
Newcomb, who was chairman of the United Nations panel of experts on North Korea from 2011 to 2014, called the report “an important breakthrough.” Since the start of the Syrian civil war in 2011, there have been suspicions that North Korea was providing equipment and expertise to maintain the chemical weapons program of Syria’s president, Bashar al-Assad. Those suspicions were not assuaged when in 2013 Syria signed onto the Chemical Weapons Convention and claimed to give up its chemical weapons stocks. “We knew stuff was going on,” Newcomb said. “We really wanted to up the game on chemical weapons programs, and we just weren’t able to get what we needed to do so.” The report, which is more than 200 pages long, includes copies of contracts between North Korean and Syrian companies as well as bills of lading indicating the types of materials shipped. Much information was provided by unidentified United Nations member states. The military-related cooperation, if confirmed, indicates major shortcomings in the international effort to isolate both countries. The shipments would have eluded detection even though both nations are subject to highly restrictive sanctions, and are under the intense scrutiny of American and other spy services. North Korea’s relationship with Syria takes up one section of the report, which also documents the many ways the government of North Korea’s leader, Kim Jong-un, has tried to circumvent sanctions. It describes how North Korea uses a complex web of shell companies and sympathetic foreign citizens to gain access to international financing, employs sophisticated cyber operations to steal military secrets and enlists its own diplomats in smuggling operations. It also criticizes Russia and China for failing to do enough to enforce sanctions on items like oil, coal and luxury goods. The sanctions, it says, have yet to be matched “by the requisite political will, international coordination, prioritization and resource allocation necessary to drive effective implementation.” The report gives fresh details of a military relationship between North Korea and Syria that goes back decades. In 2015, Syria honored that assistance by opening a monument and park in Damascus dedicated to North Korea’s founder, Kim Il-sung, grandfather of the current leader. The unveiling ceremony, held as Syria’s civil war raged, featured North Korean and Syrian dignitaries, military officials and a marching band. North Korea has provided training and support for Syria’s chemical weapons program since at least the 1990s, according to a forthcoming book by Bruce Bechtol, a former Korea analyst at the United States Defense Intelligence Agency who is now a professor at Angelo State University in Texas. The book also describes an accident in 2007 in which several Syrian technicians, along with North Korean and Iranian advisers, were killed in the explosion of a warhead filled with sarin gas and the extremely toxic nerve agent VX. The relationship with Syria “has been a boon for the North Korean military-industrial complex,” Bechtol said in an interview. The United Nations report says the cooperation continued during Syria’s civil war, despite international sanctions. Crucial evidence of that was found in January 2017, when two ships carrying acid-resistant tiles, commonly used in the construction of chemical weapons factories, were interdicted at sea en route to Damascus, the report said. Those shipments were among five deliveries agreed to in a contract between a government-owned company in Syria and the Korea Mining Development Trading Corp., a North Korean company involved in arms exports, according to the report. It based those findings at least in part on copies of contracts provided by the shipping company, identified as Cheng Tong Trading Co. Ltd., based in China. The report said the three other shipments had been sent between November 3 and December 12, 2016. The report did not say which country interdicted the two January tile shipments or whether the other three shipments were delivered to Damascus. The contract stipulated that the materials were to be delivered to the Metallic Manufacturing Factory, a company run by the Syrian government that was penalized by the United States Treasury Department last year for its involvement in Syria’s weapons industry. Several months earlier, in August 2016, a delegation of North Korean missile technicians visited Syria, at which point there was a transfer of “special resistance valves and thermometers known for use in chemical weapons,” the report said, without elaborating. An unidentified United Nations member country told the report’s authors that North Korean missile technicians worked at Syrian chemical weapons and missile facilities in Barzeh, Adra and Hama. In 2013, after the Obama administration threatened military action in response to a sarin gas attack on the rebel enclave of Ghouta that some experts estimated killed 1,400 people, Assad agreed to destroy his stockpile and join the Chemical Weapons Convention, which comprises 192 countries that are to have dismantled their chemical weapons programs. But Western officials and nonproliferation experts have long suspected that Assad retains some chemical weapons. So far this year, according to
