Implications of the U.S.-North Korea Summit

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CSIS Headquarters, Washington, D.C.

INTRODUCTION
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Transcript By
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Lisa Collins: Good afternoon. Thank you all for coming to our event, “Implications of the U.S.-North Korea Summit.”

Lisa Collins: We are trying something new today. We’re giving a live podcast – we’re doing a live podcast recording with our distinguished panel here. So you all will be part of making history at CSIS. I will leave it to our chief communications officer, Andrew Schwartz, and the host of the podcast, to explain a little bit more shortly.

Lisa Collins: But before we begin, I would like to say a few words about safety at CSIS. We feel very secure in our building, but we have a duty to prepare for any potential incidents. In the case of an emergency, please exit the building using the emergency exits and gather in front of the National Geographic Museum on M Street. I will serve as your safety responsible officer. Please follow my instructions, should the need arise. Thank you very much.

Lisa Collins: We’ll just move this podium, and off to you, Andrew.

Andrew Schwartz: Welcome to everybody. Thanks for being here at CSIS. We are doing something, as Lisa said, a little bit different today. We’re taping live our podcast, “The Impossible State.” Usually Victor and Sue and me and Mike Green and others are taping “The Impossible State.” Sometimes we have guests, like Ambassador Vershbow or the great Washington Post reporter, Dave Nakamura, my good friend who I desperately want to see him cover sports again one day, because I love reading him when he covers sports.

Andrew Schwartz: You know, we tape this down in our studio downstairs. But now, by the magic of having our producer, Yumi Araki, here – that’s Yumi over there; for those of you who can’t see her on the podcast, she’s sitting off to your left – we’re able to do the podcast live in front of you.

Andrew Schwartz: And we’re really lucky today to have with us Ambassador Sandy Vershbow, who’s a distinguished fellow at the Scowcroft Center for Strategy and Security at the Atlantic Council. He’s, of course, former – among many other things, he was former U.S. ambassador to the Republic of Korea.

Andrew Schwartz: We have Dr. Sue Mi Terry, senior fellow at CSIS Korea Chair. She’s a former senior analyst at the CIA, former National Security Council staffer.

Andrew Schwartz: As I mentioned before, Mr. Dave Nakamura is a White House correspondent for The Washington Post; and, of course, Dr. Victor Cha, who’s our senior adviser and Korea Chair here at CSIS.

Andrew Schwartz: Victor, let’s start with the news. We had a little bit of news this week. It started off Tuesday night. I got a call from Victor late in the afternoon Tuesday. He was – Victor was rushing around. I was rushing around. And there was some news that we had some images that showed a bit of activity in North Korea. What was that?
Victor Cha: Yeah. So we found that there were images, commercial satellite images, of the Sohae satellite launch facility –

Andrew Schwartz: Right.

Victor Cha: – where there was activity there, particularly in three areas of the launch facility that was significant and notable activity, given that the facility had been pretty much dormant after some initial disassembly following the Singapore summit.

Victor Cha: So the initial reaction, I think, among not just us but other analysts who looked at this was that these were deliberate efforts by North Korea in response to the inconclusive results of the Hanoi summit; to send a message, really, to President Trump and the world.

Andrew Schwartz: This morning, though, we got – this morning – today is Thursday morning – we got a new imagery report. And what did that show? And why is this site so important?

Victor Cha: Yeah. So we had new imagery. I’m going to put it up on the screen here. So we had new imagery from yesterday.

Andrew Schwartz: For those of you listening to the podcast, you can’t see it in front of you because you’re listening, but you can tune in. You can look at Beyond Parallel, our website, or CSIS.org. It’s both there.

Victor Cha: Yeah. So this is –

Andrew Schwartz: In both places.

Victor Cha: In both places, yeah. So this is imagery from March 6th of the Sohae satellite launch facility that shows essentially that they have – since the last images on March 2nd, they have essentially continued activity at both the vertical-engine test stand, the rail-transport infrastructure, and some of the oxidizing – roofs of the oxidizing buildings.

Victor Cha: To make it very simple, they essentially reassembled all the things they disassembled after Singapore. And, of course, we’ll watch the site for more activity. But we refer to it as their snapback. They basically snapped back from the initial actions they took after Singapore in terms of disassembly of the Sohae satellite launch facility.

Victor Cha: For those who aren’t familiar with this, this is not a facility – it is not a ballistic-missile facility. It’s a facility from which they launch civilian space-launch vehicles to put satellites into orbit. It came most in the news, I think, in 2012 when they launched a rocket directly after concluding negotiations with the Obama administration in something called the Leap Day deal that eventually fell through. But it’s still significant from a strategic perspective because, under U.N. Security Council Resolution 2087, North Korea is not permitted to launch satellites because they are using ballistic-missile technology to put those payload vehicles into orbit. So that makes this a significant site for us to watch in terms of the missile threat.
Andrew Schwartz: So Ambassador Vershbow, could you tell us – give us your reaction. Why is this so significant? What does this mean for the Trump administration and their negotiations with the North Koreans?

Alexander Vershbow: Well, at this point we’re not sure whether this is a significant event or just kind of the North Koreans letting off a little steam after the disappointments at the Hanoi summit. It does look like it happened after the summit so, you know, it’s not an accident. But, on the other hand, we don’t yet have any signals from the North that they’re breaking off talks. They actually accentuated the positive at the end of the summit meeting. You know, they were quite surprised that the president walked away from the table. So I think it’s too early to draw any conclusions about whether this spells the end of negotiations or this is just kind of some maneuvering that doesn’t foreclose the possibility that talks will resume in the next few weeks.

Andrew Schwartz: Sue, what’s your reaction to this? And then I want to get to Dave because Dave was actually traveling with President Trump and in Hanoi for the summit.

Sue Mi Terry: I think – for now, I think Ambassador is absolutely right. I don’t think it’s necessarily North Korea’s return to provocations. I don’t think this should be taken as a sign that they’re going to return to missile testing or nuclear testing. I think right now it’s a signal they are trying to send to show their resolve. But it’s not only a signal they are trying to send to President Trump as a pressure tactic.

