

Center for Strategic and International Studies

“Spring Summitry on the Korean Peninsula: Peace Breaking Out or Last Gasp Diplomacy?”

Welcoming Remarks

Speakers:

**John J. Hamre,
President and CEO,
CSIS**

**Ambassador Cho, Yoon-je,
Republic of Korea Ambassador to the United States**

Introduction:

**Lisa Collins,
Fellow, Korea Chair,
CSIS**

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LISA COLLINS: Good morning. Thank you all for coming to our event, “Spring Summitry on the Korean Peninsula: Peace Breaking Out or Last Gasp Diplomacy?” It is a pleasure for the CSIS Korea Chair to co-host this conference. We would like to thank all of our distinguished speakers and guests for coming today.

I am Lisa Collins, a fellow in the Office of the Korea Chair, and I have the honor of introducing our first speakers today. But before I do that, I would like to mention a word about safety here at CSIS. We have a very secure building, and we do not expect any emergency situations to arise, but if something does occur, please exit the building carefully, using the stairways and emergency exits, and walk towards the National Geographic building on M Street, behind CSIS. I will be the designated responsible safety officer and will give you any further instructions should a situation arise.

Today we will be having an interactive session with questions that will be displayed here on the screens. You have each received a clicker hopefully – downstairs. If you have not, please go to the reception desk and receive one. I would just like to remind you about a few logistics – things with regards to these clickers. Please remember to turn them on – there is an on and off button here at the top – before you start choosing your choices. And please also don’t walk away with these clickers. They have some tracking devices so you won’t get very far – (laughter) – but they are pretty expensive, so please do remember to return them at the end of the session.

Now I would like to introduce our first speaker, Dr. Hamre, the president of CSIS. He will be giving some welcoming remarks, and after he has finished, we will have Ambassador Cho, Yoon-je, the current ambassador of the Republic of Korea to the United States here in Washington, D.C.

First, I will introduce Ambassador Cho very quickly. Ambassador Cho is the ambassador of the Republic of Korea to the United States. Prior to being appointed, he was a visiting professor at the Korea Advanced Institute of Science and Technology and a professor emeritus at Sogang University’s Graduate School of International Studies.

He has had a long, distinguished career in civil service, having served at the South Korean ambassador to the United Kingdom and an economic advisor to former President Roh Moo-hyun. He also previously was an economist at the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund.

Thank you very much. We’ll have our first speaker, Dr. Hamre, come to the stage. (Applause.)

JOHN J. HAMRE: Well, good morning, everybody. Thank you for coming. I’m delighted to have you here. I must confess I’m a little blurry. I just came back last night from ten days in the Serengeti, so I’m – so if I say stupid things, I have a good excuse. I’m still – I’m still jet-lagged.

Very excited to have you here today, and I can’t think of a more interesting topic and time. I remember back in 1989 when Vaclav Havel, who became the first president of the Czech Republic, and he said – this was ’89 – he said, you know, things are moving so quickly we just don’t have time to be amazed. And there’s a little bit of that same narrative here right now. I mean, I think all of us are amazed at what’s happening, and don’t really quite know what to make of it yet.

We were talking in advance, sitting back in the green room, and the difference between the hopefulness in Korea and the skepticism in Washington is going to be a theme we’re going to hear today. I mean, this is going to be part of this backdrop, and yet we share together with our friends in Korea this sense of amazement. And we’re going to try to spend the day understanding what this

means and where it could go, what are the implications, and it's larger than just North Korea-South Korea. It's – the entire geopolitical landscape of Northeast Asia is really at the core, going to be the topic we'll be exploring.

Fortunately, we have very, very good people that are going to help us explore these topics today. I especially want to say my thanks to Ambassador King, Ambassador Yun, Ambassador Mark Lippert, who are going to be here. All of them have had very timely, relevant experience about working with North Korea in kind of clunky ways, you know, for the last 20 years, honestly. It was really quite an imperfect interaction with North Korea from our standpoint. So we probably don't understand the dynamics as well, and so – very important reason for Americans today to spend time listening very carefully to Koreans and Korea scholars so that we can inform our thinking here and not just bring the bias of 20 years of Washington narrative and politics that we have here, which has largely been shaped by, you know, failed experiences and a very brittle formulation about what North Korea is.

We'll see what happens. This is going to be – I'm in the amazed camp, I must say, with – probably tinged with a little bit of skepticism, but I need to temper my own views and listen carefully today, and I intend to do that.

