

Foundation for Defense of Democracies
North Korea's Imminent and Long-term Threats: Good, Bad, and Worse Options
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Panel with Rebecca Hersman, former Deputy Assistant Secretary of Defense for Countering Weapons of Mass Destruction; Victor Cha, former Director for Asian Affairs of the National Security Council; and Olli Heinonen, former Deputy Director General of the IAEA. The discussion was moderated by Cliff May, Founder and President of FDD.

MAY: Glad to see you all here and welcome to our first panel following the very edifying discussion.

Let me introduce our panelist. We have starting on the far right. Rebecca Hersman. She's former deputy assistant secretary of defense for countering weapons of mass destruction and director of the project on nuclear issues and senior advisor to the International Security Program at the -- at CSIS.

We also have after that Victor Cha, former Director for Asian Affairs of the National Security Council. Currently a Senior Advisor and former -- and the Korea Chair at the Center for Strategic and International Studies as well.

And my colleague Olli Heinonen, former Director -- Deputy Director General of the IAEA and currently a Senior Advisor on Science and Nonproliferation here at FDD. And I'm going to ask some questions but feel free to also ask each other questions to respond to what's being said and then after a little while, we'll go also to the audience.

Victor, let me start with you. We think of North Korea as a black box. To what extent is it? Do we have any sense of the extent to which Kim Jong-un has advisors, listens to advisors, has a team of rivals around him? How is he making decisions? What discussions are likely going on in Pyongyang right now? They're probably not having breakfast and panels like we are. What are they doing?

CHA: So you're absolutely right, it is a black box. Having said that, I can say with fair certainty that they're not having a roundtable discussion with experts and scholars about what the next steps are for North Korea.

You know, I think at point early on in the transition process over five years ago, there was some hope raised by experts both I think inside and outside the government that this might be more of an enlightened leader. I think that's pretty much been proven to be incorrect.

In terms of what we can actually say and know about the behavior of the country, one of the things that we've actually been doing at CSIS is collecting data on North Korean behavior and there are couple things I'll just throw out for right now.

The first is that based on historical data, there are some patterns to North Korean provocations. So for example, as Susan mentioned, there's an election in South Korea on May 9.

And so we've looked at the history of North Korean behavior around elections and there's a real pattern there. They like to do provocations around elections and particularly around U.S. and South Korean elections.

So according to our own calculations, it's very likely that North Korea under Kim Jong-un is going to do a major provocation within 6.5 days of South Korea's election and that's based on an average that's been taken going back to Kim Il-sung.

The second thing I would say is that part of the reason that I think the North is behaving the way they are and the leadership is pushing so hard in the direction of trying to acquire an ICBM capability to reach United States is that I think there's a legitimacy problem inside the regime.

The fact that he is purging so many people -- 300 high-level purges -- consistently over six years is a sign that there's significant internal churn in the system and we have actually been doing some interviewing through NGOs of North Korean citizens in the country and it's very clear that large percentages of the citizenry are unhappy with the way the government intervenes in the market.

They are desirous of outside information. Eighty-six percent of the people that we talked to said they use and find more useful in their daily lives the market and foreign information than what the government gives them.

You would expect defectors to say this, right? But these are people inside of the country and that's a big change from what we've seen in the past.

MAY: Let me just follow up for a second, do you think he cares what the people think? Do you think the question of legitimacy weighs heavily on him?

CHA: I think it does because unlike his father and his grandfather, he had none of the mythology of the Kim family dynasty coming into power. Certainly, I think that he does not care about people outside of Pyongyang, the capital city.

But these are people inside the capital city that are talking like this and these are people who are not just blue collar workers. They're white collar workers. They're doctors. They're professionals.

So to the extent that there is concern about keeping those within the capital city who are truly the elite, the leadership class in North Korea happy, I think he's having problems with that.

MAY: Let me follow up on that. Kim Jong-un is a young man. Do you have a sense of what his goals are, what his intentions are, where would he like to be and where would he like North Korea to be in five years?

HERSMAN: For me?

MAY: Yes. If you like?

HERSMAN: I'm really not a Kim Jong-un expert in terms of looking at him as a person. I'm really looking at his weapons program. If I look at it from the perspective I know, his weapons program, I think that his goal is to secure his position and to do so in a belief that he can hold the United States at bay, that he can keep us at risk enough to secure an ability to turn inward and focus on his legitimacy internally.

Right now, I think there's a perception that that's sort of untenable because he's so externally oriented. The problem is I don't think that's going to deliver what he's hoping for because I think by continuing to put the United States at risk directly which then by extension puts the alliance and our extended deterrence at risk, he's only sowing the seeds of the additional conflict.