Sue Mi Terry: I think it’s a signal they are also trying to send to President Moon Jae-in. This is something that they’ve agreed to with South Koreans also at the Pyongyang declaration. So that’s getting South Korea to sort of say, hey, you need to do either a(n) intermediary role and fix this or trying to press the South Koreans to sort of get off and for South Koreans to improve the inter-Korea relations and move forward on inter-Korea projects like reopening Kaesong and what not. So I think North Koreans are also trying to pressure the South Koreans and it’ll be interesting to see what South Korea’s response is going to be because it’s going to put President Moon Jae-in in a very difficult situation.

Andrew Schwartz: Dave, you were – many of the people don’t know this but Dave is the first U.S. journalist to actually ask Kim Jong-un a question. (Laughter.)

Alexander Vershbow: And get an answer.

David Nakamura: And get an answer, and return to tell about it.

Andrew Schwartz: So OK. How tall is he?

David Nakamura: He was sitting down two out of the three times that I saw him –

Andrew Schwartz: Yeah.

David Nakamura: – and the third time he was obscured by Trump a little bit because he was across the pool at the Metropole Hotel walking in a sort of staged photo op – the leaders’ walk – and which they met Pompeo. It’s a little hard to tell. I know –

Andrew Schwartz: He seemed to have a healthy glow, though, on TV. He looked like he had had, you know, a facial. You know, he was ready for the summit.
David Nakamura: When you – when you have that distinct of a look – maybe him and Trump. I mean, they look like they do in person, right.

Andrew Schwartz: Yeah. Yeah.

David Nakamura: I mean, you know, a little bit cartoon character like and that you see – you know, so much on TV or movies are caricatures. And so when you're in the room the first time, you know, there was a lot of anticipation for us in the press pool, 13 White House reporters and then some North Korea state media all dressed in the same outfit with their lapel pins featuring the dear leader and the great leader. They all came in. They didn't shout any questions, by the way, the North Korea press.

Andrew Schwartz: No, I guess not. Yeah.

David Nakamura: When we were let in, you know, it's a – it's a mad – it's a mad scramble for positioning, and trying to get a CNI (ph) to move over I almost knocked over a North Korean mounted video camera. I didn't want to do that, so I moved over a little bit. But when you – then you sort of see the leaders right there. They're just already in the space and it's a little bit jarring, and then you're trying to figure out, like, how do I get a question in. When is my moment? I waited until, you know, Trump took a question and when he stopped talking I figured that was the moment.

Andrew Schwartz: And so what – and what did you ask him?

David Nakamura: I asked him – I wrote a story about this. Like, what do you ask a dictator? You know.

Andrew Schwartz: Right.

David Nakamura: What's your moment? You know, is it the human rights? Do you get right to it? You know, a lot of the questions we shout. Sometimes you have to think about public perception, especially if you don't think you're going to get an answer. What are you spending your time asking? We went through all of that. You know, there was a sense that, you know, for Trump, you know, he had gotten angry the day before about some Michael Cohen questions yelled at the dinner, or before the dinner.

Andrew Schwartz: Right. He actually kicked some people out.

Sue Mi Terry: Kicked everybody out, yeah.

David Nakamura: Some reporters out. So we discussed Trump. He was going to have a news conference and we figured he could take some offbeat questions there – off-topic questions. So we would ask him about the state of the summit. I figured that would be smart for Kim, too. You know, so I, basically, said, you know, Chairman Kim, do you – are you confident you're going to get a deal, and he looked at me and, as I wrote in my sort of piece, I gave a little thumbs up, not to establish any kind of like camaraderie but to say that, you know, do you feel good – do you feel good about a deal. There's a language barrier. And then he – I noticed in the replay of the video that Trump's interpreter leans over across
the table and interpreted the question into Korean and I knew I had a – we had a shot at an answer, and Kim, you know, to his credit, gave us an answer.

Andrew Schwartz: And what’s it like being in that situation, covering a historic summit – pretty surreal summit, as you – as you alluded to? And what was the president’s mood like during –

David Nakamura: You know –

Andrew Schwartz: A lot of people paid a lot of attention to that because, you know, the big elephant in the room was Michael Cohen’s –

David Nakamura: Yes. Right.

Andrew Schwartz: – hearing was going on at the same time. Here in the United States we saw split screens of, you know, President Trump and Kim Jong-un on one side of the screen and Michael Cohen testifying on Capitol Hill on the other side of the screen.

David Nakamura: Right. The president likes the – he likes deals but he likes the show, too.

Andrew Schwartz: Yeah.

David Nakamura: The big moment, the big reveal, and he had built up a lot of anticipation for the Singapore Summit and I think he felt that went well and he was able to tout – it was a small four-paragraph agreement he was able to show and the big signature – that moment he liked, and we were on – you know, basically, on an island in Southeast Asia and he had this sort of command of the media there and, really, the whole world. So he was trying to repeat that. There was, clearly, pressure and the White House knew and the president knew to get a better – more of a deal – I mean, those specifics, and that’s where we saw a breakdown. But in terms of the atmosphere, I think the White House was certainly concerned about how the president would react in real time to Michael Cohen and we saw it play out, basically, as you would suspect. The president had a bilateral meeting with the Vietnamese, there were a couple of different meetings there, and as soon as he got back to the hotel for some downtime before the sort of meet-and-greet with Kim Jong-un. The day before the main day of the summit, the president started tweeting and he tweeted about, you know, “Da Nang” Dick Blumenthal, you know, as he says degradingly about the senator, and then he also started tweeting about Michael Cohen. And so you could see where his attention was.

David Nakamura: We don’t know how late the president stayed up the night before. There were some reports that he may have been, you know, communicating with people back in Washington during the hearing, so we don’t know how well-rested or focused he was really on, you know, the big day which, you know, was that Thursday.

Andrew Schwartz: Safe to say he was in executive time.

David Nakamura: He was in – lots of executive time always built in.

Sue Mi Terry: Didn’t President Trump tweet, though, something about the timing. He said it was bad timing to report it together.
David Nakamura: Yes, yeah.

Sue Mi Terry: And by the way, maybe that contributed to the walk –

David Nakamura: He did that – he did that after we got back, yeah.

