Center for Strategic and International Studies (CSIS)

Press Briefing: Republic of Korea President Lee Myung-bak State Visit

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Tuesday, October 11, 2011
9:30 a.m.
Washington, D.C.

Transcript by
Federal News Service
Washington, D.C.

RYAN SICKLES: Good morning, all. We probably still have a few left to trickle in, but we'll go ahead and get started.

On behalf of my boss, Andrew Schwartz, I'd like to welcome you guys to CSIS. My name is Ryan Sickles, the assistant director of media relations.

Here and with me to brief on President Lee's visit to the United States and President Obama's fifth official state visit is Victor Cha. Victor Cha's our CSIS senior adviser and Korea chair. He was the former director of Asian affairs at the National Security Council and was the U.S. deputy head of delegation for the six-party talks.

To his left is Meredith Broadbent, also a CSIS senior adviser. She is the William M. Scholl Chair in International Business and former assistant U.S. trade rep for industry, market access and telecom.

To her left is Michael Green, CSIS senior adviser and Japan chair, former special assistant to the president for national security affairs and senior director for Asian affairs at the National Security Council.

With that, I'll turn it over to Victor.

VICTOR CHA: Thanks, Ryan. Good morning, everyone.

So the way we'll do this is I'll speak first, then Meredith will speak largely on the trade issues, and then Mike will speak on the broader context and some of the security issues that are likely to come up in this visit.

I think, as all of you know, President Lee is arriving today and will have a pretty light day today – I think just an event with the Korean-American community, visiting Arlington Cemetery and things like that. Tomorrow the main event for the day is a lunch with – hosted by the Chamber of Commerce, and then the – what is likely to happen is, tomorrow evening, he's going to have some private time with President Obama, most likely a private dinner with the president and his wife.

Thursday is the White House day with meetings in the Oval Office and then the larger Cabinet meeting. Lunch is an event hosted by the vice president and the secretary of state. Somewhere in there is rumored a(n) address to a joint session of the Congress, but I – Mike can probably tell you more about that than I could. And then Thursday evening is the state dinner.

Friday morning, CSIS will host a breakfast for President Lee at the Blair House with a bunch of foreign policy luminaries; many of the people on our board – you see around the wall – will attend this breakfast at the Blair House, and then after that the two leaders will go to the

Midwest and, as I think you've seen in the press, one of the things that they will do is that they will visit a GM plant, the GM Orion assembly plant in Michigan.

The state visit, as all of you know, is the highest honor that a foreign leader could receive from the White House, and I guess the question is, why? You know, why is President Lee getting this sort of treatment? And I think that there are basically four reasons.

The first is the personal chemistry that has been struck between the two leaders really from the – from President Obama's first trip to Asia in November of 2009, where Korea was the last stop on his trip, and arguably it was – it was not an easy trip. In Japan, he had to deal with a new prime minister, Hatoyama. In APEC and Singapore, he had – he was getting a lot of questions on the absence of a trade policy. His first trip to China, as you all know, was not exactly the best trip, and then he got to Korea, and Korea was a very good stop. It was the last stop, and the Koreans rolled out the red carpet and really treated him like an ally. And people who were on the trip said they got to Korea and they felt like, for the first time, they – this was an allied country. They really felt good about the trip.

And then President Lee also, in his first encounters with Obama – as many of you know, President Lee, before he became president of Korea and before he was in politics, was the head of Hyundai global construction. So he spent – if you go to his office, he has all these pictures of himself with different world leaders, and it wasn't from when he was president; it was from when he was head of Hyundai global construction. And so, in that sense, his mannerism, his attitude, his behavior – everything about him is not like a straight-laced, conservative, use-only-your-talking-points Asian politician, right? He's very dynamic, very charismatic; in many ways, very Western in his behavior; and really struck off – struck up a very good – a relationship – chemistry with Obama, and is one of the few foreign leaders that can claim that they had this very special relationship.

The second reason is it's not – it's not just personal chemistry, but also, in addition to this, the ROK really delivered on things in terms of Obama's global agenda, whether it was climate change issues and green growth; whether it was the war in Afghanistan, where Korea stepped up to provide a PRT; on counter-proliferation issues – whatever the issue was – anti-piracy, contributing real military assets for antipiracy campaigns – South Korea really sort of stepped up, which is part of Lee's agenda for Korea to be more of a global player at a time when the United States wanted to see allies like Korea stepping up, and I think that was another important reason.

The third reason was of course North Korea, right? North Korea's missile test and nuclear test in 2009, then the attacks on the Cheonan naval vessel and then the shelling of the island – you know, these sorts of things bring leaders together, right? As Mike and Meredith both can tell you, I mean – when your leaders talk on the phone, you know, when it's not a state visit or on the sidelines of APEC or the U.N., if they have to talk on the phone, usually it's not good news, right? Usually it's bad news. And in this case, the North Korean provocations compel the two leaders to spend a lot of time with each other on the telephones or on the sideline of meetings and, you know, when things like this happen, allies come together. So, in that sense, we also have North Korea to thank for this better relationship between the two leaders.

And then the fourth reason more broadly was the – is the external environment, I think, in the sense that I think many would agree that Obama's agenda with China in his first year did not go as planned in the sense that China was not as cooperative as Obama had hoped. In Japan, you had watershed domestic political change and then, of course, the triple disaster in March of 2011. So, in many ways, the environment of Asia was changing in ways that were not as helpful to U.S. policy and, in the midst of all this, Korea kind of rose up in this flux, this change that was happening in the region. Through largely unforeseen events, Korea sort of emerged, and I think that was another important reason why this relationship is quite good.

So the net assessment, I think, that many give of the relationship today is it's extremely close. It's probably the one – at one of its highest points, if not the highest point in history, in U.S.-Korea relations, and therefore President Lee, on what is likely his last visit to the United States as the president of South Korea, is being awarded this honor.

What are they going to discuss? A number of issues – there are a number of bilateral alliance issues that are ongoing in terms of Yongsan relocation, the base restructuring agreements; the transition of OPCON, the transition of operational control – wartime operational control of U.S. – of combined forces to Korea in wartime; the FTA obviously, but I'll let Meredith speak on that. And then of course another very important issue they are likely to discuss is North Korea and, while I think the public statement that comes out from their meeting on North Korea will be pretty bland, I would imagine – the two leaders consulted, you know, agreed on the need for denuclearization, something very broad and simple – I think the private discussion will probably be a lot more substantive.

We've now seen two North-South bilateral meetings and one U.S.-DPRK bilateral meeting in August of this past summer. And the rumor is that now that we've had a second North-South meeting, what – where was it? – in Beijing last month, it's very likely the U.S. will re-engage in another bilateral meeting with North Korea, and my guess is that that will happen sometime after this summit meeting. I mean, it looks better if the two presidents meet and talk and then they announce another U.S.-DPRK meeting. This will probably be called another exploratory meeting, but I think at this point if the U.S. is – would engage in a second meeting, it's hard to call it "exploratory." I think many of you will write about it as basically a return to negotiation.