diplomats and witnesses, several chlorine gas attacks have occurred in rebel-held areas in Ghouta, Idlib and Afrin. A separate United Nations panel also said Assad’s forces were responsible for a sarin gas attack on the rebel-held village of Khan Sheikhoun last April that killed at least 83 people and sickened roughly 300. Mallory Stewart, a former State Department official who was involved in the Obama administration’s efforts to dismantle Syria’s chemical weapons program, said that there were always concerns that the Assad government had not listed all of its chemical weapons stockpile on its declared inventory of what it gave up. The report, she says, “confirms everything we’ve been saying.” “Certainly what we tried to do in the last administration is dismantle the entire chemical weapons program,” Ms. Stewart said, “which we know they never did.” Establishing the origins of such weapons has been difficult. In November, Russia used its Security Council veto to end the work of an independent panel investigating chemical weapons used in the Syrian conflict. The Joint Investigative Mechanism, as it was known, had found that both the Syrian government and Islamic State militants had used chemical weapons in the war, though Russia’s ambassador to the United Nations labeled the panel’s reporting “a joke.” (Michael Schwirtz, “U.N. Links North Korea to Syria’s Chemical Weapons Program,” New York Times, February 27, 2018)

No phrase is more closely associated with the Trump administration’s North Korea strategy than “bloody nose.” The two words, captured in news articles and cited by people close to the administration, have quickly become shorthand for all manner of preemptive strikes designed to demonstrate American resolve and prevent Pyongyang from developing nuclear weapons that can hit the United States. There’s just one problem: Trump administration officials have insisted repeatedly — in classified briefings to Congress and in public testimony — that they’ve never said it, don’t like it and would never support it. “The phrase has never, ever been uttered by anyone in the White House,” said a senior administration official involved in Asia policy. Sen. James E. Risch (R-Idaho) echoed those sentiments last week at an international security conference in Munich: “There is no bloody nose policy. Nobody knows where it came from.” And yet the White House can’t shake it. The evocative phrase echoes the punchy, macho language President Trump has employed to threaten to “totally destroy” North Korea and taunt its leader Kim Jong Un as “Little Rocket Man” on Twitter. The president has made clear from his first days in office that neutralizing the North Korea threat is his top national security priority. More recently the idea of a “bloody nose strike” has sparked worries in Washington and Seoul that a war may be imminent — even as the North Koreans on February 25 indicated that they were open to talks with the Trump administration. Foreign diplomats and Beltway analysts are comparing notes from meetings with senior Trump officials to figure out how serious the White House is about an attack. On February 23, Trump probably added to their fears. “If the sanctions don’t work, we’ll have to go to phase 2,” the president said ominously at a news conference with Australia’s prime minister. “Phase 2 may be a very rough thing. It may be very, very unfortunate for the world.” In a sign of the White House’s conflicting opinions on North Korea, White House aides privately express frustration that the bloody nose phrase has caught on so widely and so quickly. Such talk “should have petered out,” the administration official said. The White House, he cautioned, does “not want to give the impression of a gathering snowball toward [military] conflict.” Theories abound to explain the phrase’s staying power. Some foreign policy experts insist that the White House denials are simply disingenuous. “They are playing semantics here,” said Thomas Wright, a foreign relations analyst at the Brookings Institution. Even as the Trump administration denies a pinprick strike designed to bloody North Korea’s nose, Wright said, it still seems to view preventive military strikes on the country’s nuclear program — and the catastrophic response from Pyongyang that might ensue — as a legitimate option. Others said that the Trump administration’s strategy, which it describes as “maximum pressure and engagement,” is so murky that it is barely distinguishable from those of previous presidents. “The administration is trying to pretend that it’s different,” said Jeffrey Lewis, an arms control expert at the Middlebury Institute of International Studies. “If you take them at their word…[all] you are left with is this bellicose language stuff.” “Bloody nose” seems to better capture what’s going on in Trump’s head than the actual words of senior administration officials. The phrase is on its way to joining the pantheon of other memorable foreign policy idioms that have set expectations for military action and — for better or worse — come to define presidential policies. Senior Trump administration officials were so bothered by