The question is can we adjust that calculus and give enough assurance that he could turn inward sooner rather than later and deal with his own legitimacy crisis.

MAY: But you're suggesting that his capabilities are a way of determining his intentions? He wouldn't build these capabilities without having specific intentions although he's inherited them, of course.

HERSMAN: He's inherited them but he has certainly made his own mark in terms of accelerating them, in kind of putting his very public face on them. I mean, this issue of, you know, getting your picture taken with your bombs is kind of new.

So I think that he has very much -- it appears, again, I'm not a psychiatrist or a psychologist but it seems that he's highly personalized those capabilities and has attached his sense of legitimacy and long-term presence to them.

MAY: Victor, you look like you're chomping at the bit to answer that

HERSMAN: I don't know, do you want to--

CHA: I completely agree. I mean, as Rebecca said from 2008 to today, he has done 72 ballistic missile tests and four nuclear tests. Just by comparison, the 14 years prior from 1994 to 2008, the previous leadership did 17. I mean, 17 is still bad but it's not 72.

So there's been, you know, a step increase and it's directly associated with the leadership even though he doesn't come to power until later. This really starts in January of 2009 and it's because in January 2009, the western world learned news of the fact that the father, Kim Jong-il, had a massive stroke in August. It wasn't public really until then and that's when we see the step increase because I think this guy started to take over.

The other thing that I would add to what Rebecca said in terms of intentions is, you know, they say that their weapons are about survival. But regimes like this, they're not status quo oriented, right?

I mean, of course, they want survival but these are predatory states and in this case I think what they would like to do is be able to threaten the United States, the homeland of the United States such that they can try to break the U.S.-South Korean alliance by trying to essentially say to the United States, are you willing to trade Seoul for Los Angeles?

And so I think it's a deliberate strategy that they have been seeking to implement over the long term because their main adversary is the alliance. That's what they want to break.

MAY: Olli, we're talking about this today because it's -- it appears to be an imminent threat but it's been a maturing threat for close to a quarter century and you were young but you're a historian.

So back in 1994 when you had Agreed Framework, there was great optimism that that was going to be the solution. One, talk about whether there was skepticism at that time and two, what did prove to be so flawed in the Agreed Framework?

HEINONEN: Well, there was a lot of skepticism and we have to think of the Agreed Framework in two ways. First is that what it was supposed to accomplish. The idea of what's absolutely the de-nuclearization based on this 1992 December agreement between U.S. and North Korea that eventually North Korea will give up its weapons -- actually plutonium production program including the graphite moderated reactors.

And the people decided it in such a way that they didn't believe that it will take 10 or 20 years for the regime to stay but during this opening process most likely there would be a regime change. And therefore, they agreed to somewhat limited verification arrangements and most important to very little dismantlement in the beginning of the program. Everything was supposed to be dismantled at the end.

And as a result of that, what we saw then when North Korea decided to quit the agreement in the end of 2002, that they were very quickly able to restore the plutonium separation. Meanwhile, they had also worked with the development of a nuclear device, plutonium metallurgy, et cetera. So they were able to go in three, four years' time to a nuclear test.

And I think this is one of the most important lessons which we drove from this Agreed Framework when we're going out to the next agreement that there needs to be from the beginning quite a lot of irreversible dismantlement if we want to achieve the goal of dismantlement.

MAY: Let me throw this question for everyone to answer it. Clearly, North Korea is attempting to -- it has nuclear weapons, has missiles, attempting to improve those missiles, extend their range so they can reach targets anywhere in the world, miniaturize their nuclear weapons so they can put them on top of the missiles. Do we know the framework in terms of how long before they get to that capability?

Do we know that there's no way they can do that within the next year, next two years? Or is this is a guessing game? Maybe, Rebecca, you seem to have a sense of this.

HERSMAN: Well, I think one of the challenges on this is we have to kind of be careful about how much we project U.S. perceptions of capability readiness because that may not be what the North Korean regime is looking for or needs to be satisfied.

We have very high expectations in terms of safety, in terms of accuracy, in terms of precision, in terms of failure rates. We want to be, you know, accurate and have it delivered exactly the way we want. We tend to think that's what someone else is going to do.

What makes this so difficult is if the North Korean regime is prepared to take a lot more risk in their program, to risk a failure, to risk in imprecise launch, in other words, a weapon that goes but doesn't land exactly where he thought it might, that might be enough for his purposes.

So what that does is really change and shorten the timeline potentially because it's always in those details and really, you know, the refinement and the testing where so much time comes in to play. So it shortens the timeline.

