

Center for Strategic and International Studies

TRANSCRIPT
CSIS-Korea Chair

Press Call: Preview of the Second Trump-Kim Summit

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LOCATION
CSIS Headquarters, Washington, D.C.

CSIS EXPERTS
Victor Cha
Senior Adviser and Korea Chair, CSIS

Michael J. Green
Senior Vice President for Asia and Japan Chair, CSIS

Sue Mi Terry
Senior Fellow, Korea Chair, CSIS

MODERATOR
H. Andrew Schwartz
Chief Communications Officer, CSIS

*Transcript By
Superior Transcriptions LLC
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H. Andrew Schwartz: Hello, are we live?

Operator: Yes, we are live. Please go ahead.

H. Andrew Schwartz: Great. Thanks a lot. Thanks to everybody for joining this press call today from CSIS. This is Andrew Schwartz. Thanks for all of our colleagues in the media for joining us. And for our friends in the media who are traveling to Hanoi, we'll have this transcript as soon as possible. We'll have it distributed after the call as quickly as possible. Also, you should tune into our podcast, The Impossible State, which you can find on Spotify. You can find it on Apple Podcasts, Stitcher, Soundcloud, wherever you get your podcasts. And please also take note of the event tomorrow at CSIS, the preview of the second Trump-Kim summit, which begins tomorrow at CSIS at – hold on – at what? Let's see. Hold on, let me just get the exact time. Begins tomorrow at 10:00 a.m.

H. Andrew Schwartz: With that, I'd like to come to my colleague, Victor Cha, our Korea chair, to get this kicked off. Victor.

Victor Cha: Sure. Yeah. Thanks, Andrew. And good afternoon to everyone on the call.

Victor Cha: So as all of you know, we have this big event planned next week, the second U.S.-DPRK leadership summit. Let me start off with a couple of observations. First, I think there's a great deal of pressure on both – actually, both leaders to produce tangible results out of this second meeting, since the first meeting effectively laid out a statement of principles between the two leaders about what the endgame or the outcome of these negotiations should be. That is, a normalized U.S.-North Korea political relationship, a peace treaty on the Korean Peninsula, and the end of North Korea's nuclear weapons program. In the six or seven months since the Singapore summit last summer, there really wasn't any tangible progress in terms of fulfilling any of those three objectives, which creates a lot of pressure then on the second meeting.

Victor Cha: If this second meeting does not produce actual tangible steps – whether it's on peace, on normalization, or on denuclearization – I think it will widely be seen as a failure and will really raise questions about whether this process has ended. Having said that, I think both of the leaders know that. And so in a sense there is more of an incentive to try to work together to reach some outcomes. But at the same time, having said that, the outcomes may be underwhelming. For example, if the North Koreans are going to allow the United States or international inspectors to go visit the nuclear test site that they blew up last summer or visit a rocket test stand – the Sohae Satellite Complex, otherwise known as Pongdong-ri Satellite Complex, that they basically froze, again, last summer. Those would be tangible steps, but they would not be tangible steps that would create confidence, I think, among experts who look at this to say that there's been – there's been real progress in large part because the North Koreans no longer need those facilities.

Victor Cha: So I think – on the denuclearization side, I think what people would want to see is something that goes beyond that where the North Koreans don't simply resell us the Yongbyon Nuclear Complex or pieces of the Yongbyon Nuclear Complex that have been – that have been under inspections two times already before in the '94 agreement or in the 2007 agreement. But if they do other things beyond that, then

I think people will start to pay more attention and think there is – think there is some value to the process.

Victor Cha: So this then takes us to the U.S. side. If the – what comes out of this meeting next week are underwhelming concessions by the North Koreans, essentially, incremental and underwhelming concessions that attempt to resell the horse that they sold three times before, you know, the operative question for the summit then becomes what is the United States going to give up in return for those underwhelming concessions, and I think this is where, you know, the president's unpredictability, his impulsiveness, his inclination not to prepare for meetings could get us into trouble. I mean, I think that is the concern.

Victor Cha: In Singapore, the only tangible concession that was really made in Singapore was the president's decision, impulsively, to suspend U.S.-South Korean military exercises. And so, you know, I think the worry is, is that are we going to see a repeat of that in this – in this meeting next week wherefore some, you know, underwhelming concessions the president is going to put things on the table – alliance equities on the table – that could do long-lasting damage to or erode the alliance.

Victor Cha: The last point I'll make is that what is interesting about these potential concessions that the North Koreans could make is that they could be easily seen by the president as actually being winners in the sense that if U.S. inspectors are allowed to go into the now this unused nuclear test site, there's an argument that could be made that this has never been done before – that nobody has ever had access to this test site where they had done six nuclear tests, or if they dismantle this one long-range satellite launch facility that this was actually the launch facility that North Korea tested a rocket that blew up the Obama "Leap Day" deal, then, again, the president could claim victory that no one else has done that. And he would be factually accurate in such a statement but it would be materially irrelevant, given the size and scope of the program today.

Victor Cha: And, Andrew, one more final thing, you know, that I want to say is that the other piece of this that is not talked about at all is the issue of human rights. This month marks five years since the U.N. Commission of Inquiry report on North Korean human rights that led to a groundswell of international support for bringing the North Korean leadership before the International Criminal Court for crimes against humanity.