Sue Mi Terry: He himself hinted that there was –

David Nakamura: A little revisionist history, though, I think.

Alexander Vershbow: Maybe he should thank Michael Cohen in that case because walking was the right thing to do.

Victor Cha: Right. He did the right thing. (Laughter.)

David Nakamura: Maybe it was, but it seemed a little revisionist by the president to say – to blame – he’s trying to put a lot of blame on Democrats right now. I wrote a story today talking about both on immigration and on trade, the president’s gotten some rough news this week about the numbers at the border and the trade deficit growing.

Andrew Schwartz: Trade deficit.

David Nakamura: But also on North Korea that he’s tried to sort of hoist some of the – foist some of the blame onto Democrats in every case.

Andrew Schwartz: So before we continue, you all have notecards on your seats. And the way we’re going to take some questions during the podcast from the audience is if you could write down your questions, they’ll be collected by our staff and we’ll get to a few of them as we go along. I know some of you are going to want to have questions.

Andrew Schwartz: Victor, let me ask you this. President Trump still seems to expect that his personal relationship with Kim is going to yield results in these negotiations, despite what happened at Hanoi. Is that a smart strategy or should he empower his people – Pompeo, Steve Biegun? What should he do now?

Victor Cha: Well, I, you know, I don’t know if it’s a smart strategy, but it’s his strategy.

Andrew Schwartz: Yeah.

Victor Cha: And he’s been very consistent in defending the North Korean leader’s intentions, you know, since Singapore. I thought that his response to the reports about Sohae yesterday were uncharacteristically sober, right? He said that, you know, he hopes it’s not true, you know, he doesn’t think it’s true, but we’ll see. It was very – it was very sober. It wasn’t sort of a mad tweet.

Andrew Schwartz: He said he would be disappointed.

Victor Cha: He would be disappointed. And when we had – we had an imagery report about some of the operational missile bases that were – that were undisclosed by North Korea, he immediately tweeted angrily that that’s just all fake news. This time, he was like, you know, he didn’t deny that this could be happening.
Andrew Schwartz: Yeah. So to be clear, when we first – when we reported a couple of months ago that there were up to 20 operational missile sites that were undeclared, David Sanger of The New York Times reported it and President Trump tweeted that David Sanger’s article was fake news. He did not say CSIS’s images were fake news, so just to clarify.

Andrew Schwartz: But in this case, he didn’t dispute either the reporting – Andrea Mitchell of NBC reported it first – and he didn’t – he didn’t dispute, of course, our research here at CSIS.

Victor Cha: Yeah. No, I don’t – I think – and so the pictures themselves don’t lie, except if you’re in North Korea where they airbrush – they airbrush stuff out.

Victor Cha: So I think, in terms of where we go from here, yes, I mean, you know, one option is to empower the working-level people to try to take what was left from Hanoi and either chop it up into smaller pieces, right, whether it’s their demand for the lifting of five U.N. Security Council resolutions, sanctions from 2016, 2017, or whether it’s our demand from Yongbyon plus, right, you can chop them up into smaller pieces or you can try to get the bigger deal. In either case, that really just takes us back to the sort of negotiations that we have been in for the past 25 years, so that is not a particularly good outcome.

Victor Cha: The other possibility – and I don’t discount this at all – is that things could get worse before they get better. And that is because I think one of the lessons I think that both sides took away from the summit is that pressure works. Right? From our perspective, the fact that the North Koreans fingered these five U.N. Security Council resolutions is clearly showing that they see that pressure as troublesome. Right? And then you had Ambassador Bolton out there saying, hey, we could increase pressure.

Victor Cha: And then you see, in terms of our imagery, that the North Korean response is to go back to some of these sites that they know bother us, whether it’s the nuclear test site or the Sohae satellites – launch site and say, look, we’re going to start doing some stuff here, too. So I feel like that’s certainly one of the lessons that they both walked away from this meeting with. And so you know, I worry a little bit that this could get worse before it gets better, because both sides want to try to figure out how to get the other side back to the table. And they may say pressure is the way to do that.

Andrew Schwartz: Sue, what do you think?

Sue Mi Terry: So I think one takeaway from this summit is that North Koreans care about sanctions relief. We were ready to give peace declaration. We were ready to open a liaison office, right? But it fell apart over sanctions. So I think sanctions advocate has a point here, that they care about sanctions relief. So the concern is – but that’s not where we are, right? Exactly what Victor said. I don’t think there’s any kind of – we’re not – in the U.S. government, there’s no one that supports sanctions relief at this point. So if that’s what they care about, and they’re not – they’re not going to be happy with just walking away with the liaison office or a peace declaration, what’s the give? How do we bridge this gap? I think that’s going to be a problem. But anyway, that – I do think that’s one main takeaway, was that they at least saw what each other wanted. And clearly, for North Koreans, sanctions relief is a top priority.
Andrew Schwartz:  
Ambassador?

Alexander Vershbow:  Yeah, I certainly agree with that. We did learn that the sanctions are really hurting. The North Korean economic is in really bad shape. And at the same time, you know, I don't think we've been consistent in applying pressure. Particularly after Singapore, the president declared the threat is gone. And then he was saying in the leadup to Hanoi that I'm in no hurry. He kind of gave the impression, both to the North Koreans and to China and others – who we need to enforce those sanctions even more harshly – that they could let the pressure off. So I hope some lessons are learned about the need to be a bit more consistent and send a consistent message to the North.

Alexander Vershbow:  I also think that on the personal diplomacy, I mean, I think the two leaders have learned that love does not conquer all. (Laughter.) And that you do have to focus on the details. You do need to have a real process. So while there's the risk that we get back into the same kind of whack-a-mole unsatisfactory results that we achieved under previous administration, I think it's unavoidable to back and try to hammer out a much more coherent, comprehensive deal, one that I think shows the North Koreans that they get the sanctions relief that they want, but they're going to have to do more. They have to pay for it through much more serious steps on denuclearization.

Alexander Vershbow:  Just closing Yongbyon, which doesn't even capture the covert or clandestine production facilities, and not touching the missiles, the warheads the things that actually threaten the South and threaten us is not going to be enough.