They've indicated they're more risk tolerant and it makes it more ambiguous for us because it means there may be fewer signals that we're able to pick up on in terms of their level of preparedness.

MAY: Anybody else want to comment on where they are and where they're going technologically and how long it's going to take?

CHA: I mean, I agree with what Rebecca said. I think the result of that is that there's always, you know, the sense of the expert community's assessment of three, four years and I feel like in almost every single instance at every rung of the technological ladder we've underestimated how quickly they could do it.

And I remember in April of 2012, on the very same weekend that we had this -- a couple of weeks ago where everybody thought we were going to war, the Day of the Sun, North Korea stood up a three-stage rocket on a launch pad to try to put a satellite into orbit and it basically blew up and everybody said they are still so far away from being able to do that.

What, seven months later, they put another one on the launch pad and they succeeded and I don't think anybody was expecting that. Same thing with their cyber capabilities. Nobody thought before the Sony cyber hack that North Korea had the sort of capabilities that were demonstrated in that attack. I think most people thought they were a long way away from that capability.

So I think we often tend to underestimate how quickly they can do these things. For many of the reasons that Rebecca said because they will cut corners, they're not afraid of things blowing up on the launch pad.

HERSMAN: Hurting workers.

CHA: Hurting workers. Yes. Yes.

HEINONEN: Yes. I agree with Rebecca and I take a little bit different look after, you know, visiting these nuclear installations in North Korea and also seeing their manufacturing capabilities in the supporting industry.

Their standard and goals are very different from ours. We should not, you know, underestimate what they achieved. And let's keep in our mind, they have now been testing nuclear weapons for 10 years. That's a lot of time.

It took for example China to go less than five years from fission bomb to the hydrogen bomb. Certainly, they had much more resources in China. Or if we look uranium enrichment in North Korea, they have now two decades of experience and maybe last 10 years plus in a semi-industrial scale. They renovated their re-processing plant during this period of 2002 to 2007, radically.

So they know how to do it. They are looking for simple solutions and I think still want to remind that, you know, yes, it's important to look at the intercontinental ballistic missiles but let's not forget about the scuds, let's not forget about the nodongs. They may be able to carry nuclear warheads with a distance which is unacceptably long.

MAY: The assembly of the THAAD is evidently making haste right now and we have agents in the region. How reliable and robust are the missile defense systems we're now putting in to place to prevent a launch from succeeding?

HERSMAN: I don't have the precision rates in mind. I think it's a little uncertain since you don't know exactly what you would be hitting. So I think there's some uncertainty there.

First and foremost, the THAAD demonstrates a robust U.S. commitment and a desire to go forward in a defensive manner in support of our South Korean allies to say, we're going to commit on the ground even further than we have before and even when we are paying a price for it on the international stage such as with China.

So I think it's a very important part of the overall defensive posture. It needs to be considered as part of the conventional force presence and as part of the broader nuclear deterrence umbrella under which the rock sits.

And when we look at it, you know, holistically, it's filling a very, very important piece. Missile defense is going to be an absolutely critical part of pressure and denying the North some of the benefits they hope to seek from their programs.

CHA: Yes. South Korea, I mean, they don't have an area missile defense system, right, and their plans to acquire one I think are like 2023 or 2025 and, by then, what is it, the horse has the left barn, the train has left the station, it would be an understatement I think.

MAY: The ship has sailed. There's a number of truisms we can come up with that. Yes.

CHA: Aircraft carrier somewhere.

(LAUGHTER)

CHA: Sorry. And so putting a THAAD battery on the Korean peninsula, it's absolutely essential. It's part of a plan to layer missile defenses. My own view, and there are others in the audience who know this subject better than I, is I think Korea needs not one but at least two THAAD batteries to truly get full coverage. And, you know, yes, there has been a price to pay in terms of Chinese reactions but I don't think there's really much of a choice when it comes to this.

MAY: I'm going to introduce one topic, then I'm going to then ask a very broad question and then I'm going to begin to go to the audience. The topic I'm going to introduce as we talk about nuclear weapons and it's vital that we do, but the North Koreans are also developing chemical and biological weapons, or so we believe, are they not? Do you want to talk about what we know and don't know about chemical and biological weapons?

HERSMAN: Yes. I think Olli and I probably both want to chime in on that. I mean, I understand the North Korea problem is bad enough when you're only talking about their nuclear and missile programs.

But I think we ignore their chemical and biological weapons programs truly at our peril. These are large, capable -- their chemical weapons program is huge. It's long standing and it poses a lot of direct threat to the Republic of Korea.

It's also quite dispersed. It's pretty weaponized. It would be easy either in a conflict to see some of those things be used but they could also easily be diverted to more covert or special operations-type capabilities.