Victor Cha: There has been no discussion of human rights at all in the run-up to this meeting and that is – that is a shame not just because the United States needs to be a beacon of human freedom but because it actually materially matters to the negotiators and to the desired outcomes for human rights to be addressed, in no small part because if part of what President Trump wants to do to entice North Korea to give up its nuclear capabilities, you know, the promise of economic support – I think he now calls North Korea the economic rocket rather than "the little rocket man" – if that's what they really want to do, the reality is that there is no international financial institution or no U.S. or Western company that will go into North Korea if there are human rights violations somewhere along the supply chain because then they would be in violation of U.S. law.

Victor Cha: So it actually really matters for the negotiations. It's not just a throwaway to talk about human rights, but I'm not confident that that's going to be one of the headlines coming out of this meeting next week.

H. Andrew Schwartz: Great, Victor. Thanks very much.

H. Andrew Schwartz: Next let's turn to Dr. Michael Green, who's the head of our Asia programs here at CSIS. Mike?

Michael J. Green: Thanks, Andrew. Let me build on Victor's presentation.

Michael J. Green: There were two things experts/diplomats were talking about when President Trump met Kim Jong-un back in June. One was considered an important indication of whether North Korea was serious, and that was whether or not North Korea would provide a declaration of its facilities – in other words, a list of the nuclear materials, plants, missile sites – in effect, a menu that would allow a subsequent negotiation about how you dismantle it. That is off the table. I don't expect to see that. It's not – the administration doesn't talk about it anymore, for the straightforward reason that North Korea refuses to provide it and the administration negotiators don't have the leverage to demand it because it is very, very clear to the North Koreans that the President Trump wants a summit essentially without preconditions. So I don't expect to see a declaration, which Victor and I and many other experts and previous negotiators have said would be a sign that North Korea's kind of serious. Don't expect to see it.

Michael J. Green: The second thing I don't expect to see, although it's still possible, that we were all talking about would be a declaration by the president of the United States that he's withdrawing our troops from the Korean Peninsula. We worry about it outside the administration. The ally is worried about it. Clearly, people inside the administration are worried that the president might do it. In June in Singapore he said I would like to withdraw our troops from Korea someday, which was a real shock to our allies and Congress. That now seems less likely for a couple reasons. One is the Congress passed legislation limiting the president's ability to withdraw troops without congressional approval. The second is that the South Koreans' recent agreement with the U.S. on a cost-sharing arrangement for U.S. forces, they did so in desperation before this summit. It's only a one-year agreement, but it increases what they pay so that that issue is not on the table, so that President Trump is not sitting down with Kim Jong-un steaming at the same time that South Korea is not paying enough and is ripping us off. And the president himself on a Sunday talk show said he has no plan to withdraw.

Michael J. Green: So don't expect to see a declaration which would be a sign North Korea is at all serious. Don't expect it. But also, less worried – not ruling out, but less worried about a sort of catastrophic unilateral withdrawal from the peninsula, which really animated not only the Korean and Japanese governments, but the U.S. government. I think they've boxed the president in. He's not likely to do that.

Michael J. Green: What we're left with going into this summit and probably coming out of the summit is essentially a freeze for freeze. The president has started praising himself and the administration has started trumpeting the fact that North Korea has not done any tests in over a year, which is true, and that's important. But what the U.S. has done, and what the president unilaterally announced without consulting with the

Pentagon or the U.S. allies, was to freeze our military exercises, what the president calls wargames, which is the term the Chinese, Russians, and North Koreans use for the regularly scheduled exercises. So we're essentially at a freeze for freeze, and I think that's an important thing to hold up to the administration and ask them about.

Michael J. Green: In 2017, when the Chinese and Russians proposed this freeze for freeze, the U.N. ambassador, Nikki Haley, said that it was insulting to suggest that somehow these were equivalent. The State Department spokesman, Heather Nauert, said there is no equivalency. Henry Kissinger, testifying in the Senate Armed Services, said a freeze-for-freeze scheme would equate legitimate security operations with activities which have been condemned by the U.N. Security Council for decades – and I'm quoting here – “and it would encourage demands for additional restraints on and perhaps the dismantling of America's alliances in the region. In its ultimate sense, a freeze would legitimize North Korea's nuclear establishment, as well as the results of its previous tests.” So if you Google Heather Nauert, Nikki Haley, Henry Kissinger on a freeze for freeze with North Korea, they spell out all the reasons why it's a bad idea. That is essentially where we now are, and without significant concessions from the North Koreans where we'll be after this summit.

Michael J. Green: There may be one or two other flashy headlines. The president may agree to a(n) end-of-war declaration – not a peace treaty, but a declaration that the war has ended – and other things that make for good headlines but ultimately have no impact on the nuclear program, and in many ways will be used by the Chinese, North Koreans, and Russians to create mischief and to argue, you know, we don't need to have missile defense or exercises among allies. So I would watch very closely for what happens with U.S. military exercises.

Michael J. Green: I strongly suspect that they will – the freeze that the president placed on them will continue and where we will be with North Korea is exactly where the Trump administration swore we would never end up, which is a freeze for freeze.

Michael J. Green: So I'll end there and look forward to Sue's comments and questions.

H. Andrew Schwartz: Thank you, Mike.

H. Andrew Schwartz: Dr. Sue Terry has also joined us here.

H. Andrew Schwartz: Sue?

Sue Mi Terry: Hi, thanks. So sometimes I feel like we're the Three Stooges doing the same schtick over and over again. And I wish I could say something different here just for today's purposes, but I don't have anything too different to add from what Victor and Mike said. I fundamentally agree with both of their assessments, although let me build on a couple of points that both of them have made.