Andrew Schwartz:  Dave, what are your sources telling you in the aftermath of this? Is there still – is it all love? You know, what's going on?

David Nakamura:  You know, what's interesting is before the summit we wrote about the exchange of the love notes and the match notes between the president and Kim, and the president liked to show them off in various meetings. We tried to have our photographers getting a shot of what was actually written in those. But we did do some reporting. And, you know, we wrote a story, for example, about Steve Biegun's role.

David Nakamura:  And you know, what we were told by the – we had heard that, you know, John Bolton was certainly concerned that Biegun was – and that others – were pushing too quickly, or seemed too eager for a deal, might give up too much. But we were told by folks in the White House that it wasn't just Bolton. It was an interesting message. That there was other concerns. The concerns in Commerce about the sanctions, go to the Pentagon over the military drills and other matters, and even concern among – from Pompeo.

David Nakamura:  And so when you saw the president surrounded by that group, including Bolton, at one of the extended bilateral meetings, it seemed like that – you know, that sort of view won out. And afterward, though, it's interesting because, you know, Pompeo gave an interview the other day, I think to USA Today, where he seemed surprised that North Korea had kind of drawn a tough line about their negotiating position in public – their public comments. So, you know, but in that interview, I think, and other places, Pompeo has said he's trying to get a team over there fairly soon, so it's interesting.
David Nakamura: But I think from the president’s point of view, he’s made clear that if – and he said this at the news conference afterward – that if North Korea holds off on the missile and nuclear testing, and rebuilding a site is one thing. But if they do anything provocative, he seems willing to sort of continue this negotiation and ride this out, because he’s put so much into it.

Alexander Vershbow: But that too emphasizes how he’s kind of sent mixed signals, because just stopping testing doesn’t actually reduce the real threat. And of course, unilaterally giving up those exercises – which really do harm the readiness of U.S. and Korean forces, is a premature concession.

Andrew Schwartz: Do you think that he thinks stopping – do you think that he thinks stopping testing reduces the threat?

Alexander Vershbow: Oh, well, he definitely thinks so. And it does reduce the threat to some degree, because the North Koreans have not perfected ICBMs. They’ve only had a couple of tests. So, yes, we’re better off if they continue this moratorium. But it doesn’t solve the fundamental problem of a major nuclear weapons state emerging on the Korean Peninsula, that we want to reverse.

David Nakamura: I think it’s an argument, too, the president can make to the public. We saw missiles in 2017 flying over Japan and reports of nuclear tests. We recall the summit with Prime Minister Abe at Mar-a-Lago where they were using, you know, a cellphone, flashlights to sort of go over public statements in the middle of a public dining room, which got a lot of attention. You know, so the president – and the president built up a lot of his campaign against – this pressure campaign on North Korea saying how flagrant and provocative they had been, right, at the U.N. and in South Korea and at the State of the Union last year.

David Nakamura: So the president is now saying that’s an achievement they’re not doing that anymore. And as long as they don’t I think he can continue to try to argue – and he has been – that this is something he’s brought about and that he’s reduced tensions.

Victor Cha: You know, that – I think that’s true. It doesn’t – no testing doesn’t invoke the political crisis that comes with a test. But that is – that is a situation where time is on the North Korean side because even though they’re not testing, they’re still producing more fissile material, more weapons. You know, there’s talk about how they produced more material between Singapore and Hanoi, right? So they’re continuing to increase – you know to increase their stockpiles.

David Nakamura: And on the testing, you know, so our – the work we’ve done here at CSIS shows that it’s not just under the Trump administration, any time the United States is at the table talking to North Korea the North Koreans don’t test. They don’t do major WMD tests or demonstrations.

Andrew Schwartz: This is historic. And both of you negotiated with them.

David Nakamura: Yeah. For 25 years that’s been the case. So I know the president likes to say it’s a big accomplishment of the policy, but it’s actually just data. It’s just an empirical fact that’s the case.

David Nakamura: But again, I think this goes back to the – and I don’t say this as – I don’t say this with a great deal of excitement; I say it with a great deal of regret – is that so
what I’m worried about is that – again, that we walk away from this meeting understanding now very clearly what the North Koreans want. As Sue said, they don’t want a peace regime, peace declaration, and they don’t want liaison offices. The South Koreans may want that, but the North Koreans, they want sanctions relief and they want these five sanctions, which for the United States just reinforces to us that this is really good leverage that we should use, that we could supplement, you know, to try to get – to try to get what we want. And I think the North Koreans walk away from this meeting and they – and they feel like, well, you know we’ve tried. We put our dear leader with the U.S. president. He hasn’t moved on any of these issues. You know, we may have to just go back to using pressure again to try to soften up the Americans. So, you know, I’m not predicting that we’re going back to 2017, but I do worry that we may see a bad cycle. And that would not be unusual in the history of this negotiation crisis, that we then cycle back from engagement to – you know, to a little bit of confrontation before we cycle back to the diplomacy again.

Alexander Vershbow: Let’s hope that these two guys – you know, their first date went better than their second date, but let’s hope that they’re not going to break off the relationship.

Victor Cha: Yeah. Yeah.

Andrew Schwartz: Sue, you always say the North Koreans never do anything for free.

Sue Mi Terry: No. No, they don’t. I mean – (laughs) – Victor knows this better than anybody.

Andrew Schwartz: He’s not a cheap date.

Sue Mi Terry: No, no, absolutely not. (Laughter.) But what I do wonder about is just going forward I have a little bit of a different take. I just – you know, it would be very foolish for Kim Jong-un to return to provocations, right, in the form of missile and nuclear tests because all Kim has to do is kind of sit tight and continually engage in diplomacy, summity, continue to meet with Xi Jinping, you know, meet with President Moon and Putin and what have you, and you know, he’s on this path of normalizing himself. All of a sudden he looks like a normal leader, right? We forget about who he really is like, a guy who killed his brother and uncle and so on. So all he has to do is kind of sit tight and not test, continue to build a nuclear missile program that doesn’t really bother President Trump – as long as it’s not in your face testing – and then sort of run out the clock on this administration. So that’s why I’m not panicking that they will return to provocations.