And I want to say thank you to our scholars that are going to be here to help us. Ambassador Cho looks pretty good for a guy that hasn't slept for the last four weeks. He is constantly moving, you know, keeping this very dynamic situation moving forward. When he first arrived, we had a conversation, and he told me that this was a time of potential great opportunity because of President Moon's conviction and his willingness to lean forward at some risk – you know, some personal risk, and we see that amplifying itself now in front of us. And so we're very fortunate that Ambassador Cho was going to be with us this morning to really launch this conference.

So could I ask you, with your applause, please welcome warmly Ambassador Cho, Yoon-je. Thank you, Ambassador. (Applause.)

AMBASSADOR CHO, YOON-JE: Dr. Hamre, distinguished guests, ladies and gentlemen, Good morning. Thank you for having me here.

Today's discussion couldn't be more timely. The world has just embarked on an intensive diplomatic effort. I hope that it will result in the complete denuclearization and a permanent peace on the Korean Peninsula and beyond.

Ever since the PyeongChang Winter Olympics, events on the Korean Peninsula have rushed to this moment.

About a week ago, my President met with the North Korean leader at Panmunjom for a highly anticipated summit. And, although we do not know exactly when, in a few weeks, President Trump will meet with Kim Jong Un face-to-face.

The first part of this spring summitry was a success.

The leaders adopted the Panmunjom Declaration, affirming the common goal of complete denuclearization of the Korean Peninsula. They also expressed their firm resolve to end the Korean War and establish permanent peace on the Korean Peninsula.

Though it was the 3rd inter-Korean summit, it was the first time that both leaders explicitly addressed the nuclear issue.

For the two leaders to confirm their common goal of a nuclear-free Korean Peninsula is a major achievement in my view.

You may remember how, as recently as December, our focus was on stopping North Korean provocations and bringing them to dialogue.

Where do we stand now? The North Korean leader unilaterally pledged to discontinue all nuclear and ICBM tests. The President of the United States is preparing to sit down with the North Korean leader just as the inter-Korean summit has concluded successfully.

Earlier, many doubted that North Korea was willing to denuclearize.

Since then, North Korea has clearly expressed its willingness, not only to us, but also to China, and to the United States. At the inter-Korean Summit meeting, this promise was codified unequivocally.

North Korea is demonstrating a fundamentally different attitude this time.

First, at the party plenary meeting, North Korea announced to shut down their nuclear test site and to shift their focus onto economic development, building the economy.

Second, the entire text of the Panmunjom Declaration, including the common goal of complete denuclearization, was featured in Rodong Shinmun, North Korea's daily newspaper. Now the entire North Korean people know that their country has stepped onto a new path.

Third, Mr. Kim said that he will carry out his commitment to close down the nuclear test site at Punggye-ri this month, and promised to invite outside experts and media. The whole world will be able to witness Pyongyang's first concrete steps towards denuclearization.

The groundwork for the Trump-Kim summit has been laid. At this juncture, two questions matter: first, how to translate all these gestures into concrete progress, and second, how to ensure that North Korea does not back out of this process.

We will be able to see more clearly what our future holds in a few weeks, when President Trump meets Mr. Kim.

Peace and stability in East Asia depend on North Korea's complete denuclearization. We hope that the U.S.-North Korean summit will be a concrete step towards such aspiration.

Of course, the road before us may be bumpy. There will be tough negotiations.

The notorious verification process may impede our progress. And it will require careful calibration and tremendous patience.

It is imperative that South Korea and the United States maintain close coordination in the whole process.

Throughout this whole process, the voices of concern and caution will help ensure that we stay on track. That is why I look to you to continue to provide constructive criticism and wisdom.

Personally, I was quite surprised by how many Koreans didn't know that North and South were still at war until the leaders discussed ending it.

Many in the younger generation were shocked to learn that the Korean War was not something of the past, but a reality we have been living with for the past 68 years.

It is time to turn the page on this war and achieve real peace. We must take this rare opportunity to make diplomacy work before it slips through our fingers.

In that spirit, I would like to rephrase today's title. Today's title, as I understand, is "Peace Breaking Out, or Last Gasp Diplomacy." I would like to say we are all here to discuss how we are going to see "peace breaking out" through "firm grasp diplomacy."

I look forward to hearing your thoughts and insights on these important issues, as well as your constructive recommendations and suggestions that can inform and provide guidance to our way forward. Thank you. (Applause.)

MS. COLLINS: Thank you very much, Ambassador Cho and Dr. Hamre, for those welcoming remarks.

We'll now have a short transition while our speakers take the stage for the next panel. Thank you.

(END)