Sue Mi Terry: So, yeah, I do think that, in terms of outcome, you know, it appears that there's going to be this very modest deal between the U.S. and North Korea that Victor and Mike talked about. And the most, realistically, the most that can be achieved is a freeze or even, you know, freeze of the North Korean WMD program. I agree with that. If the two sides would agree to make progress towards a shared, but still undefined goal of denuclearization, I know that folks have been talking about that

in this summit maybe they will come up with an agreed upon definition of that – definition of it, but I’m not confident of that.

Sue Mi Terry: And I think that basically the deal is a continued halt to testing by North Korea, promises to put a limit on existing stockpiles and then possibly this Yongbyon, you know, offer to close down the reactor at Yongbyon, which has been on its last legs for a long time and possibly verified by IAEA inspectors, but at that facility alone. And I think this is the most we can expect from the North Koreans.

Sue Mi Terry: And I think on our side, the corresponding offer is likely to include what we just talked about, continued restrictions on military exercises and easing of sanctions. Even though we say we’re not going to do that, I think basically what we are going to do is allow South Korea to seek U.N. exemptions to embark on its plans, you know, for economic projects with the North, like including construction of railways, roads, pipelines and so on and, of course, the reopening of Kaesong and Kumgang. I think this could be on the table, Kumgang tourism and Kaesong industrial complex.

Sue Mi Terry: And I think there’s also talk of opening a liaison office and granting a peace declaration. And this is one I what I want to sort of talk about, this peace declaration. I agree with Mike that I don’t think we’re going to have a declaration that the U.S. will pull out troops. But I do think a peace declaration is very much on the table. That’s different from a peace treaty.

Sue Mi Terry: But if the U.S. grants a peace declaration ending the Korean War – and now I’m hearing that that’s increasingly more possible – I think that is an outcome and I, frankly, I am kind of concerned about that because from, you know, myself and I know a lot of folks, the concern is that it will be a slippery road to a peace treaty. That would eventually undermine the rationale for maintaining U.S. troops in South Korea. So I agree with Mike that Trump might not say, hey, we’re going to pull out the U.S. troops, but if there is a peace declaration and if, you know – and then North Korea might insist that they’re not seeking to kick U.S. troops out of South Korea. But if the Korea War is formally over and there’s a peace declaration and South and North Korea are in a state of peace, what is the rationale for keeping U.S. troops in South Korea?

Sue Mi Terry: So, you know, it’s logical to assume that if the war is officially over, it could cause all sides, including South Korea and the American public, to eventually question the need for continuation of U.S. military presence in Korea. So I am concerned of that potential scenario because I’m hearing that that’s very much on the table.

Sue Mi Terry: And, you know, the danger, of course, of eventual American withdrawal is greater because Trump still is the president and he has repeatedly made it clear that he views the stationing of troops in countries like South Korea as a rip-off. And even though the U.S. and South Korea have just reached a deal on cost sharing, that deal, as Mike talked about, it’s only a one-year deal, which means that negotiations for this next year are going to begin soon. So there’s no – and there’s no guarantee that that will result into another agreement. So I can see, you know, Trump potentially talking to Kim Jong-un, and putting that on the table as something that they could look forward to in the future. So that’s my concern. And, you know, I agree with Victor, that whatever North Korea and U.S. ultimately agree to in Hanoi, what is certain is that President Trump is going to walk away from Hanoi claiming victory, even though North Korea is unlikely to deliver a timetable for disarmament or

declaration for all of its existing stockpiles, as Mike said. So I think that's where we are.

Sue Mi Terry: I was also dismayed to kind of see Trump lowering the bar, once again, when he declared recently that there was no time limit for denuclearization. He reversed from his initial demand that North Korea has to give up nuclear programs quickly. He said – I think he said that as long – that his focus is North Korea's testing of weapons. And as long as there's no testing, he's in no rush whatsoever. I mean, how – you know, such a statement obviously ends any sense of urgency regarding denuclearization. It really gives, you know, a license to Kim to basically slow this whole negotiation process way into the future. So I'm not overly optimistic that more can come out of this. And this is basically how I see next week playing out.

H. Andrew Schwartz: Sue, thank you very much. We're going to open it up for questions now. So our AT&T operator will come on and start that process.

Operator: Thank you.

(Gives queuing instructions.)

Operator: Our first question will come from the line of George Condon from the National Journal. Please go ahead.

Q: Great. Thanks so much.

Q: First off, let me assure you that we don't view you as "The Three Stooges." But if I can ask two questions. One is, how long can we these summits and these negotiations go on with such contrasting definitions or dueling definitions of denuclearization? Don't they have to settle that at some point? And secondly, there was a reference made to the president following his instincts instead of briefings. What is your biggest fear, the worst-case scenario of him doing that at this summit?

Victor Cha: Who do you want to take that, Andrew?

H. Andrew Schwartz: Victor, why don't – why don't you start, and then the rest of you guys can jump in if you need.

Victor Cha: So it's a great question. I mean, you know, these – you know, it goes back to my initial – I mean, these things – (laughs) – these summit meetings, if they continue to produce underwhelming results, they will lose all of their utility either as a – either as part of a negotiation, as a media event, or as a credible process towards denuclearization. And, yes, if it's going to take us four or five meetings just to get some – just to close the gap in terms of how we define denuclearization, then the process really isn't a process.

Victor Cha: So, again, I mean, that puts a lot of pressure on this meeting. There were some U.S. officials that said that essentially that we're going to be working towards a process of a common understanding on denuclearization. Those are not very comforting words, because we came out of Singapore and initially the administration was not only did we have a definition but, as the president said, the nuclear threat is over. So we're far from that. Certainly far from that.