Sue Mi Terry: I do wonder, though, what about the military exercises? Right now we have decided not to continue with those, but there’s another major military exercise coming up in the summer, fall. So after some status quo, after some months pass, are we going to just continually not exercise? And if we do return to military exercise, then wouldn’t that give North Korea sort of – sort of an excuse so then sort of they can go back to provocation? And then, in that scenario, China and others will say, well, OK, United States that returned to military exercises first, right? So right now what we have is freeze for freeze. We don’t – we don’t do exercises in return for no testing. That’s what we’ve got here.

Andrew Schwartz: What is the not testing – what is that doing to us right now, not testing?
Alexander Vershbow:  You mean not doing the exercises?

Andrew Schwartz:  Yeah, I’m sorry. Yeah. Yeah. What is our – what does the freeze do to us. We haven’t exercised in how long now? How long has it been?

Victor Cha:  Almost a year.

Sue Mi Terry:  Since – yeah, since –

Andrew Schwartz:  It’s almost a year, right? So what’s that –

Sue Mi Terry:  Readiness.

Andrew Schwartz:  What is that doing to us?

Alexander Vershbow:  Yeah, no, it definitely hurts the readiness of our forces and also the interoperability between U.S. and Korean forces. And it’s especially important in Korea, where most of our troops are there just for a one-year tour. So every year you have fresh troops who have to learn the terrain, how to operate with the South Korean allies.

Alexander Vershbow:  So not doing these exercises – you know, you can do it in other ways, through simulations, through command-post exercises, you know, computer-based exercises, but there’s nothing like putting those troops in the field and learning how to deal with the harsh conditions side by side with their allies.

Alexander Vershbow:  So, I mean, it is a freeze for freeze, but we did it unilaterally. We didn’t perhaps get as much in return for it as we could have. And I worry that if we continue to suspend – the North Koreans are just going to pocket it – we actually reduce our leverage on denuclearization.

Andrew Schwartz:  And they seem to be hellbent on being recognized and continually being recognized as a nuclear-weapon state. Even though there’s a momentary freeze, they’re not – they haven’t stopped in their pursuit.

Alexander Vershbow:  Well, that’s – that’s what people think is their ultimate goal is to have their cake and eat it too; you know, some kind of a deal that only reduces and limits their capability but leaves them as a nuclear-weapon state. I don’t think we should concede that, because, you know, they’ve said that denuclearization is their goal too. The conditions may be hard to meet. But, you know, we should continue to say we don’t accept them as a legitimate nuclear-weapon state but only as a de facto one, and continue to try to chip away.

Alexander Vershbow:  And finally, the tradeoffs – they couldn’t get them to actually take some steps to dismantle some of the real stuff that threatens us.

Andrew Schwartz:  Victor, what do you think about this?

Victor Cha:  I agree. I mean, you know, I think most people that I’ve talked to have said that if you go a full year without any real exercising, you are – you know, you are truly eroding readiness on the Peninsula. And in case anybody forgets, the North Koreans have not stopped exercising, right. They’re – they have a winter training site that goes till the end of this month. So it’s very asymmetrical in that sense.
Victor Cha: I don’t think it sends a good message more broadly to not just alliance managers of Korea, but all of our alliances, if there’s a willingness to just put willy-nilly alliance equities on the table as bargaining chips or as concessions, unilateral concessions for – you know, for very uncertain nuclear negotiations.

Andrew Schwartz: Well, wasn’t freeze for freeze an idea that China and Russia advocated to begin with?

Victor Cha: Yeah. So I’m sure the Chinese and the Russians –

Alexander Vershbow: We rejected it. We thought it was insufficient.

Victor Cha: Yeah, we rejected it, yeah. And I’m sure the Chinese or Russians are – you know, are very happy with this.

Victor Cha: But, you know, I think where we’re going to go from here, at least in that respect, is, you know, whenever – so I wrote a piece several years ago for Dave’s paper, The Washington Post, the title of it which was “The Dilemma of American Reasonableness.” And what it essentially was, we always get into these cycles with North Korea where you get to a point where North Korea takes a position that’s fairly unreasonable and then the United States stands on principle.

Victor Cha: And all the actors – the South Koreans, the Chinese, the Russians, with the exception of Japan; the South Koreans, the Chinese and the Russians – look at the situation and they eventually come to the Americans and they go, you know, those North Koreans, they’re rat bastards. They’re terrible. Can you be a little bit more flexible, right, to the Americans?

Victor Cha: And so I fully anticipate that that’s what’s going to happen. You know, the Chinese, South Koreans, will start coming to Biegun and Pompeo and to Bolton and the president and say, you know, those North Koreans are rat bastards. You know, we know you’ve had these summits and everything. Can you be a little bit more flexible? I think that that’s what we’re going to start to see.

Alexander Vershbow: Plus the South to maybe start pushing for waivers of some of the sanctions, even without getting any progress from the North. And that kind of creates frictions between Washington and Seoul, which is a recipe for not ever making progress.

Victor Cha: Yeah, I think the South Koreans are in a very difficult position. They’re probably the biggest loser of the failure of the Hanoi summit. And I think for President Moon it’s a very delicate situation, because he’s got to try to pick up the diplomatic pieces. He doesn’t have a lot of time, because they have elections in Korea next year. And so that campaign cycle will start up fairly soon.

Victor Cha: So I think he’s got one opportunity to try to do some sort of high-level bringing the sides together. And if he succeeds, it’s great. But if he fails, it’s not going to position him and the party well going into the election season, especially, as Sue said, because they’ve thrown all their eggs in the North Korea basket.

Andrew Schwartz: Well, so how are the South Koreans reacting to all this?

Sue Mi Terry: Well, I think they were caught off guard a little bit because I think the South Koreans did expect some sort of interim deal where we are going to accept part
of Yongbyon. We give some sanctions relief and peace declaration and so on. So I think this is an unexpected outcome.