the “bloody nose” phrase earlier this year that they set out to trace its origins. The first usage seems to have been in the headline of a December 20 article in the Daily Telegraph. The idea, according to one former U.S. official cited in the Telegraph article, was to “punch the North Koreans in the nose” to get Kim’s attention. Around the same time foreign policy experts in Washington were growing increasingly alarmed at the prospect of a preventive U.S. strike. In a scathing two-page memo to colleagues, John J. Hamre, a former top Pentagon official and president of the Center for Strategic and International Studies, reported that a senior Trump administration official told him, “We are running out of time on North Korea.” Hamre, who had worked on the North Korea problem during the Clinton administration, insisted that such talk was reckless. “We are talking like frightened little rabbits, afraid of the lone wolf in the forest,” he wrote. “Everyone in Washington should just calm down.” Six days later, H.R. McMaster, the president’s national security adviser, warned publicly that new sanctions imposed on the North “might be our last best chance to avoid military conflict.” Confusion about the Trump administration’s precise policy and exactly what constitutes a “bloody nose strike” added to the uncertainty. In Washington, the phrase initially referred to a discrete and targeted attack designed to send a message that the United States was serious, rather than destroy North Korea’s nuclear weapons program. By contrast, a much larger “preventive strike” would seek to set back or cripple the program. Either option could provoke a war, anger Beijing or shred the United States’ relationships with its closest allies in Seoul and Tokyo, who have made it clear that they view the risk of a North Korean counterattack too great. “If they are going to use force, then they really need to explain what they are going to do and why they think it will work,” Wright said. “It’s really weird that they are not discussing it.” The lack of public discussion could be a sign that the administration’s talk of military action is a bluff. Those who think the administration is seriously considering a “bloody nose” or preventive strike point to the dropping in January of Victor Cha, a former George W. Bush administration official, as the presumptive nominee to be U.S. ambassador to South Korea. Cha had reportedly expressed private opposition to White House officials over the idea of a strike. Unable to shake the “bloody nose” label, a frustrated McMaster has jokingly told aides to get to work on a “stubbed toe” strategy to complement existing plans. (David Nakamura and Greg Jaffe, “White House Writes off ‘Bloody Nose,’” Washington Post, February 27, 2018, p. A-8)

Choe Son Hui, formerly the North Korean Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MOFA) director of the North American department, has been promoted to a vice-ministerial position, according to a diplomatic note circulated to officials in Pyongyang last week. In reports confirmed to NK News by multiple sources this week, the news will see Choe – a diplomat with extensive experience negotiating on nuclear issues – take a senior foreign ministry position amid hints that Pyongyang may be interested in talks with Washington D.C. The daughter of former DPRK Premier Choe Yong Rim, she previously served as an interpreter for North Korean delegations to nuclear negotiations since the 1990s and through the Six-Party Talks in 2003-9. Amid high tensions last year over North Korea’s nuclear and missile testing – and a war of words between U.S. President Donald Trump and DPRK leader Kim Jong Un – Choe notably often struck a more diplomatic tone. And last May saw her fly to Norway for track 1.5 talks with former U.S. diplomats, telling press in Oslo that Pyongyang would talk to Washington “if conditions are there.” Later in the year she traveled to Moscow to meet with Oleg Burmistrov, the Russian Ministry of Foreign Affairs’ Ambassador-at-Large, who she had previously met with in Pyongyang. There are believed to be six vice-ministerial positions in North Korea’s foreign ministry, with the most senior being held by first vice-foreign minister Kim Gye Gwan. Informed sources said that they had been told by North Korean officials that Choe’s promotion would see her replace current vice-minister Han Song Ryol – whose promotion to the position had initially made room for Choe to become director of the North American department – as head of the ministry’s North America portfolio. Han, who will remain a vice minister, is now solely responsible for European affairs. (Oliver Hotham, “Choe Son Hui Promoted to Vice-Minister at DPRK Foreign Ministry: Sources,” NK News, February 28, 2018)