Victor Cha: And then in terms of what's the worst possible outcome, you know, I think it is one in which, again the North Koreans essentially try to trade things from their past – in other words, old test sites or old missile sites they no longer need – and in return the president impulsively gives away things that are meaningful, either for the – meaningful for the alliance in particular. And I'm not saying that this is a scenario that is because the president is stupid, because he's not stupid. It's because there is underlying any kind of impulsive decision to trade alliance assets – underlying that is a deeply held belief by Donald Trump, as Sue said, that U.S. troop commitments abroad are a rip-off.

Victor Cha: And in fact, we're going to publish a piece at CSIS today or tomorrow that actually catalogues every statement that Donald Trump has made about the utility of U.S. troops abroad that goes back – that goes back 30 years. So this is a deeply-held belief on his part, that he doesn't understand why we have these troops in these different countries. And it could just – it could just cause him to impulsively make some decision because it will get him closer to a peace treaty, which would then get him closer to a Nobel Peace Prize, and in his own mind he's not giving up a lot. And so that, to me, would be a really bad outcome.

Sue Mi Terry: I would just add on the definition of denuclearization North Koreans have finally explained themselves what they meant, very specifically, recently, right? They talked – even in December they ran a whole commentary saying the North would not give up its nuclear weapons without the removal of the regional nuclear threat posed by U.S. forces, right? And they said when we refer to the Korean Peninsula, the term includes the area of South Korean territory where U.S. nuclear weapons and other forms of aggression are deployed. So they are very, very clear. So I do not see us in the next week being able to bridge this gap unless we can also promise that we're going to move troops, we're going to also remove all – you know, everything that North Korea is talking about. And so there is just no way we can bridge this gap or this difference that we have on the definition.

Sue Mi Terry: That's why I always link the worst possible as U.S. president putting alliance equities on the table for negotiation, that – and here I'm talking about U.S. troops. And I'm – you know, and I agree with what Mike said, that I don't think that declaration is coming. But I just feel like we are at least going to start that process by him going to at least a peace declaration and then sort of telling Kim Jong-un, hey, you know, this thing – we only have, like, a year; like, this could happen into the – in the future if, you know, you guys give up a little more. So I'm just worried about Trump giving that kind of promise to Kim Jong-un.

Michael J. Green: So it's Mike. I think the worst-case scenario is what Sue described. It's – and Victor described also. It's a presidential statement withdrawing troops from the Korean Peninsula. The South Koreans and Japanese are in a – in a state of very bad relations right now, but one thing they both strongly agree on is they do not want President Trump to pull out U.S. troops. And they have complete support for that from the Pentagon, the State Department, the NSC, other U.S. allies, and the U.S. Congress, which passed legislation limiting the president's ability to pull out.

Michael J. Green: I personally suspect that the president in June told Kim Jong-un privately he's going to pull U.S. troops out. And, you know, the fact that he publicly, in front of the North Korean leader, said I'd like to someday pull troops out suggests that what he said privately was even richer. So we may have already had the worst-case scenario in

terms of the signals that it sends to North Korea and, of course, China and Russia and others who do not wish the U.S. well. But I don't think he'll be able to pull it off.

Michael J. Green: In terms of the how long can these summits go, you know, he – a while. You know, the net effect of this will be that U.S. deterrence is degraded. U.S. three-, four-star Army generals have said very clearly on the record in Congress that a continued freeze on our military exercises will degrade readiness – big plus for North Korea, China, and Russia. It makes it much more difficult to enforce sanctions. Sanctions enforcement has definitely slowed as this dialogue has continued. And it raises fundamental questions about American willpower and commitment to things like human rights.

Michael J. Green: On the other hand, North Korea is not getting rich off of this deal yet. They've blunted sanctions. They've achieved some level of de facto recognition as a nuclear weapons state by entering into these talks and having them go the way they're going, but North Korea is not getting a huge cash reward.

Michael J. Green: So one other – second worst-case scenario, to finish, would be if the president rewards North Korea for some modest symbolic steps by relaxing U.N. Security Council sanctions in a way that allows the South Korean government to open up its joint economic projects, Mount Kumgang tourism site and the Kaesong Industrial Park, which together could put hundreds of millions of dollars into Kim Jong-un's pocket a year. And the South Korean government's clearly indicating that's the outcome they'd like to see, at least the Moon government. That would not be a good outcome because it would be no effective change and hundreds of millions of dollars into Kim Jong-un's pocket.

Michael J. Green: So, yeah, these can go on for a while. They degrade, but don't, you know, take away deterrence. And they don't richly reward North Korea unless you have something like a reopening of the – of the joint economic projects with the South, which is a lot of cash for Pyongyang at a time when they're not denuclearizing.

H. Andrew Schwartz: We're ready for the next question.

Operator: Thank you.

(Gives queuing instructions.)

Operator: Our next question will come from the line of Zhaoyin Feng from BBC World Service. Please go ahead.

Q: Hello. Thank you for doing this call. My question is about China. So given that China and the U.S. have been in a trade standoff in the past few months, which may have added new dynamics to the triangle of the U.S., North Korea, and China, I wonder in your opinion has China's role evolved since the first Trump-Kim summit? And what's China's influence on the second summit? Thank you.

H. Andrew Schwartz: Mike, do you want to lead off with that one?

Michael J. Green: Yeah, sure. So in some respects China is being helpful because – there's no doubt that Beijing has indicated to Pyongyang that if it resumes tests of nuclear weapons or missiles there would be consequences. And China could enforce sanctions more

strictly than it has. And so China's role has been helpful in the sense they've deterred North Korea from further testing.