Sue Mi Terry: But right now what they're going to do is exactly what Victor said. I think they're going to try play an intermediary role. They're going to try to sort of meet with Kim Jong-un. I think it's going to be very difficult for Kim to go to South Korea now because South Korea's not going to be able to offer a big concession, a big package, so he's not going to go to South Korea. But maybe there is a meeting to be had in Panmunjom or maybe South Korea will send an envoy, a high-level envoy to North Korea to see if they can bring the North Koreans and bring the Americans back to the table.

Sue Mi Terry: But again, you know, it just – that's fine, but I'm just skeptical of potential outcome. We already met at the highest level and we couldn't bridge this gap. And, you know, on denuclearization, we still don't have an agreed-upon definition of denuclearization. And this is after Hanoi summit, after Singapore summit. Eight months went by, we still don't have an agreed-upon definition of denuclearization, and now we don't have a roadmap, we don't have a timeline.

David Nakamura: He mentioned – Victor mentioned the elections in South Korea. We have elections, too. It's hard to avoid. It's already underway, right? So, you know, the question someone said, you know, well, Trump is going to stay in this until he realizes – someone was joking, I guess – but said Trump will stay in this North Korea game until he realizes he won't get a Nobel Prize and then he'll lose interest, you know? And how does Trump want – you know, domestic concerns are always big for any White House in an election season. And how does Trump want to characterize this North Korea play, right? Is it a win and he's going to say I did a lot, I changed the game here and ride that out? Or does, you know, somehow he want – it's not going to be that instrumental in his reelection message. It's going to be immigration and the economy and Democrats and, you know, out to get me and so on and it's not that big a part.

David Nakamura: And I think, you know, someone was saying that Trump is headed to Japan as early as possibly next month or maybe May for the – to meet the emperor, new emperor, and that the South Koreans are trying to get him to swing by. So I don't know that that would happen, but, you know, there's an interest in trying to keep Trump onboard, right? And I think for the president, you know, you never know if he's going to – he wants to use this issue to distract from some sort of, you know, domestic issue or, you know, or if he gets a deal with China on trade, if that gets less pressure to get a deal with North Korea. There's a lot of factors going into this.

Sue Mi Terry: And just, you know, President Trump, just wondering about his mindset because now he really – I think one of the other takeaway from the Hanoi summit is he must have walked away realizing, OK, finally that this is not an easy deal, that the Nobel Peace Prize, you know, might not be available for him. So with all the domestic turmoil, with the Mueller investigation and everything out there that he's going to be facing this year, is he even going to be focused on North Korea?

David Nakamura: Right.

Sue Mi Terry: That's one of my concerns.
Alexander Vershbow: But on the other hand, I mean, I think he must appreciate the fact that he got praised for walking away, even by Democrats.

Sue Mi Terry: Right, there was bipartisan support for him.

Alexander Vershbow: So maybe he learned something about how the art of the deal with Kim Jong-un is a little different than a real estate deal and, you know, maybe we should be a bit more on the – on the – on the – to take the initiative here. We’ve been very reactive in letting Kim Jong-un define the agenda, even though the president has been delighted to have these grand photo ops. But maybe before the North Koreans quite figure out what they’re going to do next, I think they’re in a period of reflection because their media has been silent for the last few days.

Alexander Vershbow: We should be proactive and try to shape the agenda and say, look, you know, we can do a big deal or a small deal, but let’s get the people back together and see whether we can get what you want, maybe it’s in five stages, maybe it’s in three stages, but there’s a way forward where both sides can end up winners.

David Nakamura: And we reported in today’s story that the president has privately expressed frustration at the coverage of this summit and he’s not so happy about the sort of media coverage, but that the White House did make an effort to brief senators on their goals and that the senators did come out in a bipartisan way and praise Trump for walking away, as you mentioned.

Andrew Schwartz: Well, this is to all of you – Dave, start – but did you think that Trump was better prepared for this summit than he was for the last summit? And does he understand the nuance of policy when it comes to the North Koreans better now than he did in Singapore?

David Nakamura: That’s a little bit difficult to answer probably. I mean, I, you know, I think in Singapore his goal and the, you know, the media’s attention kind of was on the historic moment honestly, you know? And to some degree, the pageantry of that did become the story, right? And so, of course, reporters made the point that this was a fairly hollow agreement that had – some of which had been already agreed upon in South Korea.

David Nakamura: And so going into this, I mean, there was clearly pressure on the White House to do more and they clearly made some changes by bringing Steve Biegun in –

Andrew Schwartz: Right.

David Nakamura: – who they felt and seemed to get very, you know, positive reviews from everyone I talked to in Washington on both sides of the aisle as someone who is a serious, disciplined negotiator, who may not have an extended background in Asia, but understood the politics of Washington and understood how important this was to the president.

David Nakamura: What was not clear, though, is what we keep getting back to, which is, was the, you know, this interagency and sort of that, you know, the sort of jargonistic kind of words we use for NSC process, right, if there had been one under Bolton and whether they had come on the same page. And it did not seem clear that that was true. I mean, you know, the president clearly, you know, wanted some sort of deal, and his advisors were a little bit more skeptical all along. But in the
end we saw, as you say, that the president sort of surprised folks by walking away.

Sue Mi Terry: And, I mean, he did have this long plane ride to Hanoi with Ambassador Bolton there, so I’m sure if he wasn’t prepped before he was being prepped. And the fact that he brought out Yongbyon-plus, right, and just even bringing that covert site, nuclear –

Andrew Schwartz: Explain what Yongbyon-plus means.

Sue Mi Terry: Well, I think the North Koreans thought the deal was to be had with the Yongbyon nuclear complex aspect of Yongbyon, but I think President Trump brought up it can’t be Yongbyon; if you want this five sanctions relief, it has to be the whole thing. And then there was a second enrichment site that the Trump – President Trump brought it up. And I think the North Koreans, from what I understand, were caught a little bit off-guard by that because they thought what they were going to talk about is just Yongbyon nuclear complex.

Alexander Vershbow: It was particularly significant and surprising that the president seemed to have actually made some use of intelligence from the U.S. intelligence community –

Sue Mi Terry: Right.

Alexander Vershbow: – and sort of showing the North Koreans that we know more about your program than you think we do, and that’s why your offer is inadequate because it’s too one-sided.

Andrew Schwartz: That was new, a new use of his intelligence apparatus. (Laughter.)