And the question of course is, why? Why would the Obama administration be ready to return to negotiations with North Korea? You know, I think, because objectively speaking, there's nothing that we've seen publicly from the DPRK that gives anyone confidence that they are any closer to returning to the 2005 agreement than they have been since they exploded a second nuclear test. So there's nothing publicly that we've seen that should give anyone confidence. Perhaps there is something privately that the DPRK is saying to the South Koreans and the Americans that make them feel more confident, but I don't get that sense either. So it really does raise the question of, why go back now?

And I – you know, I think Mike will talk about this also, but I think one of the reasons is, you know, we know that the longer that you do not engage with the DPRK, the more likely it is

that they will carry out another provocation, whether that is, you know, a nuclear test or whether that is a(n) armed conventional provocation against the South again. And the danger of course is that we're now talking about these sorts of provocations in a completely different environment after the Cheonan – after the sinking of the South Korean naval vessel because the Lee Myung-bak government has made pretty clear that he is going to respond to the next DPRK provocation. And this raises lots of concerns about the potential for escalation and, you know, maybe some fundamental misunderstandings on the part of the DPRK that they are free to do these sorts of provocations because they believe they have a nuclear deterrent.

As I wrote in The Washington Post yesterday, I think that's wrong; they don't have a nuclear deterrent, but they may believe that, and that may lead them to think they can carry out these sorts of provocations. So I think one of the main issues that the two leaders are going to want to talk about is how to contain this crisis and avoid more provocations by the DPRK even as they continue to put their nose to the grindstone and try to make more progress on the denuclearization aspect of the talks.

So with that, I'll turn it over – turn it back to Ryan.

MR. SICKLES: Meredith, can you talk about the trade?

MEREDITH BROADBENT: Sure.

Yeah, Meredith Broadbent. The trade picture here is a really good one. I mean, this is a great week, I think, for the United States and for our trading partners, particularly Korea.

We have been in a political logjam since three – the three trade agreements were negotiated in 2006 and 2007, mainly looking inward with our focus on our own domestic politics and really not being able to follow through on the process of implementing agreements that close allies sign with us and made concessions and announced, and these have been pending in a difficult space, I think, but in bilateral relationships between all these three countries. And I'm just including Panama and Colombia here too as part of the three agreements that we expect will be approved by Congress this week.

And I think a lot of the progress really – and this final breakthrough, I think, could have – I think the deadlock could have gone on for another month or two, but the visit of President Lee is an action-forcing event, and I think Congress and the president were able to come to some agreements where they were able to make commitments to trust each other on the processing of these agreements which had been long in dispute, and it looks like there's a way forward. The agreements themselves – the agreement between the U.S. and Korea is a win-win, state-of-the-art, sound commercial agreement that will put transparent rules in place, allow fairness and accountability for U.S. business in Korea, and get us back into the game of negotiating trade agreements, which our trading partners have been doing during these years that we've been more focused inward.

It gets U.S. exporters in under a tariff tent, basically, in Korea. We need to keep up with our European competitors. They implemented their free trade agreement with Korea July 1st, so

we've been identifying lost sales as a result of that better competitive position that the Europeans are in right now. So time is of the essence. The hope is that this agreement may be implemented by January 1 of next year, but that will be a quick timetable.

It puts us in a position to assume a leadership role again in a lot of the Asian economic organizations: the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation group; the Trans-Pacific Partnership negotiations, which are going on. It's hoped that this breakthrough in Congress will basically open up a door for U.S. to exert more leadership in these international negotiations. I think there's been a difficulty that our trading partners have seen, being able to assess how quickly the U.S. can follow through on trade agreements and whether in fact they can actually be implemented, and I think passage of these three in succession will send a real wake-up call, both to the Asia-Pacific region and those economic relationships, and potentially to Geneva as well, although it's unclear whether there's any movement – any more movement possible in Geneva. But I think trading partners will look at us as a more serious country with which to negotiate, and I think we need to take advantage of this opening and this ability to come together and compromise on the difficult political issues that slow down these agreements.

I think one more point is that going forward, as we try to determine what's next on the U.S. trade agenda, Congress and the administration needs to take a close look at the mechanism for implementing trade agreements – trade negotiating authority to see if it – if it's possible to develop a better mechanism where our trading partners can strike one deal and be assured that they can give us our – their best offer and not have to renegotiate trade agreements several times before they're actually implemented. So that will be – set the stage for a new generation of trade initiatives and trade objectives, and it's very important that Congress and the administration build on the success of this understanding that they look like they've reached so that we can be more actively involved, particularly in the Asia-Pacific region.

Thank you.

MR. SICKLES: Mike, you want to bat cleanup?

MICHAEL J. GREEN: Thank you.

Four brief points before we open it up to your praise – excuse me – questions. (Chuckles.)

First of all, this is a very big win for the president. I think, as Meredith said and as Victor said, the U.S.-Korea relationship now is about as strong as it's been in a very long time, and the passage of the KORUS – the Korea-U.S. free trade agreement – is really significant not only in terms of strengthening U.S.-Korea security and economic ties, but its broader import or meaning for U.S. engagement in Asia as Meredith said. So it's a big success.

I want to say four things, just to round out the discussion. First, a brief comment on the Lee Myung-bak-Obama relationship; second, I'm thinking a little further out about the meaning of KORUS; third, North Korea, a bit more on that; and finally, the larger strategic problem that both Lee Myung-bak and Obama face with respect to the rise of China.

First on the two presidents' relationship: I agree with Victor; this is probably President Obama's closest relationship in Asia. I think that comes as a surprise to the White House because the Obama administration came in essentially planning on continuing a policy of engaging China but balancing that with strong alliance relationships, and the big powers, I think, they were focused on – were Japan and, to a lesser extent, perhaps India. And what has happened is that Korea has emerged as the most reliable partner in many ways.

And Japan has had the difficulty of a new prime minister every year. Prime Minister Hatoyama really threw U.S. strategy in Asia off the rails, and the repair is done, but it – through the midst of that, Lee Myung-bak stood as a real stalwart. India has a coalition government that has made the U.S.-India relationship more difficult to move forward. Even Australia, our oldest ally in the region, has a coalition government that's holding together by one vote. So Lee Myung-bak's popularity is fairly low, but his steadfastness really stands out in Asia.

I don't get the impression that this is a particularly warm relationship. I don't think President Obama is like Presidents George W. Bush, Bill Clinton, George Herbert Walker Bush, in that he – in that he does not really develop close personal ties. I think that this is a relationship based on respect and the fact that Lee Myung-bak can deliver, but nevertheless, that counts for a lot, and you can see it in the protocol that surrounds this visit.

On KORUS, Meredith is right: This is a very big day for U.S. trade, for our trading partners. There will be a joint session on Thursday; that's a very good sign. Speaker Boehner was not going to sign on to a joint session of Congress unless there was a deal to move forward with both the three FTAs – Korea, Panama and Colombia – and trade adjustment assistance. The level of trust between the White House and the Congress is so bad now that each was suspecting the other would do a bait-and-switch; that, you know, the president was worried that, you know, he pushed through the three FTAs and then wouldn't get TAA, and the speaker's office was worried that they'd do TAA, trade adjustment assistance, which the unions and the Democrats want, and then the president would only push for Korea, not Colombia and Panama. There was this standoff reflecting the general mistrust in Washington. They've clearly resolved it because the joint session address by President Lee Myung-bak is going ahead for Thursday afternoon and that's great news.