Michael J. Green: However, and it's a big however, Beijing is milking enormous strategic benefits from the way this is all going. There are two big advantages to China that are unhelpful to the U.S. One is that the current approach has essentially caused the administration to hold off on secondary sanctions against Chinese firms. There are a lot of Chinese firms, according to the Security Council, outside experts, Treasury Department, that might well be guilty of violating U.N. Security Council sanctions and could have U.S. secondary sanctions placed on them based on new authorities that the administration introduced a year ago through the Treasury Department.

Michael J. Green: But that's not happening. And so the Chinese are not getting hit with secondary sanctions as long as, you know, there's no testing. And then the larger advantage they have is that – as Henry Kissinger pointed out in his testimony and as, you know, Heather Nauert and Nikki Haley pointed out a year ago, the freeze in exercises degrades U.S. readiness and weakens alliances. And Henry Kissinger was right. That is not in our interests, and it's enormously in China's interests. So that's, I think, the state of play with China right now.

Victor Cha: And I'll – it's Victor – let me just add that I agree with everything Mike said. Let me take a slightly different approach, which is to say that not only is China benefitting from the current diplomacy or the current contours of the diplomacy, they are free-riding tremendously on this security problem in Asia, in the sense that all the burden is now on the United States to negotiate, you know, some sort of deal. In the meantime, China has taken their foot off the pedal on sanctions. They have normalized their political relationship with North Korea, which went through a period of disarray and started to come back on track really after Trump announced his willingness to meet the North Korean leader. They have basically resumed regular commerce with North Korea. The Chinese are not paying anything for the prospect of denuclearization.

Victor Cha: In addition, if one of the reasons that North Korea pursues these weapons is because they're insecure, China is not willing to offer any sort of security guarantee or even nuclear umbrella for North Korea. So you know, they're not only benefitting, I think they're also free-riding off of this problem and putting all the weight onto the United States.

H. Andrew Schwartz: Great. Do we have any further questions?

Operator: At this time, I have no further questions in queue.

H. Andrew Schwartz: Callers, if we have no further questions we're going to end this call. And we'll put the transcript out shortly.

Operator: I apologize, we did have one person queue up. George Condon from the National Journal. Please go ahead.

Q: Yes. Sorry to jump in a second time. But can you – one of the things that you've talked about that I'd like to have some elaboration is the idea of a declaration of the end of the war. Trump has talked about he wants – endless wars are something a great nation shouldn't do. It seems very appealing to him.

Q: What are the dangers? That sounds to most people like, OK, the war has been over for a while, why shouldn't he do it? What are – what are the dangers of doing it?

H. Andrew Schwartz: Victor, do you want to –

Sue Mi Terry: So this is –

H. Andrew Schwartz: Oh, Sue, I'm sorry.

Sue Mi Terry: Go ahead, Andrew.

H. Andrew Schwartz: No. Go ahead, Sue. Sue, please jump in.

Sue Mi Terry: Well, first of all, I mean, so this – my whole point about – (inaudible) – from peace declaration to peace treaty which formally ends the Korean War is that, first, it's difficult to undo a declaration that the Korean War is over, even if there was no formal peace treaty among all the parties. And so as I previously mentioned, if the Korean War is formally over and both North and South are in a state of peace, again, I think that does undermine rationale for keeping our troops in South Korea.

Sue Mi Terry: I think it's not illogical to assume that it would cause all sides to question that, for the need for continuation of U.S. military presence. And again, you know, I wouldn't be as concerned if it was another kind of president, but we're talking about this president who has consistently and repeatedly talked about or questioned why we need to have troops in countries like South Korea – in South Korea, Japan and, you know – you know, even he's the president who even talked about pulling troops out of NATO. So that is an actual concern.

Sue Mi Terry: And when you look at this special burdens agreement with South Korea, it took many rounds of negotiations to just come up with this one-year deal. It's now – it's now a five-year deal, so it's quite fragile. So I don't – I don't see that it will take much for President Trump to, you know, get there in terms of trying to withdraw U.S. forces.

Sue Mi Terry: Now, if we get to that, what is the real – I mean, I don't know, maybe Victor and Mike has a perspective on this. But, you know, from my perspective, that is a huge deal if we ever get to removing U.S. troops from South Korea, and then we can talk about, you know, the consequence of that. But that's my concern, that a peace declaration itself, it's just a political statement, but it will lead to a peace treaty.

Victor Cha: This is Victor. So I think I'm pretty confident in saying this. I think it's pretty fair to – I think it's fair to say for the record that Mike Green, Sue Terry, Victor Cha are not against the idea of peace, we all believe in peace. However, you know, the real question is, what do we mean by peace? Like, when we talk about a peace declaration or a peace treaty on the Korean Peninsula, is it really a peace if North Korea keeps, you know, forwarding nuclear weapons and short-range, medium-range and intermediate-range ballistic missiles? You know, that's not peace. That is a fake peace.

Victor Cha: And so, you know, it is intuitively appealing to talk about peace on the Korean Peninsula. And the likelihood of a conventional war starting on the peninsula is not very high as long as deterrence holds. But, you know, to declare peace early is like

putting the cart before the horse. The situation on the ground has to reflect peace before you can declare it. You can't just politically declare peace while the situation on the ground has not changed. That is actually a dangerous – that's a dangerous situation, that's a dangerous sort of peace.