I think it's really interesting that the assassination of Kim Jong-nam actually involved VX. I think that was deliberate. It sent a very specific signal and it kind of reminded us that there's a whole other set of things to worry about.

The biological weapons program is a bit less clear where it stands in terms of weaponization and turned into an actual operational capability. But they certainly have a lot of capability and could easily pursue those capabilities and many of us think they have.

So that is a suite of WMD capabilities that can be used at the tactical, the operational, the strategic level from a deterrence perspective but also from a covert or deniable perspective. That is a lot of capability that the North possesses.

For us, one of the things that that makes very difficult is understanding where our thresholds and red lines are. So as we focus a lot on our nuclear thresholds and our missile thresholds, what

happens if North Korea takes a page out of the Syria playbook or, you know, kind of explores other types of things as they sort of doing with that assassination.

What are we going to do in response? How do we calibrate between those? And how do we send a layered but responsible defense and deterrence message? It's a tough one.

MAY: No adds on that?

HEINONEN: Yes. I agree fully with Rebecca. If we leave chemical weapons and possibly biological weapons out, it's going to be a historical mistake because we end up with a hostage situation.

We solve the nuclear issue and they are going to use the chemical issue to get more, you know, as a bargaining chip. So it has to be from the very beginning part of the plan. How do to it is going to be difficult because this chemical weapons program is a very long one, it goes over the decades.

And I think it's very important again when we go to the verification that the bar is much higher than for example what it was in Libya, which means that you need to make sure, and I know it's difficult, that they have fully complied with the dismantlement and declarations and their declarations are complete. That is essential so that we don't end up with this kind of problems which we have today in Syria and maybe even one day still from Libya.

MAY: All right. Before I go to the audience, let me ask you this broad question. Imagine that we're finished here, you got a call, car is coming, take you to the White House, you're in the Oval Office, and the President says, I want you to tell me what I should do about North Korea and by the way, I only got a minute, what do you say?

HERSMAN: I would say that we have to accept the fact that we have to choose between bad options and that we're going to have to put some difficult things on the table. If dealing with the nuclear and other WMD challenges posed by the North as our number one threat and if we're going to treat it as such, A, we do have to be prepared to take some risk and to assert ourselves from a deterrence and defense perspective, and I really understand, I think that's what the administration is trying to do.

But I think we also have to look hard at our broader policies on the peninsula, our commitment to reunification and so forth to recognize that we can't go to the heart of the regime, which is not only the North's number one priority, their survival, but also I think very much China's issue that they don't want a unified, you know, kind of U.S. backed country right up to their border.

We're going to have to look at our commitments there and see how do we assure them that we're not coming after their regime if we can protect our interests in the interim through other means. Now I don't know if Victor would agree with that.

CHA: No. I don't disagree with it. I mean, I think I would agree with everything Rebecca said. I would also say that, Mr. President, you have to decide what you're going to do the next time

they stack a three-stage missile because that three-stage missile even if they say has a satellite on it, we don't know what's on the top of that missile.

And so the only person who's going to make that decision is him, right? And then the other is...

MAY: But what would you advise him when that happens? Let's think he calls you when that happens and says, tell me what to do.

CHA: I think one of the -- I think one of the most difficult policy decisions that has to be made out of this crisis will be what U.S. declaratory policy would be in a situation like that. I think we have said things about if there's something in flight that looks like it's headed in a dangerous direction.

But I think that is one of the most difficult decisions that would have to be made. And then the other is on the regime, I mean, in the end, the real answer to all this is the regime and the question is, is there -- maybe you who knows South Korean history, is there a Pak Chung-hee in North Korea somewhere. In other words, a secular leader who can make rational economic decisions which this leadership cannot do.

MAY: Olli?

HEINONEN: Well, actually Rebecca and Victor already gave more than one minute advice to the President so I'll keep it short and sweet. No partial solution and don't push the buck to the next administration.

HERSMAN: OK.

MAY: I'm going to go to the audience. This is almost a yes or no question. We have not had robust development of layered missile defense over the past eight years. Would you advise this President to return to that? As I understand it, the technology mainly exists. We haven't deployed the technologies we have and the other technologies that could be developed are not that far off. You can disagree with me if you want.

HERSMAN: I personally believe we need to follow a step by step process but focus on increasing missile defense as a critical capability in the suite of capabilities we're going to bring to bear to the problem.

CHA: And I agree and I think we also have to better the network especially among the three countries, the U.S., Japan and Korea.

HERSMAN: That's a good point.