The other good thing about this is there are 15 chapters in the Trans-Pacific Partnership agreement – I think there are 15 – the TPP, and the U.S. is probably ready to start locking in about eight or nine of those, but had to wait until KORUS passed because they now have to take those to the Hill and get buy-in. And so the TPP – the negotiating process was essentially frozen until KORUS passed. Now, the administration can go forward to the Hill and lock in, in concrete form, a lot of – at least the outlines of the chapters in that Trans-Pacific Partnership trade agreement. And that's great for the U.S. going into APEC because it puts real momentum behind TPP.

Participants in the negotiations who are a bit hesitant and getting cold feet, like Vietnam, will now be under much more pressure to make a deal. It also puts more pressure on Japan, frankly, to make a decision itself about TPP because this is now becoming concrete and real, and

the consequence for Japan being left out of these multiple trade liberalization deals is becoming more serious. So kudos to the president.

That said, he really made Lee Myung-bak suffer to get this. This thing was negotiated, as Meredith said, four years ago, five years ago? Then Speaker Pelosi rejected it, so the Bush administration forced the Korean side to renegotiate. Then Speaker Pelosi rejected it again. (Chuckles.) Then candidate Obama ran against the trade agreement. So it took four or five years, and Lee Myung-bak has a lot of political scars on his back for that, and he still has to push through a number of bills in the National Assembly to pass it, but I think he will because this adds real momentum.

North Korea – I think the U.S. and the ROK, President Obama, President Lee Myung-bak are pretty much in sync on North Korea strategy right now. They were in sync after the sinking of the Cheonan and the shelling of Yeonpyeong because the North Korean actions were so egregious. It was clear that both sides had to restore the credibility of our deterrents and demonstrate the strength of our alliance. I think, in the spring and summer, the U.S. and Korea started drifting apart a little bit because the Lee Myung-bak government demanded an apology from North Korea, and the Obama administration was nervous that this was going to become an obstacle to resuming talks. When Foreign Minister Kim Sung-hwan came here – two months ago? – he basically backed away from the demand for an apology, and now we have both the U.S. and the ROK engaging in some exploratory talks with the North Koreans.

I also think both the Blue House and the White House have the same basic approach on this, which is, as Victor said, why are we doing this? No one really expects the North Koreans to seriously denuclearize, and I think both the White House and the Blue House are doing this engagement for defensive reasons. They don't want North Korea to test a nuclear device – nuclear weapon in 2012. The North Koreans have for several years been telegraphing they intend to do that. 2012 is the hundredth birthday – is that what you say when someone's dead? – (chuckles) – of Kim Il Sung, the hundredth anniversary of his birth.

MR. : He never died.

MR. GREEN: He never died.

And also, the North Koreans have declared for some time, in their propaganda, 2012 will be the year they become a full nuclear weapon state.

I don't think the Blue House or the White House has any expectation that a – that a grand bargain or a deal of any real import, any significance or denuclearization will begin. So why are they doing it? Because they're worried about what Victor said: They think there's a correlation between whether they're engaging and whether or not North Korea tests. And there is a correlation; Victor has shown it in some studies he's done here.

What isn't so clear is whether there's a causality, whether engaging North Korea actually can convince him not to do a test or provocation. Personally, I'm very doubtful. And I think probably Blue House and White House are a bit doubtful too, so this engagement process will be

very tentative: Try to see if they can dissuade North Korea from provocations, coax them towards a dialogue process. But they're not going to be able – on our side, they're not going to be able to put on the table anything North Korea would want, nor should they. And I think that there's a still a significant danger of a North Korean test or provocation next year.

The last big issue which we tend not, in the U.S.-Korea alliance, to talk about so explicitly, but I imagine the president and Lee Myung-bak will talk about, is the larger strategic picture and the rise of Chinese power.

Lee Myung-bak in general has leaned towards the U.S. more than his predecessor Roh Moo-hyun did on the questions of where Korea stands with the rise of China. Korea's largest trading partner is China. Their major security partner is the U.S. That's not unique: Australia and Japan, others are in that situation.

But the polarization in Korean politics has meant that there are big debates about whether or not the government is too close to the U.S. And Lee Myung-bak has moved as close to the U.S., I think, as he comfortably can to try to shore up Korea's own strategic position with China's rise. Opinion polls done by Asan Institute show a pretty clear shift in Korean public opinion about China and a clear growth in threat perception, in views that China is a challenge, a threat to Korea. But it's still a very difficult and delicate balancing act.

And it comes at a time when the U.S. defense budget is under huge clouds. It's very – we could have enormous changes. We could cut several hundred billion or we could cut 8(00 billion dollars) or $900 billion in our defense budget over the next five to 10 years. And there are a lot of uncertainties; there are a lot of questions in Korea about the U.S. staying power, about whether we can maintain ground forces on the peninsula.

The administration is trying to rethink our posture in Asia to have more flexibility and to have more dispersal and to have more reliability.

And there was an interesting little incident this last week on Cheju Island where the Korean navy is building a new facility. In practice, it's for the Korean navy, but the U.S. Navy could use it. And the left, the progressive left, is protesting – protesting because they don't want U.S. Navy ships coming in; they don't want to be pulled into a conflict with China.

And so while Lee Myung-bak and the Blue House are inclined to do what they can to shore up U.S. forward presence and strategy, there's going to be a big debate in Korea, and negotiating that will be tough for Lee Myung-bak and will take a lot of care and thought by the president.

And I would be surprised if, at least in their one-on-one – for their personal time, they didn't have some candid discussions about how they're going to manage that piece too.

MR. SICKLES: Great. Thank you. The stage has been set. I would ask during the Q&A, if you're able, to make your way to a microphone so that you are heard on the recording

and the transcript, both of which will be available later today. So, with that, I'll open it up to questions.

Q: My name is Angela (sp). I'm very honored to be here to share the brief you have.

One thing, I was late, so I wasn't sure whether you mentioned about human rights. My concern is, recently, September the 20th, President Lee was awarded as the World Statesman Award as the humanity and peacefulness. I'm happy for that because it is a great honor. But I'm also concerned that three of my friends, Emily (sp), Lei-ying (ph), and, you know, Zhen-jie (ph), three of them are the victims of the Chinese Falun Gong practitioners in China. There is a big, big issue there. In South Korea right now, there are58 Falun Gong practitioners who were refused – denied asylum and refugee status; they are facing the deportation to China. And we're very concerned about the North Korean status. So we also urge that President Lee please do not send them back to China. Ten of them from 2009 to 2011, 10 of the denied Falun Gong practitioner already been deported to China. It is more like helping the Chinese government to persecute them. And I hope our president, Obama, also in addition to good relationship, please urge about the Koreans' president. Thank you very much.

MR. SICKLES: Thank you. Who wants to address human rights sort of writ large?