Victor Cha: The other thing is that, you know, if peace means that the North Koreans no longer will use sort of long-range ballistic missile test bans, but at the same time the United States does nothing with regard to short or medium-range missiles, then we effectively have a peace where we're decoupling our security commitments from our allies which are under threat, from continued threat from the extant missile capabilities. So that's not really peace either, right?

Victor Cha: And so, I – you know, I know it sounds kind of wonky and experty, but the question is really, you know, does a declaration of peace really reflect the situation on the ground? Is it a manifestation of actual changes on the ground or is it – is it just a political statement that raises false expectations and creates dangerous illusions that could actually undermine our security?

Michael J. Green: So I would just quickly add two points. First, for the president politically, if he announces with Kim Jong-un or signs a declaration ending the Korean War, that is a headline that is hard to nuance. I mean, you can picture the newspapers: "Trump and Kim declare end of Korean War." And then the part that says, "yeah, but" – that Victor and Sue just described – is going to get buried by the lede. And so he'll play it, you know, for a summit. They will have very little concrete deliverables. That will be a headline that, for sympathetic audiences, the president and the White House will play for sure.

Michael J. Green: In terms of the impact, it is not legally binding – a declaration – but it could be used by opponents of exercises, by opponents of U.S. bases, by critics of missile defense. All the things that are necessary to deter against a now more dangerous North Korea would be at risk, not legally but just in terms of the political atmospherics.

Michael J. Green: I take some comfort, though, from the – what appears to be the ability of Japan and Korea and the Congress and the Pentagon to kind of ignore it, to be honest. The Japanese government was privately quite opposed to a peace declaration in Singapore. They've given up on that. Where the U.S. Congress, the Japanese and Korean governments, and the president's own national security team are focused is protecting U.S. Forces Korea, and I think they've done a good job blocking the president in on that front.

Michael J. Green: He may get his peace declaration. It will have the negative effects you've heard. But I think, frankly, our allies and a lot of our top officials triaged going into the summit and have protected the most immediate and important thing, which is our military presence, which the president, you know, as I said, declared in front of Kim Jong-un he'd like to end.

Michael J. Green: So, given the choice, I'd take a peace declaration over a withdrawal of U.S. forces. But, as Sue and Victor pointed out, they could be connected down the road. So it's not a good thing but it's not as bad as it could have been.

H. Andrew Schwartz: Great. We've got a couple more questions, I believe.

Operator: Yes, thank you. Our next question then will come from Kyle (sic; Kylie) Atwood from CNN. Please go ahead.

Q: Hi. Thank you, guys, for doing this.

Q: I have two quick questions. One is on sort of the hardware side of the nuclear program and the other is on the brain trust side of it. So on the hardware side, we've, you know, heard Pompeo and folks in the administration talk about North Koreans agreeing to allow inspectors into Yongbyon – excuse my pronunciation – and also Punggye-ri, but we haven't – we haven't, you know, actually seen any inspectors going into either site. So I'm wondering if you guys have heard anything about progress on that front or if there are other testing sites or research centers we should be paying attention to that might be under discussion as well. And then on, you know, the scientists who are doing this research and making this nuclear program possible in North Korea, do you get a sense that there will be any conversation as to who those folks are, and I've heard that they might ask for a list of those scientists. So just trying to see if you guys have heard any of that.

Q: Thank you.

Michael J. Green: It's Mike. If I can start, I'd just – a declaration would have to include facilities, weapons, missiles, fabrication plants, scientists, budgets, programs. My sense is the administration has just dropped that, and what they're hoping to achieve is a roadmap – a very simple list of steps. We did this in the Bush administration in June 2004 in the Six-Party Talks. We put forward a proposed roadmap for steps each side would take. It was endorsed by our allies but the North Koreans walked out of the talks. They've never given us that.

Michael J. Green: But that's what they're trying to get is some kind of piece of paper that would – that would list the broad steps each side would take, and as part of that, you know, a declaration would be necessary. I'm doubtful they'll actually get even a roadmap out of the North Koreans, given that the president wants to do the negotiating himself and the North Koreans are very likely to not give anything to the negotiators going in. But in that context, the scientists and others would come up. I am very doubtful that they'll get that in this summit.

Michael J. Green: Victor and Sue can talk more about the visits to the closed test sites. It's largely symbolic. It's a small step. It is not crucial to North Korea's nuclear program anymore. So it's largely a kind of event for CNN to show something concrete, with all respect to CNN. (Laughter.) They're looking for – they're looking for visuals to go with the headline. And Victor and Sue can say more about it, but it's not a deeply significant step towards denuclearization.

Victor Cha: This is Victor. So if, you know, they come out at Hanoi next week and they say we're going to get inspectors back – we're going to get inspectors into Yongbyon, the five-megawatt reactor, that – you know, so that's nothing, right, because we've done that at least twice before. If they say inspectors into the Punggye-ri, the nuclear test site, or Sohae, the satellite launch facility, that is also not a big deal because they no longer use those facilities. They don't need them. They decommissioned both of them last summer.

Victor Cha: However, if they do things like say we're going to let inspectors into the centrifuge facility in Yongbyon, you know, that's different because they've never done that before. Or if they – or if they, you know, allow access full scope to all of Yongbyon, which is nine square miles and four – you know, I don't know what it is, 200-something buildings, you know, that would be new. So essentially what we're looking for is something new. If there's something truly new there, then I think – you know, it's not like we're – everybody is against the negotiation. All of us have participated in negotiation, and we will know what is new versus what is not new. And if there's something new there, then I think most people would say, OK, let's build on that; let's see what else – what else can be done.