CHA: You know part of the reason South Korea has this 2023 plan for missile defense is they want to try to walk and chew gum at the same time. They want to have missile defense system

but they don't want it to be threatening to China. They wanted to have it sort of separate from the overall U.S. framework and I just think that's not feasible anymore.

MAY: No. Olli, anything on the capabilities on defense?

HEINONEN: No.

MAY: But you agree we should be developing layered missile defense, air, I mean, at all levels, at launch, in ascendance before -- I mean, give yourself several shots at it -- in space, all that is technologically feasible. If we want to do it, we can do it. It's not putting a man on the moon. It's easier than that.

HEINONEN: This is an issue around policy because we may not be able to solve all these problems so you need to have something at the end in your pocket, anyway.

MAY: Right. Right. Right. OK. Let's go.

QUESTION: Michael Shrage with MIT. I just want to ask -- go back to the nuclear issue. You talk about how the North Koreans take shortcuts, et cetera. Not wanting to touch on any classified issues but how one instruments, launches, and tests can be extraordinarily revealing.

And of course, it would be interesting to know what kind of diagnostics we can have, what kind of assessment we can make about where they're cutting corners on these issues? How have our assessment abilities improved for making inferences from these tests? And the final point which is the North Koreans aren't stupid, you can instrument tests in a way that sends signals, as well. That's right out of Tom Shelly.

So I'm sort of curious, are there any things you can share in that regard about a trend line as to what is being signaled by tests and insight into the shortcuts that you've described about what they really want from these tests and their investments?

HERSMAN: I can think of few more important things that I hope our technical intelligence, you know, talent is applying itself to, but that's as far as I would go.

MAY: Let's go to Amit here and then we're go over on the other side.

QUESTION: Thank you. Amit Sharma. I'm part of CSIF here and I've done some work in previous government within Treasury on financial measures in particular. One thing that I see noticeably missing, although, Victor, you touched on it and I see this maybe as a potentially more near term and dramatic threat is the cyber domain. Can you all comment on, quite frankly, the somewhat disastrous impact if they took that capability to power grids and other type of vulnerabilities that quite frankly don't have a distance issue that some of the missile issues -- missile threats pose?

CHA: So thanks, Amit. Rebecca talked about a suite of capabilities. This is part of the suite of capabilities that they are actively working to improve.

Our own research on this shows that the entities that are involved North Korea's cyber capabilities are housed in the same agencies in the North Korean government that are involved in their missile program, their nuclear program and terrorism. I thought it was a mistake to call the cyber hack against Sony a cyber vandalism, I think that was cyber terrorism and it should have been treated that way.

And they are -- I mean, the North Koreans are constantly hacking. I mean, they are constantly hacking and they do not discriminate between targets. They've gone after a lot of commercial entities both here in the United States and in South Korea and in China and other places.

And I think you're absolutely right, the concern is they would go after public utilities and infrastructure or other sorts of things. So this is a very serious concern and our level of knowledge on this I would argue is fairly -- I won't to say it's shallow, I think it's deeper now but it certainly is not very long because I don't think anybody paid attention really to their abilities until the Sony cyber hack.

We actually started a study about six months before the Sony cyber hack and we couldn't get anybody in town to talk about it, public or private sector, because no one had done any research. Everybody was focused on China and so it's a very different picture today.

HERSMAN: I would just add one thing to that, one of the things that's very difficult in cyber as I think we're seeing entities and countries use it for espionage. Use it for punishment or retaliation. Send a very clear signal in that regard.

I think when you get to this other though sort of basket of purposes, for example, the same way that they are looking to use their missile or nuclear program. In other words, in a very coercive way. I'm trying to change your behavior, I'm going to signal, I'm going to do something and change your -- I doubt that Kim Jong-un is any more knowledgeable today about how to do that effectively than frankly any other country is right now.

That's just a very immature space in security and deterrence because those signals are kind of harder to send and you're not confident how they'll be interpreted. So I think that is very tricky and it puts a lot of risks of miscalculation or inadvertent escalation into the overall picture.

MAY: I got question right here in the front row. Go ahead. I want to ask just one quick while they're getting the microphone, it's a strange question and I don't know if anyone has an answer. Given that we talked about it's like a hermit kingdom and their cut-off with it, how are they developing rocket scientists and cyber security specialists? How are they training these people when they're so cut off from the world?

HEINONEN: Yes. Well, first of all, you know, their scientific base is Academy of Sciences, it has a very high level of education. Their scientists are good. What they lack very often are some of the more equipment and other resources.

But at the same time when I look it over the period, I went there first time in 1986 October, so a few years ago when I was there last time. The situation has changed and actually, North Korean nuclear program is now getting vulnerable also for cyberattacks.