MR. CHA: Well, I think – I mean, I think – I don't know about this specific case that was referred to about the Falun Gong – Falun Gong that might be detained in South Korea and sent back to China. But in the broader context of human rights in North Korea, I think what we've seen is really a shift, both in the Obama and Lee administrations, on the issue of human rights in North Korea in the sense that –

I think – I mean, during the Bush administration – and Mike will remember this well – I mean, President Bush did a lot to bring the human rights issue onto the global agenda with regard to North Korea, appointing a special envoy for human rights, inviting North Korean defectors into the Oval Office for the first time in the history of this country, starting a resettlement program for North Korean refugees in the United States. So these were all big steps.

And I think the Obama administration has continued with this, but one of the shifts that you've seen is that they have also brought the humanitarian agenda into the human rights portfolio. So the special envoy for human rights, Bob King, in his last trip to North Korea, went there largely to talk about humanitarian issues more than to talk about human rights abuses.

Now, admittedly, the administration has been very slow in terms of making some of these decisions on humanitarian issues, particularly the food aid issue. But they have really moved in the direction of pooling the humanitarian issues into the human rights portfolio.

For Lee Myung-bak, the – Lee Myung-bak has – many people criticize him in South Korea for his lack of a real policy towards North Korea. He has one very simple principle, which is that he's happy to engage if that engagement is reciprocated. If it's not reciprocated, he's not going to engage.

On the human rights issues, what he's done is made very clear that inter-Korean assistance sort of will follow three tracks: The first is basic humanitarian assistance, flood relief; these sorts of things he will give unconditionally. But larger amounts of humanitarian systems – assistance is linked to human rights issues. That includes the POWs from the Korean War, family reunifications, these sorts of things. And then the largest tranche of assistance would come with denuclearization and security issues. So he's really very explicitly made North Korean delivering on human rights a part of the inter-Korean assistance agenda which past South Korean presidents have not done.

MR. GREEN: I also don't know the specifics of the case. I do know that the Blue House now is much more focused on human rights than the previous government of Roh Moo-hyun, including, perhaps in particular, the case of South Koreans abducted by the North, which was largely off the radar screen for the Roh Moo-hyun government.

That said – correct me if I'm wrong, Victor, but the human rights bill that the GNP, the president's party, has tried to pass in the National Assembly is still stuck, still hasn't passed, and that's because on the progressive left in Korea, there's a long history of viewing criticism of North Korea, whether it's human rights or security, as an excuse to justify crackdowns in South Korea – which was, of course, true for many decades. But that still is there as a residual part of the progressive left's DNA in South Korea where criticism of North Korean human rights is viewed as either dangerously provocative and/or an excuse for the conservatives to stay in power in the South. So it's not an issue that President Lee has been able to move forward as much as he probably thought he wanted to.

I have a somewhat negative view of the Obama administration's approach to food aid. For most of the Bush administration – this changed in the last two years – unfortunately, in my view – but for most of the Bush administration, food aid to North Korea was viewed as something you did because you wanted to help starving people. And if the North Koreans could provide appropriate monitoring and transparency, you would provide food because the North Korean people, who were suffering most, were not accountable or guilty for what the regime was doing wrong. The key thing was, you had to have monitoring and accountability to be sure that the food wasn't to the North Korean army; when you had finite food resources and you had demands in the Horn of Africa and elsewhere, you needed to, on moral grounds, justify it with that monitoring transparency.

The problem with linking food aid to the nuclear negotiations, which is essentially what appears to be happening, is you can no longer make that case. And, of course, if you don't get satisfaction on the nuclear deal and you don't give food aid, what you're at least implicitly doing is suggesting that the North Korean people should not get food because of the regime's stance on nuclear issues.

So I have a problem with this linking of food aid and the nuclear talks. I know that the State Department is looking for leverage and sticks and carrots – we have very few of those. But I think it's a mistake. And I think that's where the Clinton administration was in '97, '98, '99; I think it's where the Bush administration, after holding the line, slipped to in 2007 and (200)8;

and I think it's where the Obama administration is now heading. And I think it's a mistake, both as policy and as a moral question.

But we'll see. It's still under negotiations. There is no deal yet. There is still deep skepticism in Washington and Seoul that the North Korean side is trying to get as much aid as possible now so that they'll have stockpiles for when they behave badly later. So there is no deal yet, so we'll see – we'll see what happens.

MR. CHA: The only thing I would add is that we, here, at CSIS, have had basically all the – all the humanitarian groups that have gone to North Korea – the U.S. NGO groups, the Elders group – that have gone to North Korea on this issue have come through CSIS and have briefed us on this issue. And the last group to come through were the ones that went to do flood assistance in September where the U.S. did allow for – what was it? – $900,000 worth of flood assistance.

And they were very clear. I mean, the NGO groups were very clear that they're very upset with the Obama administration at this point holding this decision out for so long. And I think – I think many of them are going to start to go public with their criticism of the administration.

Q: Paul Eckert of Reuters news agency.

It's quite remarkable, the pendular nature of U.S.-ROK relations, if you think back to the low points of the Roh Moo-hyun era. And I'm just wondering, given that President Lee is a one-term president by their definition in their system – has an election next year – are there things that can be done this week in Washington and onward that can kind of bolt down these relations so that they won't be vulnerable to the kind of swings that happened in the past? Or is it all pinned on one man and his particular political strengths?

MR. CHA: Great question, Paul. You know, I think – well, the FTA, certainly, is one thing that could be done. I mean, that is something that really does take this relationship to the next level. And alliance managers are always trying to figure out how to do that, you know. And I think – I think this is certainly one thing.

Yes, there is going to be an election in South Korea next year and the current president cannot run. And, you know, well, you have a GNP candidate, a ruling party candidate, that's seen as someone who could get along with the United States, and opposition candidates that look a lot like Roh Moo-hyun. I mean, in fact, the leading opposition candidate was Roh Moo-hyun's chief of staff.

But I think the difference now is that the U.S.-ROK relationship, after this many years, is much less politicized in the context of Korean domestic politics as it has been in the past. I think both progressives and conservatives have internalized the idea that being in favor of a strong U.S.-ROK alliance is politically a smart thing to do. And I think they've learned lessons from Roh Moo-hyun that going in the other direction is not something that's good for them, in no

small part because it creates all the sort of wrong impressions on the Chinese side about the liberties that they can take with Seoul.

So I think, regardless of who emerges in the South Korean context, you know, a year from now, I think for the most part, they'll hold a steady line. Now, I don't think that they will replicate the relationship between Lee Myung-bak and Obama, but I think overall it will be a fairly good relationship.

Now, having said that, you know, whenever you have something like you have with U.S. forces in Korea, there are things that can happen that could spark a lot of domestic unrest. I mean, I was just in Seoul last week, and of course, the big news in the papers were these alleged rapes against these – against these women by U.S. servicemen. I mean, these sorts of things can explode and really take on a life of their own.

But I think the basic structure of the relationship is pretty sound. And in particular, the volatile variable has always been this question of how the alliance plays in South Korean domestic politics. And at least all the polling that we're seeing recently – you know, clearly in the aftermath of the Cheonan but also recently – shows that in general, South Koreans, both progressives and conservatives, you know, still well over 50 (percent), 60 percent, see the alliance as being quite important to Korea's future.