Alexander Vershbow: Well, I haven’t heard him say anything good about the intelligence community until now. (Laughs.)

Sue Mi Terry: At least he used intelligence.

Victor Cha: Well, but he had to, right, because as Dave said, this – you know, this is the second meeting, so the expectations were there has to be something tangible coming out of it. You laid out the principles in the first meeting, so now you have to make progress. So of course it was going to get more specific.

Victor Cha: I feel like going forward, like, if this does not go in a bad direction and it heads on the direction of diplomacy, you know, we have to start thinking about, like, what can we actually get that goes beyond simply some old buildings at Yongbyon or some old test sites that they don’t need anymore. And all the experts that I talk to feel like, you know, the one practical thing that we really need going forward is we’ve got to stop them from producing more material – more bombs or more material.

Victor Cha: And then – so I think the question then for the – from the United States side is, if we decide in the interagency or through whatever truncated NSC process there is that that’s a thing tangibly that we need to go after, what are we willing to give up in terms of sanctions? Because we know that’s what they want. What are we willing to give up for – you know, for a verifiable fissile material production ban?
Alexander Vershbow: And sanctions – I mean, I think the administration made a mistake early on in saying it was all or nothing when it came to sanctions. So I think we do have to think of some kind of incremental approach to sanctions. Anything we do early on should be reversible. We should have snapback provisions, whatever you need. But at the end of the day, the North Koreans are just as transactional as Donald Trump, and I think there’s going to have to be some quid pro quos. I think we should be going after delivery systems as well, the things that actually bring those bombs to earth in South Korea or Japan or the United States. But sometimes enlarging a problem, as President Eisenhower used to say, is one way to make it more easy to solve.

Andrew Schwartz: We’re going to go to our audience questions in just a second. Dave, I want to ask you one last thing, though. While you were on the trip, you asked President Trump a question about Otto Warmbier. What happened there? I mean, we’re all talking about, you know, normalizing Kim Jong-un, you know, that he’s reasonable –

David Nakamura: Yeah. So people asked me why did I ask that.

Andrew Schwartz: Yeah.

David Nakamura: And it was at the news conference afterward. I had been in the press pool. So we traveled with the president in the motorcade over to the news conference, and when we got in there there was hundreds of reporters already waiting. And the president came out. We didn’t know how long he’d be there. Some were saying he may just do a statement and leave. In the motorcade we actually got some sense from the aides that they might call the whole thing off. But they went through with it, and to Trump’s credit he spent an hour answering questions. But a number of questions had been asked and answered, including from David Sanger some specific questions about the nuclear issues and the negotiations.

David Nakamura: I had been interested, I mean, in asking the president about Otto Warmbier from the first summit, honestly, and he had a long news conference there but sort of brushed off questions about human rights. And he had made such a big deal out of Otto’s case, as people remember, in 2017 and through to the 2018 –

Andrew Schwartz: Had his parents to the State of the Union.

David Nakamura: – State of the Union. I had done a story in January, before this current – this 2019 State of the Union, about how he had – the centerpiece of the past one had been not just Otto’s parents, but Ji Seong-ho, the South Korean – or North Korean defector and now activist in South Korea. And I’d say – you know, I had asked – we got in touch with him, our Korea correspondent, and he said that he had been back to the White House once for the first lady’s holiday party in December, but the president didn’t talk to him. And he expressed some – he was still hopeful, but expressed some concern that human rights were, you know, being brushed off.

David Nakamura: So I had been in touch with Otto’s family and I was interested, so I asked the president if he had confronted Kim about Otto’s death and whether he held him responsible, and why he called him in a tweet – Kim Jong-un – my friend. And the president did not necessarily seem ready for that question, but then did say that he brought it up and that – people saw the reaction, that he brought it up
and that Kim had denied knowledge of any kind of abuse, and that he felt badly about it, and he took him at his word. And, you know, when I was – we had to leave immediately after in the motorcade to return to Washington on Air Force One. And my colleagues were scrambling to deal with a lot of stories they probably already had in mind. And I said I really we should do a full story on that. We did. And we’ve since done several more. And as we know, the family came out the next day and delivered a statement.

Andrew Schwartz: We have a brilliant audience here today, including former ambassador Bob King is here, former ambassador Mark Lippert is here. We have some great questions. This one is very direct. Comes – it says: It seems pretty clear that North Korea will not denuclearize. The question is, is it time to accept North Korea as a nuclear power, and then work from them on limiting and controlling it, sort of a Pakistan model?

Andrew Schwartz: Victor, you want to go first?

Victor Cha: Yeah. I’m reminded of a time when the North Koreans said – and I talk about this in my book, so – when the North Koreans said: You should treat us more like Pakistan. And we said to them, we don’t want us to treat you like Pakistan. (Laughter.) Yeah, you know, I think it’s – I mean, increasing many people, policy experts share this view. I mean, I think it’s very hard for the United States formally to recognize North Korea as a nuclear weapons state. Our policy will always be that we seek CIVD or final and fully verified – whatever your favorite acronym is for this problem. But when we start talking about, you know, fissile material ban or something on missile ranges, or things of this nature, you know, that is trying to control the problem rather than eliminating it.

Victor Cha: I think goal will always be to eliminate it. But practically speaking, you need to take interim steps that people will characterize as sort of de facto acceptance. They can characterize it any way they want. For all of us around the table, and Mark, and Bob King, and others who worked on this issue, you know, your first job is you’ve got to limit the threat. You have to limit it. You have to stop it from growing.

Andrew Schwartz: Ambassador.

Alexander Vershbow: Yeah, I agree with that. We shouldn’t abandon the goal, particularly when Kim Jong-un continues at least to pay lip service to it and is going to sign many North-South declarations to that effect as well, and the Singapore statement. We do have to clarify what means by denuclearization. And we do have to accept that this isn’t going to be solved overnight. So even if we begin to engage again and start getting some positive actions on both sides, we still won’t know the answer to the question of whether he’s ever going to be ready to give them all up. But, you know, this time could be different.