All these new instruments and capabilities which they have been developing are equally vulnerable as on this side and I think that this is perhaps one other reasons people might know more about their capabilities than what they admit today.

MAY: OK. Yes.

QUESTION: I'm Peter Humphrey, I'm an intel analyst and a former diplomat. I want to put one more WMD on the table. I'm looking at the reconnaissance drones that North Korea has been sending along the frontier and over South Korea. One of them even has photos of the Blue House and a South Korean airbase on the chip that was recording the photos.

It is easy to buy these drones commercially. Thousand, 1,200 bucks a pop, load them up within incendiaries, send them in by the thousands and do more destruction to any wooden object in South Korea, burn down buildings left and right than a nuclear weapon.

Victor, your book sights a million dead people at the hands of the regime in sort of human rights circumstances in addition to those that died in the famine. If we take a kill rate of about 150,000, 250,000 per nuclear bomb, that means that we have experienced four or five nuclear bombs worth of death just in the prison camps and every 10 or 12 years that we go on, that's going to be another nuclear bomb worth of dead people in North Korea.

Why are we even thinking about talking to this guy? Where is the pressure for regime change? Where is the secret committee to arrange a campaign of the thousand things we can do to bring that real change? I don't get it.

CHA: Well, those are all points well taken. I entirely agree. I think while we focus so much on the nuclear, the ballistic missile threats, the artillery and the cyber threats, I mean, this is the worst human rights disaster in modern history that's taking place inside of North Korea and it's related to all the other programs because their abusive labor, their export of slave labor, all of these things we believe go to directly funding their WMD program.

So it's clearly something that more attention needs to be given to. On your question of why we are not taking -- you know, I would argue that what you are -- what you described is asking the United States and other countries to take a lot more risk in their policy towards North Korea.

And I think up until this time, if anything you could characterize U.S. policy towards North Korea as trying to minimize risks. I thought it was very significant that Acting Assistant Secretary Thornton said that this is the number one national security issue for President Trump because when the United States makes something the number one national security issue, we're willing to take more risks.

That could be risk in terms of some of the things that you describe. It could also mean more risk on the diplomacy side. But that's why I actually agree with her that I do think we are in a different period now.

MAY: Let's go back...

CHA: Yes.

MAY: We'll take that question there. Let me just share this and at the same -- before we do because we haven't gotten in it and I think it's relevant. As North Korea has -- its closest relationship is with China but it has relations also with Iran and has had very close relations one might say with Syrian regime of Basher al-Assad.

Let's talk a little bit about that strategically. Obviously, philosophically, Kim Jong-un is not in the same place and yet he obviously sees these as relationships of convenience. It seems to be to diminish and lessen the power of the United States is a main common interest. What else do you see in these relationships that we should be thinking about?

CHA: Well, I mean, there's clearly the outward proliferation relationship and Olli could speak to this as well in terms of exchanges between scientists, the missile program, I mean, the mainstay of both the Pakistani and Iranian missile program are North Korean missiles.

So this is a relationship that has been going on for quite some time and it should be and is the target of our counterproliferation efforts on North Korea.

HERSMAN: I would only chime in. I think actually this has been an area of success relatively speaking in our policy over the last number of years. North Korea is very transactional in these relationships and they kind of move on to the next partner when one is severed and I think at times to sever those relationships have made it harder and harder and harder both for North Korea to proliferate successfully and to benefit financially in terms of those transactions, which it was funneling directly into its weapons programs.

The problem is that, you know, they can always -- there's always a work around, there's something always to sleep around. It's very transactional, not very philosophical in my perspective.

CHA: The real concern I think today is, yes, Iran and Pakistan, but it's China. I mean, China, Chinese companies, Chinese nationals are involved in circumventing U.N. sanctions, U.S. law to facilitate dollar denominated transaction for North Korean entities.

There are Chinese companies that re-export dual use items that are restricted by U.N. Security Council resolutions to North Korea. So if what we're concerned about is their growing nuclear and missile program and in particular, this uranium enrichment program, there's a lot of problems there with China.

QUESTION: Rachel Oswald again. I want to go back to some of the things said about the importance of having a declaratory policy. President Trump has repeatedly said, I don't telegraph

my actions. You know, people think he's trying to be like a little bit like Richard Nixon, a bit of the madman-esque. How does that inclination of his – Can you say why it's important for U.S. policy to be very, very specific as to what we will do both on recent experiences with Syria and going forward with China?

HERSMAN: Let me just say one point which is that you cannot have a deterrence relationship between two countries if you don't have some mode of communication. It's -- those two things are inextricably linked.