MS. BROADBENT: Yeah –

MR. GREEN: Also – sorry –

MS. BROADBENT: Go ahead.

MR. GREEN: Go ahead, Meredith, please.

MS. BROADBENT: No, I was just going to – I mean, I think that's – I love your question because that's what the trade agreement does, I mean, in terms of setting in place mechanisms of fabric, relationships, commissions that can work out problems that could be disputes – could raise to disrupting the relationship on the commercial side. If you have a free trade agreement, you have a much more reasonable, managed way to handle potential disputes. And it stands that – so far, these agreements have stood the test of time once we get them in place, so I think it really is an important cement to the – (to ?) bilateral relationship.

MR. GREEN: I have a column in JoongAng Ilbo in Korea. And last year, after a number of Korean and American columnists had written the U.S.-Korea alliance was better than ever and on a new plane and finding a new altitude, I wrote a column saying, yes, that's what we said about the U.S.-Japan alliance when Koizumi was there. (Chuckles.)

So nothing is written in stone in terms of solidarity between allies. I remember showing Condoleezza Rice on a flight to Korea once public opinion polls about the U.S. in Korea. And they were basically bouncing up and down every few years. The low point was not Roh Moo-

hyun; it was actually the Agreed Framework in 1995. It was the low point of Korean attitudes towards the U.S. But they bounced up and down. There's a certain volatility.

That said, I think KORUS locks in, as Meredith put very well, a process for integrating our economies and resolving disputes. The other piece is, on the security side, the agreements on transferring wartime operational command and redesigning the joint and combined command structure put in place as soon as a strategic dialogues and operational and procedural things between the militaries – and that kind of process really helps you refine and revise and work on the alliance, even with political change. So that's good.

But, you know, there are a number of candidates emerging. You know, it's not clear that Son Hak-gyu or someone like that will be the candidate for the progressive camp. He's pretty moderate, internationalist, but it won't necessarily be him. And so, you know, it could be an interesting transition.

The other thing about the alliance is, we have to be careful not to ask for too much. I mean, there may be a temptation to get Lee Myung-bak to agree to lock in a lot of things before he leaves, but after KORUS, he's close to a lame duck in many ways. Some would argue he already is. And getting the KORUS pieces passed, finishing up the elements of the wartime OPCON transfer and so forth, that'll keep him pretty busy. And I'm not sure we'd be well-advised to ask for a big new security agreement or big new framework to round out his administration. Sometimes, if you ask for too much and the answer's no, you can end up looking a lot weaker than where we are, which is in a pretty strong place.

MR. SICKLES: I just want to mention, when I was talking about the microphones earlier, I didn't mean to make that a barrier to entry. If any of the back-benchers want to ask questions, I'm happy to repeat for the recording.

MR. : Here's a microphone – (inaudible).

MR. SICKLES: Sir?

Q: Excuse me. Anthony Izaku (ph), with NHK. Mr. Cha and Mr. Green, I think you both touched on this a bit, but I'm wondering if you can go into more detail about why it makes strategic sense for the U.S. to emphasize the South Korean relationship more while Japan is sort of taking a backseat a little bit.

MR. CHA: Well, I think – I'm not – I won't speak for Mike, but I think he'd agree that it isn't so much a question of choosing Korea over Japan, right? I mean, any administration, when it's dealing, trying to figure out its policy in Asia, has to feel – has to figure out what pieces it can work with. And I think they began the administration very clearly focused on, you know, continuing steady state with Japan as the foundation of U.S. policy. And it was evident in the – Prime Minister Aso, the first foreign head of state to visit the White House under Obama, and then Secretary Clinton – first overseas trip as secretary of state was to Japan. So I think it was very clear. You just had major changes in Japan that really threw everyone for a loop. Arguably, the biggest strategic surprise for everyone in Asia was what happened in Japan. And

so, you know, if you're the administration, you're just trying to figure out what you can work with.

And South Korea, you know, little by little, started to emerge – first it was in Copenhagen, very supportive of the climate change agenda; then in Afghanistan: You know, after Obama said he was pulling out of Iraq and looked for support from Europeans in Afghanistan, you know, nobody was willing to show up but the Koreans were willing to show up. So piece by piece, Korea started to emerge. You know, you add in to that the North Korean attacks, and it becomes a very, very close relationship.

So I think – you know, I would agree; I think it's the closest partner for the United States in Asia today. But in many ways, that was accidental. It wasn't deliberate.

MR. GREEN: I mean, I think the administration is suffering a certain amount of fatigue with respect to relations with the two pillars of strategy towards Asia; India and Japan are both frustrating because of domestic political reasons. And, as Victor said, you know, Korea under Lee Myung-bak is delivering and there's momentum to the relationship.

That said, Operation Tomodachi, the humanitarian and disaster relief effort after the March 11th earthquake and tsunami, was huge, was huge. And the level of trust that was rebuilt between the U.S. and Japan – the military's always had it, but the public is remarkable. As you know, 85 percent of Japanese now are pro-U.S. and pro-alliance. It's the highest ever. So the U.S.-Japan alliance went through a rough patch, but the fundamentals are very strong.

The problem is that getting things out – decisions out of Japan on Futenma, on trade, on a number of other issues is proving very frustrating for the administration.

Korea and Japan are very different allies. Japan is the third-largest economy in the world; Korea is 12th. The U.S. forces in Japan are expeditionary. Under Article 6 of the Security Treaty, they go all over the Far East and have a mission well beyond Japan. U.S. forces in Korea are moving towards some more so-called strategic flexibility, but are basically about defending the ROK from the North. The alliances are, for that reason, quite different. The economies are different. The worst thing the U.S. policy could do is decide there's a kind of trade-off between Japan and Korea. They're apples and oranges, so to speak, and we need both.

And I think in general the administration has recognized that and has tried as much as possible just to encourage trilateral cooperation among the U.S., Japan and Korea, rather than trading off between one and the other.

MS. BROADBENT: Yeah, I didn't know if you meant in the free trade agreement sphere as well; I mean, are you seeing a preference for Korea over Japan at that point? Or was it more of a security –

Q: (Off mic.)

MS. BROADBENT: I mean, I think the future on trade relations with Japan will be exciting to see in the future – in the next couple years. I mean, we've – both of us, both the United States and Japan had put an awful lot of political capital in the Doha round of multilateral negotiations in Geneva. Japan was a leader; the U.S. was a leader. And I think you see that ramping down a little bit and more of an emphasis on these regional trade agreements. So it would be in my hope that, you know, Japan would go through a pretty thorough discussion internally next year to kind of assess whether they'd like to be involved in this trans-Pacific partnership negotiation because it, we hope, will be a platform that we can bring a lot of like-minded countries together to cooperate economically.

MR. SICKLES: Please. (Inaudible.)