Victor Cha: Having said that, you know, I agree, I mean, from a U.S. perspective we would like to take a holistic approach where we get a declaration, and based on that declaration we can then map out a timeline and negotiation for, you know, location, sealing, monitoring, disablement, dismantlement and removal. But the North Koreans are not going to do that. That was where the agreement 10 years fell apart because we got to the point where they had to do the declaration and they were not willing to do it. And so what you end up with is – are these, you know – you end up with these – with these individual sites that they, you know, dole out piece by piece. And if that's all we have to work with, then the metric becomes, OK, is there anything new in what they're giving up, new enough so that we can say this is actually a step forward.

Sue Mi Terry: I mean, but that's the deal. What the North Koreans are offering are Yongbyon reactor, five-megawatt reactor. The deal really is for three sites: Punggye-ri; Sohae, which is Pongdong-ri; and Yongbyon. And there could be a roadmap, but guess what? The roadmap declaration is going to be on these three facilities. And then they're going to – because what the North Koreans are really good at is kind of reselling the stuff that they sold before. So three together for folks who don't – you know, for just a normal person out there, it sounds pretty good. It sounds like, wow, that's Punggye-ri, Pongdong-ri, Yongbyon – you know, again, the CNN effect. And I do – I truly think this is the deal the North Koreans are prepared to deal with, and I'm afraid that our – the Trump administration is – this is – we are ready to accept this.

Victor Cha: Yeah. And if that's the case, then the CNN headline should be: "A roadmap to nowhere." (Laughter.)

Q: Thank you.

H. Andrew Schwartz: Hey, Kylie, did we mention about how much respect we have for CNN? (Laughter.)

Victor Cha: No, but can I just say one other thing? It's that you should – the other thing is you should – if you're asking about other facilities, you should look at our Beyond Parallel website because we have been producing reports on 20 undeclared North Korean missile bases that are not part of the negotiations. And of course the U.S. government knows about these facilities, but the general public probably does not. And those are the sorts of things that would be new that the North Koreans are not going to give up.

Q: That's very helpful. Thank you.

Victor Cha: Yeah. Yeah.

Operator: Thank you.

H. Andrew Schwartz: Great. I think we have time for a few more questions.

Operator: Thank you. Our next question, then, will come from the line of Dao Han (ph) from Radio Free Asia. Please go ahead.

Q: Hi. My question is about the relationship between the two leaders. So President Trump has been posting publicly about his fantastic chemistry with Kim Jong-un, and it seems – it seems up until this point that both of the leaders have been careful not to degrade each other directly. And as you have mentioned previously, for the Singapore summit we have seen the president making impulsive decision to stop the joint military exercise. So for this upcoming summit in Vietnam from the negotiation perspective, would you say that this positive chemistry can play any role in producing any unexpected decision or real result? Or do you think it's just a superficial display by the leaders?

Victor Cha: So this is Victor. So, you know, clearly it's not – it's better that they speak nicely of each other in this diplomatic process that we're in than the names they were calling each other back in 2017 – you know, rocket man and dotard, and all these other things. Clearly, you know, the personal relationship between the leaders is important in sort of setting an overall tenor to the negotiations.

Victor Cha: But having said that, I mean, when that really works is when you have, you know, two sides that are tough – you know, negotiating very hard, and trying to align their positions, but can't fully align them. And then this personal chemistry between the leaders helps to push the ball over the edge because both sides are willing to give a little. But I would argue that the gap between the U.S. and the North Korean positions is so wide between the two sides. I mean, we can't even agree on what denuclearization is, apparently now, according to our administration officials.

Victor Cha: The gap is so wide that simply having a good relationship is not going to do it. I mean, simply, you know, Trump saying: Look, I'll build a million casinos in North Korea, and Kim saying, OK, I'll give up my nuclear weapons because I trust you – you know, I – you know, I'm – in my expert opinion – (laughs) – I don't think that that's going to happen. So, yeah, no. I think it's good. You know, it's good that the tone has changed between the two leaders. They both seem to go out of their way not to say bad things about each other – a far cry from where we were in 2017.

Victor Cha: You will remember Kim Jong-un's famous library speech. You know, it was quite – it was grave times. So that is certainly positive. But you can't rely on that to somehow resolve what are – you know, what look to be irresolvable positions.

Operator: Thank you. We have a question from the line of Chris Kimball (sp) from KCIF. Please go ahead.

Q: Hi. Thank you. Victor, you used the word "timeline." And I was wondering, is there anything in the sense of, you know, a timeline in the – I remember, you know, it was months ago, maybe a year ago, somebody like Pompeo talked about wanting to achieve certain things during the first term of this administration. Is there any

sense of a timeline now? And how could that play out in these negotiations? And then additionally, is this something that we could look at happening every eight months or so? There could be a third one, you know, before the end of the year and another one next year?

Victor Cha: Well, so in terms of the – as Mike said earlier – you know, it sounds like this has completely dropped off of the – off the map of the United States. You know, first it was a declaration. That's kind of dropped off. Now there was a timeline. That's kind of – that's kind of dropped off. I mean, it's actually inconceivable to think about what a credible timeline would be, because, you know, as you said, the president wants a timeline that essentially this is done with his first two years in office – his last two years in office. And then you know, experts say the program is so vastly larger than what it was in 1994 that it would take at least a decade to truly get denuclearization, even with North Korean complying – you know, actively complying.