If you don't communicate in certain types of intentions to varying degrees of precision or ambiguity -- that we can debate -- but if you don't communicate your intentions then the adversary doesn't know to calibrate their behavior and can't possibly understand that one course of action will be more dangerous to them than another. That's the whole point of deterrence.

So we have to communicate that and we have to be somewhat consistent and reliable in those communications. The tough issue is normally, how do I balance the desire for flexibility and ambiguity on the one hand with the need to send clear and precise messages on the other? If we send no messages at all, we won't have deterrence.

MAY: Let's go right here.

QUESTION: Thank you. There's an elephant in the back of the room.

MAY: Just introduce yourself if you don't mind.

QUESTION: Oh, I'm sorry. I'm Joshua Stanton. There's an elephant in the back of the room. His name is Moon Jae-in. He's the frontrunner in the South Korean presidential election and he has publicly stated that he intends to do a number of things, including reopening the Kaesong Industrial Park that would violate U.N. Security Council resolutions as currently constituted.

There is a burden on member states that pay money to North Korea to ensure that the money is not going to WMD programs and programs like Kaesong require approval from a U.N. committee that the U.S. sits on. If this park were to reopen, this whole policy of maximum pressure falls apart because first, it isn't just the \$100 million a year that undermines the pressure, it's the fact that China, Russia, Malaysia, Singapore and every other country that's funding North Korea will now point at South Korea and say, if they can violate the sanctions, why can't we?

So my question and I think this is for Mr. Cha is, has the United States government directly or indirectly explained what the resolutions require because all of the analysis I see coming from the Democratic Party shows a complete misunderstanding and perhaps a lack of even reading of the resolutions and what they require? I see our governments as being on a direct collision course.

CHA: Sure. I'll take that. Thanks for the question, Joshua. So you're right, they probably don't read. I mean, they're in the middle of the campaign so probably reading is the last thing they so except poll numbers, they're probably not reading anything else.

I do agree that it -- I think what we've heard in the campaign is not very comforting. But here is the argument that I would make and have made to some of the people who are -- in South Korea who are looking at policy.

You know, the next South Korean president will take office on May 10th after a seven-month impeachment crisis or longer than seven months, and I would argue that during that time, South Korea's strategic position has been greatly made vulnerable in the sense that when the new president takes office on May 10th, he will not have had a relationship with their most important ally, the United States, right? There's no relationship there.

During the seventh-month impeachment crisis, the relationship with Japan has spiraled downwards over comfort women and other sorts of issues. And at the same time, if the new president is going to take office on May 10th with China still stepping on Korea's neck trying to cut off, you know, business ties, economic ties to change the decision on THAAD, I would argue, that is the most challenging strategic environment that any South Korean president has ever entered upon on day one in office.

And with that sort of situation, what you don't want to do on May 10th with that sort of situation is say, I'm going to reopen Kaesong Industrial Complex, right, because not only does that out in violation of the UN sanctions, that will actually marginalize you more in terms of your strategic position vis-à-vis the United States, your main ally, Japan, and even China, right?

And so I don't think the United States is against engagement. Historically, I don't think we're against inter-Korean engagement, but it has to be effective and for it to be effective, it has to be done at the right time. And clearly, now is not the right time.

So that's the argument that I would make. I think it's a credible, reasonable argument, but we shall see.

MAY: Olli?

HEINONEN: I would like to add a couple of realities to this. I think it certainly is a concern but let's not forget United Nations Security Council resolutions are compulsory for the countries to adhere to those restrictions.

South Korea is currently a member of the U.N. Security Council. So there are many other aspects which will come to play if this president is elected and he will become the president and then he tries to make better relations with North Korea.

Then I doubt personally that some of these countries which you mentioned are really going to dash to North Korea at the time when the Security Council resolutions are in place. I think it's very unlikely that for example Singapore or some other countries which you mentioned are going to follow the suit.

MAY: Let's go to Bud McFarlane here.

QUESTION: Thanks very much. I wonder to what extent is the credibility of the United States from North Korean eyes influenced one way or the other by it being bipartisan, by this being an expression of maximum pressure being today different. Last year, the study done by Senator Nunn and Admiral Mullen made pretty clear that there was a call there for a more robust statement of capability and concern related.

Is there any value and is the administration even considering things like calling for a new use of force agreement? Whether they are or not, going to the cyber domain and the Internet of Things, to what extent is the capability there whether we would use it or not to prevent a launch?

CHA: Well, on the last question, sir, you know, I think there has been a lot of press reporting about the so called Left of Launch programs that the previous administration had been undertaking. I really -- I didn't work in the last administration so I don't know a lot about that sort of work.