Q: Thanks. Dan Robinson, Voice of America. I wondered – Michael was mentioning a trans-Pacific partnership, which was a big deal during the president's South America trip as well. Can you – can you all – all of you look ahead a little bit to the Bali summit, to the East Asia Summit and talk about prospects for progress on TPP, as well as what may be carried over in terms of the advantages of the relationship between the president and Mr. Bak (sic) into Bali?

MR. CHA: All right. The – well, the passing of the KORUS FTA will be a huge boost for TPP because, as Mike said, a lot of things were put on hold because of KORUS, not least of which was Korea's position on TPP, which I think will be strongly in favor of after this. You know, there's always this – for many of the countries and, well, at least for the three countries in Northeast Asia, there's always this comparison between whether they should do a Plus Three FTA or whether they should go TPP.

I think a lot of the discussion about Plus Three was largely because TPP was sort of sitting there idle and the Koreans were not saying anything about TPP. I think once KORUS gets passed, Koreans will come out in favor of TPP and it will create a huge cycle of momentum, not least of which will involve Japan. Because I think after KORUS gets passed, I think the Japanese will come on board with – I mean, as Meredith said, they'll have to think about it. I think they will think about it hard and they will come on board with TPP.

So what does that mean as we look to APEC and the Bali summit? It means that potentially the Obama administration could possibly get a framework for TPP in place by the time of these multilateral meetings. If they could do that it would be complete – it would be the perfect irony because the administration that started out so negative on trade in Asia would end its first term, you know, or maybe its only term – first term, only term – in office laying down probably the two most important aspects – building blocks of getting to FTAAP, or Free Trade Area of the Asia Pacific, with KORUS and with a framework for TPP.

MS. BROADBENT: Yeah, I mean, Japan will have to think in the sense of the practical result of the – of the KORUS FTA for Japan is that Korean-manufactured exports in particular will become more competitive in the U.S. market. Since we didn't negotiate a multilateral agreement, our tariffs are still relatively higher than they would be and so Korea is getting – will get that advantage, and they compete very directly with a lot of exports from Japan, as you know.

MR. GREEN: You mentioned the East Asia Summit in Bali. I think the administration – they're doing three things – the president is doing three things on this trip in November. He's going to Hawaii for APEC – the Asia Pacific Economic Cooperation Summit – also known as four adjectives in search of a noun – (laughter). He's going to Australia, which I think will largely be about the alliance. And then he's going to Bali for the – for his first time in the East Asia Summit.

I think the administration views APEC as the premier vehicle for advancing a trans-Pacific trade architecture – not the East Asia Summit. In fact, I think that they're wary of using the EAS for trade because it's got a lot of difficult members, like Burma and Laos and so forth, and because it doesn't have any governance structure. It's just a meeting right now whereas APEC, for all its faults, actually has some process for agreements on – non-binding agreements on trade facilitation and so forth.

President Bush, in addition to beginning – to negotiating Korea and then starting the TPP negotiation, put out the idea of an FTAAP – Free Trade Area of the Asia Pacific. That was, I think, centered on APEC. So TPP – whatever the president announces or doesn't, TPP will be aimed at APEC in Hawaii, which raises the question – what's he going to do in Bali?

And I think there's going to be a lot of handwringing in – among the foreign policy people in the administration over the coming months as the domestic people say: Why are we going to Bali? You realize the president's in the fight of his life in this election? And they're going to have to come up with a very clear reason why EAS is so important that – for an Asianist, it makes sense. As Woody Allen said, nine-tenths of success is showing up, and in Asia policy, it's probably six-tenths of success – (chuckles) – is just showing up.

But that's not a very compelling reason in domestic American politics. So it's not trade at EAS. It's security, except that a lot of the members of EAS don't really want to talk about security. So it's interesting you raised EAS because I don't think they've figured out quite how to frame that. And I think the State Department and NSC, the people who have the jobs we had, get it. But to make sure the president, A, goes, and that presidents keep going, they're going to have to think hard about how to frame up the EAS and what it means. Obviously engaging Asia is important but that may not be enough of an argument.

MR. SICKLES: And obviously you all will be invited to CSIS press briefing as we get closer to APEC. Anna?

Q: Hi. I'm Anna Fifield from the Financial Times. Victor, before you mentioned about the prospect of U.S. bilateral talks after this summit. So I know that this falls into the realm of pure speculation, but can you talk a bit more about what you might expect, what form they might take and whether they are just talks for the sake of talking or whether you think that they might be able to aim for some low level, you know, agreement out of it. Thank you.

MR. CHA: Yeah, the great thing about being out of government is you can speculate all you want, you know? (Chuckles.) The – well, I think – I think they're still undecided in terms of venue, basically. But I think – what we've – what we've seen is essentially a sequence of

steps that both Washington and Seoul have agreed on, which is that, as Mike said earlier, I mean, the U.S. did become a little bit more interested in trying to make some headway on the North Korea issue starting from last spring.

And – but they didn't want to cut the South Koreans out, so every negotiation had to be preceded by a North-South meeting. And now that we've had the second of these meetings, it's very likely we'll have a second U.S.-DPRK bilateral. What will they talk about? I mean, it's been – I think the U.S. has already made pretty clear to the DPRK the so-called pre-steps that they would like to see the DPRK to take in order to get back to a larger six-party format – you know, including freezing their reactor, activities at Yeonpyeong; allowing access to the uranium facility at Yeonpyeong; agreeing to no more missile tests or nuclear tests; no more provocations against South Korea – there's a whole list of things that they would like to do.

What's interesting about this is that these are all the pre-steps that the administration says are necessary to get back to six-party talks but we all know that the North Koreans would much rather talk to the United States than go to six-party talks. So effectively, it'll be a negotiation over these pre-steps. You know, venue – who knows. Geneva, Beijing, Pyongyang, who knows where it could be. But I think that's what the discussion will be about and then we'll see – you know, again, a sequence of steps.

The U.S. will come out of those meetings; Bosworth will go to the region to consult with Seoul and Tokyo and Beijing and, you know, this will all be to try to create some sort of proper platform upon which to come back to the – to the six-party process. But I think, you know, the meat of the work will be done in these bilateral discussions. And that's why, I think, if they announce a second bilateral they are basically going back to negotiations.

MR. GREEN: Can I just – I've been doing North Korea as long as Victor and – and Victor's kept an energy. I'm scarred and – (chuckles) – bitter. But it's important to remember, in October 2008, the United States, over the strenuous objections of Japan and with great anxiety in Seoul, agreed to a deal with North Korea in the six-party process in which we would lift two sanctions on North Korea – mostly symbolic, Trading with the Enemy Act and terrorism, mostly symbolic – and North Korea would provide us with a – with a protocol for verifying their plutonium stockpiles – that had been so watered down that it was also basically just symbolic.

But it was an agreement. So what happened? We lifted sanctions. North Korea never provided the protocol or anything. And then, as the Obama administration came in pleading with them through intermediaries and publicly not to do anything because the Obama administration wanted to continue the engagement line, in spite of that, the North Koreans tested a nuclear weapon – nuclear device; then they sank the South Korean corvette, Cheonan, then they bombed and killed South Korean civilians on Yeonpyeong, and now we're going back to talk – about what?