The government launched a rocket carrying an optical reconnaissance satellite that will look for signs of missile launches and other things at military and other facilities in North Korea. The
government is placing increased importance on space-based monitoring systems amid the heightened threat stemming from North Korea’s nuclear and missile development. The satellite was put into orbit as planned after the rocket — the H-2A Launch Vehicle No. 38 — blasted off from Tanegashima Space Center in Kagoshima Prefecture at 1:34 p.m. It is the first launch of a reconnaissance satellite since March 2017 and the seventh in total. Three of those are optical satellites that use cameras, and four are radar satellites that use reflected electrical waves. Ultimately, the government intends to create a 10-satellite system comprising four optical and four radar satellites, and two that would transmit and receive data. This would give the government the ability to reliably photograph any spot on Earth multiple times per day. The domestically produced H-2A rocket is a workhorse, having had 32 consecutive successful launches, which equates to a success rate of 97.4 percent. “I can’t disclose the details because this would reveal our capabilities,” Kinomura Kenichi, head of the Cabinet Satellite Intelligence Center, said at a press conference after the launch. The government believes revealing specifics about the satellite’s abilities would have a major impact on national defense. According to materials released by the government, its reconnaissance satellites orbit the Earth at altitudes ranging from several hundred to 1,000 kilometers. Commercial satellites have resolutions of up to several dozen centimeters — enough to recognize the movements of people and vehicles. Intelligence satellites are thought to have at least that level of resolution. The main role of the reconnaissance satellites is to monitor military and other facilities in North Korea, which is continuing with its nuclear and missile development. According to several government sources, satellites have captured signs of impending launches before North Korean ballistic missiles were fired. The signs included missiles being transported, installed on launch platforms and fueled. A figure thought to be Kim Jong Un, chairman of the Workers’ Party of Korea, was even observed traveling to observe a launch. These images are defense secrets and carefully managed by the Cabinet Satellite Intelligence Center, which shares them with Prime Minister Shinzo Abe, the defense minister and relevant entities. “The more eyes we have, the better our surveillance net is,” a senior government official said about the latest launch. North Korea has recently taken steps to avoid satellite surveillance, such as covering its operations and using movable launch pads. Only being able to take infrequent photographs makes it difficult to track the movements of launch pads. “We can’t call our surveillance system sufficient,” a senior Cabinet Secretariat official said. The latest launch brings the number of Japan’s reconnaissance satellites to seven. Rather than strengthening the surveillance system, the goal is to maintain a four-satellite system that can obtain more than a single image per day. This is because three of the seven satellites have surpassed their five-year limits and will soon cease to operate. The government’s 2015 basic plan for space set a goal of building a 10-satellite system. That target, however, was vague, only saying “by fiscal 2025 or later.” The government’s space-related initial budget is about ¥300 billion per year, of which about ¥60 billion goes toward reconnaissance satellites. This is much less than the U.S. National Aeronautics and Space Administration’s annual budget of about ¥2 trillion. “It’s difficult to secure enough funding,” a senior Defense Ministry official said. A reconnaissance satellite took images of the January eruption of Mt. Kusatsushirane. The government published the images, modified for reasons such as reducing their resolution, on the Cabinet Secretariat website. The government hopes to win public understanding of the satellite launches by expanding their activities beyond national security. The government has started researching sensor technology, but it is said that an early warning satellite would require at least ¥1 trillion for operations and other costs. Hiroaki Fukue, former commander of the Air Defense Command of the Air Self-Defense Force, said, “Instead of cutting other defense budgets, the priority should be working with the United States.” To fill the holes in its reconnaissance satellite capabilities, the Defense Ministry is working toward using images obtained from commercial satellites and technology that detects radio waves emitted by missiles. “It’s important to have a comprehensive, integrated surveillance system that includes not only satellites, but radio waves, information from allied nations, human intelligence and other sources,” a senior Self-Defense Forces official said. (Tanikawa Kojiro and Ikeda Keita, “Satellite to Keep Tabs on N. Korea,” Yomiuri Shimbun, February 28, 2018)