Victor Cha: So the notion – between those two, if the North Koreans were to come out of Hanoi and say, yeah, yeah, we'll do this in two years, I mean, that wouldn't even sound credible now given what the experts say on this. So I think, you know, that's kind of dropped off. And, yes, I mean, I think that there could be more of these meetings that, again, capture big headlines, done in exotic places. But, you know, you have to ask yourself, like, do these things really advance the ball – especially if next week's one doesn't really make progress. Do these things really advance the ball any further? And then the subsequent question is, Trump may talk about them as great, and terrific, and big winners. But does he himself on the inside feel like these things aren't getting him anything anymore, and he's attaching himself to a losing issue? And then how – and then how does he react to that?

Q: What do you think on the question –

Sue Mi Terry: I would think – well –

Michael J. Green: It's Mike. How he reacts, frankly, is how he's reacting to the director of national intelligence testifying to what we all know, which is the North Koreans are continuing to build nuclear weapons and missile capability. And, you know, multiple news reports say the president's pissed and he's going to possibly fire him for that. My sense is that the president thinks this process of summitry works because it's all about the chemistry he has with Kim Jong-un, and that in itself – his personal relationship – is the guarantee we need that there's no threat, rather than concrete, verifiable steps towards denuclearization.

Michael J. Green: It's a bit evocative of the Trump relationship as a businessman with other casino owners. His best friends were not his business partners. There are none who consider themselves close friends to the president. His closest friends are people like Steve Wynn of Wynn Resorts, or Adelson, the other casino owners who were his competitors. Those are the guys who he pals around with, even today. And I think he appears to look at the world in the same way he looked at it when he was in business, which is that the big – the other big competitors in the world, those are the guys he can relate to and build a personal bond with, and count on that. And his allies are, you know, sort of in the mold of his business partners. They get pushed around, and they're constantly being told they're ripping him off.

Michael J. Green: So I think this is quite sustainable for him, as long as he can get a different variation of the headline out of each meeting. That doesn't mean it's good for the process of denuclearization or peace and stability, but it's sustainable politically.

Q: Thank you.

Operator: Thank you. We have a question from the line of Conrad Chaffee from Tokyo Newspaper. Please go ahead.

Q: Hello. Thank you for doing this call. The three of you seem to be bracing for a, let's say, less-than-ideal outcome to this summit. Let's look at the other side. Do you think that – do any of you think that there's still a realistic chance of success to the negotiations, which I would define as North Korea actually agreeing to get rid of all its nuclear weapons, and maybe even starting that process sometimes in Trump's first term?

Michael J. Green: Zero-point-five percent – (laughter) – and I'm being generous. There is absolutely nothing, absolutely nothing in the statements/actions of the North Koreans that indicate they have any goal other than establishing their status as a nuclear weapons state with a large nuclear weapons arsenal. People talk about the byungjin policy, where Kim Jong-un said he wants to emphasize the economy more, but that's based on maintaining a large nuclear arsenal. Kim Jong-un has said he'd be prepared to give up his nuclear production of uranium and plutonium; there's no indication of verification or anything like that, but he never has talked about nuclear weapons. There is absolutely zero evidence to suggest that Kim Jong-un and the North Korean regime have any intent other than that of his father and grandfather, which is to become a nuclear weapons state with a substantial arsenal. People can try to interpret things to squeeze that water out of the rock, but I just don't think you can. I don't see it. I'm sure Victor and Sue agree.

Sue Mi Terry: I think – yeah, go ahead, Victor.

Victor Cha: Yeah, I mean, just – so just to – yeah, just to – you know, I have – so I think all of us want this to succeed, right? And so I've tried to think if there's any way, like, what would be the argument that Kim would make to himself? You know, as an insecure dictator, what would be the argument that he would make to himself about taking this new path? And you know, the best thing that I could come up with is, you know, this acknowledgement that this program that they developed going back to – and it goes back to the 1960s – this program that they have developed going back to the 1960s is not his. This was a program that was developed by his father and his grandfather, and has driven the country into the ground and almost to the brink of war with the United States in 2017; and that the other path forward, if he's going to rule for 50 years, is to become a member of the international community and to make peace with the United States, blah blah blah, so on and so forth. That would be the only argument that I could think of that he would make that would be compelling enough as an insecure dictator, right – we have to accept he's an insecure – as the – as the way out.

Victor Cha: Now, if you ask the strongest proponents in South Korea of the engagement policy whether they are optimistic that that might be what is driving him or that there is a real path forward in terms of an enlightened leader that has changed his mind, even the strongest proponents cannot say to you clear cut yes, I have evidence of that; or

yes, I believe that's the case based at least on circumstantial evidence, on data, or – they cannot – they cannot tell you that. They cannot admit that. All they can say is that we need to be confident – I mean, we need to be optimistic that that's the case. And then if you ask them why they need to be optimistic when there is no evidence to that – to that effect, the response is: Well, we have no choice. Right? We have no choice but to be optimistic. Which really speaks not to optimism, but it speaks to desperation, right?

Victor Cha: And so, you know, I – you know, again, I mean, I try to think of a way that this could be seen as a path forward. But even the most vigorous proponents of the policy in South Korea, you know, cannot give you a clear-cut answer that that is in fact the case.

H. Andrew Schwartz: Great. I think we're about out of time. Thanks to everybody for joining us for today's call. We will put out a transcript shortly. Thanks again. And don't forget to tune in to Impossible State, our podcast. And don't forget to look for more content from CSIS on our website and our Beyond Parallel microsite. Thanks very much.

(END)