I mean, how do you do this so that you don't basically look like you're rewarding North Korea for three egregious, not only violations of the six-party talks, but attacks on South Korea? How do you do it? So we have these preconditions – no provocations, freeze – I think even if we get that, it's a very, very hard road forward. And it will be very hard to get that because the

North Koreans have been pretty clear what they want, which is light water reactors, acceptance of them – their nuclear weapons status, an arms control negotiation – quote, unquote, "arms control negotiations" with us where, for a price, they get a deal like India got where they don't transfer anything and we pay them not to, but we have some very loose arrangement on Yeonpyeong and no access to their uranium enrichment or their weapons production.

It's a deal no American president can accept – or South Korean president. So that's why I think this is largely process- and procedural-aimed, on our part, to coax them away from further provocations in 2012 and on their part to see what they can get in the near term. But it's very hard for me to see how this is much more than a sort of a tactical coping mechanism on both sides when each side has probably completely made up its mind on where things appear to be going.

But as I said, I've been scarred and jaded doing this North Korea stuff, so – (chuckles).

Q: (Off mic.) Do you think it's a – (inaudible) – carrot approach? Like there's no desire anywhere, if it's put in that context – (inaudible) – terrorism list, or –

MR. GREEN: Well, that's – the problem with putting them back on the state sponsors of terrorism list is it's – it is supposed to be a legal process. And the Office of Legal Counsel in the State Department and White House have to say, as a matter of law, they are not involved – North Korea is not involved in terrorist acts. So to put the – to take them off was somewhat questionable, but I suppose just crossed the threshold of legality. To put them back on for political reasons is a bad precedent because the law is based on the law. So I think that makes it very hard and it's mostly symbolic anyway.

But there are other things we could be doing, frankly, to demonstrate to North Korea not only that we're trying our best to coax them out of provocations but that there will be bad things that happen if they do. The Koreans and Japanese in New York at the U.N. at the Security Council have been trying to get some discussions going on the outlines of what we would do in further Security Council sanctions so that the U.S. – Korea and our dialogue – or the Chinese could say to the North Koreans, look, so you know we're serious, we've got some ideas on what we're going to do to tighten sanctions.

The U.S. delegation to the U.N. made a sort of half-hearted effort – went to the Chinese. The Chinese said, no, we don't want to do it, and the U.S. gave up. So I – it's a good question. I think there are more things we could do to make it clear that there will be downside for North Korea if they do move in that direction. And the administration's not wanted to go there. There are U.N. Security Council traditions. You know, you don't fight losing battles in the Security Council, apparently. And so there are reasons why procedurally the U.S. didn't want to do it.

But we're not putting in place a set of expectations for North Korea about how bad things could get for them if they do provoke, in my view. I've not seen it.

MR. CHA: I mean, I agree with you, Anna, that – or what was suggested by your question that if the Obama administration has no evidence that they can point to that the North is

serious this time and they want to avoid at least the political criticism that they are basically rewarding bad behavior again, it seems it would be perfectly logical that they should, before they re-engage, re-engage with the other parties – the other five – to figure out what the costs are going to be if this negotiation fails.

I mean, what the costs – what costs will be imposed on the North if this negotiation fails because – yeah, forever we've said to the North Koreans: You denuclearize or something bad is going to happen. And nothing bad has ever happened. So I think particularly in this sort of situation there needs to be that sort of dialogue. In a perfect world there would be that sort of coordination taking place. But as Mike said, that it's very difficult to move certain countries, like China, on discussing this more tougher path – not that we'd ever get close to a return to 2005 or 1994 with this, you know, supposed negotiation that's coming up.

But as I've written, I don't think – if there is a future agreement with North Korea, it should not include light water reactors. I mean, after Fukushima now, I think everybody – I would argue even the Chinese are concerned about putting any sort of nuclear technologies – well, you know, otherwise –

MR. GREEN: It should not be –

MR. CHA: It should not be on the table – that everybody has realized that this is not a good thing for the DPRK to have and that no one should sleep at nights soundly knowing in the future that the DPRK is operating light water reactors. So I think in that sense what happened in Japan was a – I think a real wake-up call, and hopefully will not be part of any future agreement.

MR. GREEN: Sorry to drag this on. So what do you do if you're North Korea? You bring up the light water reactors because then you fight tooth and nail to get your light water reactors until the other side starts compromising and then you, you know, don't really completely drop it; you just temporarily drop it.

So what you avoid at all costs is any serious discussion of uranium enrichment, you know, nuclear weapons testing and capabilities and accurate figures on your plutonium stockpile. So the light water reactor will definitely be in the middle of the talks, a key issue, and the North Koreans will use it to get whatever they can to give – to say, well, all right, for now we'll drop it.

MR. SICKLES: Right here.

Q: Thank you. Jim from the Straits Times. You know, this week aside from KORUS clearing Congress, you also had the anti-Chinese currency bill – probably going to go to the Senate as well. You know, is this just a case of mixed messaging or, you know, should major trading partners really be worried about how Congress is dealing with the broader issues of trade and currency the way they're going?

MR. GREEN: Mixed messaging is a staple of American foreign policy. (Laughter.) How do you think we established our leadership position? I'm only half-joking. I mean – and democracies have a certain disadvantage formulating grand strategy; we can't keep secrets;

we're impatient. But we always have the advantage of multiple voices in the process adding leverage.

And I think that's what this is. On a lot of – you know, The Wall Street Journal editorial and others have been very negative about it. I'm personally not too worried because I don't think the House will pass it. I don't know, I mean, Meredith may have a different view. But Boehner and other leaders in the House have been – Republican leaders – have been somewhat negative. But, you know, it is a way to help the negotiators keep the pressure on.

And, yeah, the currency issue is probably not the most important issue with China. Intellectual property rights, indigenous innovation and things like that – and general lack of transparency and rule of law are much bigger problems. But it's harder to get Congress excited about those things. And so this creates a general pressure that, I think, although people are nervous about a trade war, may be necessary.

And I also think in an election year that's a good time to do this because it means either a re-elected President Obama or a new Republican president comes in with a full head of steam arguing that we really need to make some visible progress on this range of economic issues where, arguably, we've been bogged down for a couple of years.

MR. SICKLES: Meredith, did you want to –

MS. BROADBENT: I don't think it's mixed messaging because I think we deal with all of our trading partners differently. I mean, I think we've got much different issues with China. I would – I would agree with Mike that probably the biggest issues that are causing the most frustration are intellectual property and indigenous innovation and the activities of state-owned enterprises in China. The currency bill is something that Congress was able to draft and set up a mechanism to ostensibly address. So that – I think that's – it was more a way to send a message to China that there's huge concerns with that trade relationship right now.

And particularly in a situation where you don't have the – where you're not negotiating with the Chinese in a multilateral situation in Geneva – that, you know, the Chinese were not particularly supportive of the Doha Round and now things are getting more bilateral, and frictions are going up a bit, I think.

MR. SICKLES: Any others?

Q: (Translated from Mandarin.) My name is Zhang Lei-ying (ph). This January I just came – escaped from Beijing to the United States. In China I was captured in the prison for seven years because I practice Falun Gong. In the labor camp I was receiving more than hundreds of tortures there. I was almost choked to death more than 10 times. Even then, that wasn't the most sad thing to me.