But, I mean, I think Olli's point earlier is very important that with the advancement of their capabilities, they have also made themselves more vulnerable to intervention from the outside. And so I think that is, if anything, I mean, there are very few silver linings when you talk about North Korea's nuclear program but that might present some vulnerabilities that could be exploited.

MAY: Let me go to Yochi Drezen.

QUESTION: Thanks, Cliff, and thank you all for this. Sort of a one question but with two different facets. Can the U.S. or should U.S. live with containment? If the deal on the table, the only deal that seems likely to prevent war is an agreement that North Korea will -- in some verifiable way not advance its program but that it will not be willing to roll back its program. Is that something -- one, that you think it's possible and two, that would be an acceptable or should be an acceptable policy for U.S.?

HERSMAN: Speaking for myself alone, I think I mentioned before all of the choices are pretty bad and in that context while certainly not desirable, some sort of containment -- some type of containment that cuts the program might be among the more realistic options.

Also if we look at kind of capping it at least of --you know, if we don't give away too much for a cap that's right at the top, we might have some prospects of some verifiable approaches there. So I think from a pragmatic point of view, I would like to see that.

What I would hate to see is a situation where we keep aiming high and achieving low. I think that is what's gotten us to where we are today where their capability keeps advancing in ways that are really dangerous for us and our allies. So it's a world of bad choices. That's one I would want to look at very carefully.

CHA: Yes. I -- I'm sorry, Olli.

HEINONEN: No. It's OK.

CHA: I would agree. I mean, you know, the sort of the true manifestation of this being the land of lousy options is when you say 20 nuclear weapons is better than 200 but that's the world we live in when with North Korea.

I think the one thing that we -- the one thing we must be aware of if we sort of enter some sort of agreement or negotiation in this sort of this containment mode are the two externalities of it. The first is even if we cap their program, they still proliferate and they will try to proliferate.

And then the second is that I believe that as North Korea feels it can deter -- in their own minds if they feel they can successfully deter the United States from any sort of military action because of their nuclear capabilities, it will actually increase North Korean coercive actions at the conventional level.

Because as I said, these sorts of regimes are not status quo states. They are predatory. And so they will seek to use the fact that they have deterred at the nuclear threshold as a way to try to gain leverage on Japan and South Korea at the conventional level, you know, and they can do all sorts of things there to try to extort money, to extort other sorts of things. So those are the problems that we still have even if we can aggressively contain the program.

HEINONEN: I think at the containment piece, a short-term solution and one should not pursue it, there are bad solutions, and there are worse solutions. This is definitely a worse solution.

And you have to think from the point of view, for example, from Southeast Asian countries or Northeast Asian countries. What are the South Koreans thinking? What are the Japanese thinking? Can they trust that the United States of America would come to help them if there is trouble? I don't think so.

So this may in reality lead to some kind of proliferation. At least they will increase their threshold capacity to be ready to respond if needed. So I think it's one of the least desirable options which we have today.

MAY: We've only got a couple of minutes to the end. So let me give you a chance to do one of two things either to make a point that you would have like to but you didn't get a question on or to emphasize a point that you did make but that you think it's important for everybody to absorb. Let me start with you, Olli.

HEINONEN: I don't think I have anything to add but only thing, please go for a long-term solution. We have had short solutions now for two decades. I don't think we should have for another two decades short-term solutions.

MAY: Victor?

CHA: The only thing I would add is that we should not underestimate the importance of continuing to try to get information into North Korea. I mean, this is supposedly hermetically sealed country but there are markets operating here now for over 20 years and the people are

desirous of information about the outside world because I think they feel like their leadership is not very good.

HERSMAN: I would just take the opportunity to put a caution on a topic we didn't discuss much but was raised by a question over here in terms of how -- you know, it appears tempting to think that we could sow instability or promote some sort of regime change from within, encourage some collapse of the regime, and I would just say from the perspective of their WMD programs, that to me is among the worst possible options.

I understand it's tempting from a political perspective. I think, however, in terms of looking at the nuclear threats we face that would continue all of the ones we faced today and actually make the much worse because the risks of terrorism, the risks of proliferation, the risk of lost control of those capabilities or even the sort of terrorist type use of those capabilities in internal conflicts such as we've seen in Syria will increase.

In that context, I think the opportunity for us to cleave from our allies will be actually greater. So I think we need to be careful not to fantasize about an option that I think has many, many downsides.

MAY: I think this was a very useful panel. Let's give a hand to the panel. Thank you so much. We have one more I think very good panel coming up. So stay where you are. We'll get that changed and this will be moderated by the lovely and charming Jay Solomon.

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