In China, more than 100 million people are facing this destiny like me. So many people – several people pressure me and their foot was on my body. They used a wet towel to close my

mouth – to stop me to talk, and so I cannot breathe at all, and always let me stay in the position that I was always struggle – surviving, every minute.

When I was almost in a critical, critical death condition they just let me go for a second and then they'd do the same thing again until I went to the point that I lost my control of urine – I lost my control of bladder. So I was – urinate uncontrolled. A policeman came in and then even let me say, how do you enjoy that?

My daughter was four years and – in 2008. At that time Chinese government was – captured the Falun Gong practitioner before the Olympic Games. At that time I was captured in front of my daughter. It was a rainy day. The policemen took my neck, used a black hood to cover my head. He used his spray to spray my husband's eyes.

MS. : Do you need a tissue?

MR. : (Inaudible.)

MS. : Yes, yes. Thank you. (Continues in Mandarin.)

Q: (In Mandarin.)

MS. : OK, OK.

Q: (Translated from Mandarin.) OK. I'm over here to urge that do not – there are 10 Falun Gong practitioners already being deported back to China. We don't know their situation right now. And there are – 58 of them are facing the same situation. I'm urging President Lee also our President Obama, please, please, be paying more attention on this human rights issue. Thank you very much.

MR. SICKLES: I think we all share deep regret for your situation. Does anyone else have any final questions for the panel before we end our briefing?

Q: Yeah, I have one question, going back to the original theme of the briefing, the visit of Lee Myung-Bak. How do you think it'll be perceived in North Korea that he is coming to Washington and being feted – say, visit the White House, the free trade agreement – and – but what the North's reaction might be and how it might possibly influence their conduct?

MR. CHA: Well, the first thing is they probably won't report on it at all, all right. And secondly they – I'm – they'll probably hate it. I mean, they'll probably hate every aspect of it and the fact that Lee is being treated so well. And to the extent they will report it they'll talk about how, you know, he's a – basically Obama's poodle – or whatever the equivalent term would be for, you know, for South Korea. And – would certainly see it as yet more incentive for them to try to divide the two allies, all right – if the U.S. does re-engage, that they will try very hard to break up this very tight coordination between Washington and Seoul that we've seen over the past – over the past three, four years.

MR. GREEN: They'll probably also read it very carefully in terms of the press availability, the background briefings from both (the ?) governments and so forth, to try to divine how much they can get out of the current engagement mode in both Seoul and Washington. My guess would be if they read into it that this summit was a meeting of minds about testing engagement or continuing with the current North-South and U.S.-DPRK talks, that the North Koreans won't react too much. If they hear in it an unexpected return to a much firmer language that was used after the Cheonan and Yeonpyeong incident, then they will react.

I think what we're saying on the panel is probably it'll be the former – that it'll be cautious, it will be – it will talk about alliance solidarity, it will talk about all those things – but that the general message will be we're testing engagement for now. But we'll see. These summits – you know, in general the White House/Blue House controls the message, but things happen – things can come out. Other officials say things, and the North Koreans may react to that as well.

MR. SICKLES: Paul, round two?

Q: Thanks again. I'm wondering if – not so much to Meredith but Victor and Michael, in this case – is there anything to take away from the Russia-China vote on Syria in the U.N. and that sort of solidarity that would be – that applies to the Northeast Asian context and North Korea? Should – or is that (really ?) uniquely tied to the Syrian relationship with Russia? I'm just wondering because if – does North Korea feel like it has a bit more rope these days?

MR. CHA: Yeah, I think they do feel like they have a lot of rope these days. You know, there is nothing in the – in the Chinese domestic political context that would lead them to be any tougher on North Korea. If anything, they're – you know, everything pushes to sort of a middle-of-a-road, very conservative path, which is, you know, to basically force negotiations on the United States with DPRK.

And in the case of Russia, you know, all this talk recently about the gas pipeline deal and everything probably gives Medvedev, Putin even more reason to try to see diplomacy play out in a way that's favorable to them.

I mean, I think – I mean, all countries are like this but the Russians, particularly when it comes to six-party talks, are very self-serving and self-interested. And even back in 2004, they kept talking about gas pipelines, gas pipelines. So I think that that's – you know, you have – they are two members of the six-party talks and members of the P-5 who you would need for this tougher path, if you could ever delineate a tougher path. And right now neither of them are in a mode to think that way.

MR. GREEN: I think Iran, Syria, North Korea watch how the big powers treat each other very, very carefully. And they will take some comfort from the Russian and Chinese position in the Security Council on Syria; I have no doubt about that. The Russian gas pipeline proposal will also give the North Koreans huge comfort because it is completely unrealistic but suggests that Moscow is not in a mode currently to put any pressure at all on the North.

This, by the way, was first proposed to President Bush by Putin after the uranium enrichment crisis in October of 2002. His first response to the president was to send a letter saying: I have an idea that will solve all of this. We'll build a pipeline through North Korea to South Korea. Everyone will become cooperative partners – problem solved. The president said, very interesting. We're forming five-party talks; you're not in. And in St. Petersburg when he met Putin he put it more diplomatically. And Putin didn't like that. So he started modifying his position to get in to maintain some skin in the game in Northeast Asia.

So the pipeline thing coming up again, to me, is a signal to everyone who's been following this, especially the North Koreans, that Russia is not going to put any pressure on them. It also says something about Putin's Far East policy, which is, it really is kind of opportunistic and inconsistent compared to his main priority which is, you know, countering the West overall.

It also raises the other issue – you know, we have two levers we pull in – diplomatically: We can either pull the six-party lever and try to have broad consensus that includes the Russians and the Chinese, or we can pull the U.S.-Japan-Korea alliance lever that puts more pressure. It's more divisive, but it puts more pressure. And then Bush – well, Clinton, Bush and Obama have sort of played with both levers.

The lever we're now – the lever we were pulling until about four or five months ago was trilateral after Cheonan and Yeonpyeong. The lever we're pulling now is multilateral. It's looking for broad consensus among the parties. Why? Well, in part to try to dissuade the North from testing but also I think, frankly, for both the Blue House and the White House, I think – I suspect that there's a real desire to kind of find a process to let this thing play itself out over the course of, say, a year and a half – (chuckles) – in other words, past the election date.

And if you go with the trilateral lever it raises the heat, it raises the confrontation, it creates moves and countermoves. It takes – there's some risk to it. And I don't think that either the Blue House or the White House right now want to go that path given everything that's going on both politically and diplomatically. But it's not a – this Syria thing is not a good sign in terms of getting broad six-party consensus on any kind of pressure on the North to deliver.

MR. SICKLES: OK. I think we've covered a lot of ground. I'd like to thank you all for coming to CSIS. Again, let me repeat that the video of this briefing and the transcript will be available at CSIS.org later this afternoon. I'll also send around the transcript to those of you that are in the room. And feel free to contact Andrew or I at any time. We would like to make our experts available to you guys, and we're happy to help. Thanks again.

(END)