Alexander Vershbow: I think we are dealing with a somewhat different Kim than his father and grandfather. He’s young. He doesn’t want to preside over a, you know, isolated pariah state basket-case for generations. And he might be able to do that. I mean, I think we’re seeing the sort of collapse of the state economy within North Korea as markets are emerging, but it’s kind of like one giant black market. It’s not really a market economy. So we have leverage. We should see how far we can get. Interim stages may just reduce the threat. Hopefully the
most destabilizing systems can be taken off the playing field early. And then we’ll see what’s possible.

Alexander Vershbow: But it should be our goal, because I think there’s risks of proliferation in the region. If they’re accepted for the long haul as a nuclear weapons state, it does create pressures on South Korea or Japan to go nuclear. And I think, you know, we’d rather not go down that road. I would also say that – you mentioned Bob King – one thing that the president could do to show that we are interested in human rights is to appoint a successor to Bob King as a special envoy for human rights.

Andrew Schwartz: Congress has authorized the appointment of a new ambassador human rights to North Korea, which Bob King occupied that role in the last – previous administration. Has not yet been appointed, so that’s a very good point.

Andrew Schwartz: Sue, do you want to weigh in on this question before we go on?

Sue Mi Terry: No, I 100 percent agree. I don’t think we can drop it as a goal, even if in reality we’re pursuing a threat reduction policy to sort of reduce the threat, just because of exactly what the ambassador was just talking about. There is a whole lot of implications of really accepting it as a policy and declaring North Korea as a nuclear weapons power.

Alexander Vershbow: It removes the legitimacy for the sanctions.

Sue Mi Terry: Absolutely. It removes legitimacy for the sanctions, but the regional proliferation is a great point because this is – South Korea is not always going to be under this particular government. It could be under a very conservative government in the future. And let’s say North Korea is accepted as a nuclear weapons power. There’s a real possibility that South Korea might say, you know, we might have to go nuclear ourselves. And then what happens with Japan? Then we’re talking about regional proliferation. We’re also sending a very wrong message to rogue actors out there that eventually, even if it’s not reality, that all you have to do is just do it and you –

Alexander Vershbow: Wear us down. (Laughs.)

Sue Mi Terry: Yeah, so you can wear us down. So I just don’t see it as a possibility where the U.S. government actually says that this is our policy and, yes, you are now a nuclear – North Korea is a nuclear weapons power.

Andrew Schwartz: This is a related question someone else asked. What’s the downside of normalizing relations with North Korea?

Victor Cha: Well, I think, you know, so one of them is – it’s got – when the United States makes a decision like that, I think it’s our decision, but it’s also something that, you know, we want to make sure that our allies all feel the same way about it. And so obviously the sore point here would be Japan. I don’t think Japan would be ready for a U.S.-DPRK normalization.

Victor Cha: It’s difficult – going back to the earlier point, it’s difficult for me to imagine a normalized political relationship without something in terms of improvement of the human-rights situation. So it’s difficult to get past that.
Victor Cha: And then, from a really transactional perspective, I think what Hanoi showed us is that North Koreans don’t really care about that, right. They’re not really looking for a normalized relationship. What they want is something very transactional and very material, which is sanctions relief.

David Nakamura: There was a pointed moment in that second time we got to see Kim Jong-un in the meeting with Trump. And people may have been watching it, but my colleagues were throwing out more questions for Kim Jong-un, and they asked him about would he be willing to have a liaison office from Washington in Pyongyang, you know, which we thought of as just, like, one of the main things that had already been agreed on. And I think one of Kim’s aides tried to cut off the question and this, and then Trump, you know, instead of ending it, said I’m interested in this.

David Nakamura: And I was – at first I was saying, well, what’s Trump saying, like he’s never heard this idea before? But instead it looked like one of the passive-aggressive plays by the president to put Kim on the spot, which is really awkward, given the, you know, chummy kind of atmosphere he’d been trying to do. But the president does that. He uses the media the way he wants; and so put him on the spot, a little oddly. And Kim said it was very welcomable, or something like that. But soon after they said – you know, Kim himself said give us a minute; please leave. And that’s the last time we saw him.

Andrew Schwartz: Dave, how are you and your colleagues at the Post going to continue to prepare for covering the story, continue to cover the story? You know, as we said, you know, it might drop out of the news for some time now, the politics and other issues going on. How are you going to keep –

David Nakamura: It’s an interesting arc. And, you know, my story today talked about the three prongs, immigration, trade and North Korea. And the reason I did, because those are the things the president has invested the most time in, you know, rhetorically, but also, to a degree, policy-wise, right. On immigration, it’s executive actions and things. But it’s summitry and it’s tariffs.

David Nakamura: And so, you know, the arc of the North Korea story is interesting, because it is a moment where the president seemed to take something from President Obama. And although he maybe wants to show that he can do something Obama did not, it was that first meeting with Obama that seemed to put North Korea to his mindset the foremost. In the campaign, he really had talked about China and Japan and other – right – terrorism and ISIS. But he did not talk that much about North Korea. And all of a sudden it became issue number one.

David Nakamura: So to us, I think the answer to your question is how do you judge a president’s record, right. I mean, there’s the outside stuff that Trump’s dealing with. But how do you judge his record? And I think North Korea has to be clearly one of the main pillars of that. And I think we’ll continue to write it. You know, in these campaigns domestic concerns tend to far outweigh the foreign policy, but I think we as a paper will continue to cover it significantly.

Andrew Schwartz: That’s going to be it for this session. With your applause, will you please thank our panelists today? (Applause.)
Andrew Schwartz: Thank you for being – thank you for being part of the taping of “The Impossible State.” You can get it wherever you listen to your podcast, on Apple podcast, Spotify, Sound Cloud, CSIS’s website; wherever you listen to your podcast.

Andrew Schwartz: We’ll like to invite all of you to join us for a short coffee break out in the foyer here, and our session will pick back up in about 15 minutes. Thank you very much.

(Break.)

Victor Cha: Thank you, ladies and gentlemen.

Victor Cha: Senator Gardner is on his way. He has a vote. So we have a little bit of time before he comes. He’s supposed to be here by 2:45. But at CSIS we never allow for there to be blank space during our events, and we thought we’d take full advantage of the fact that Ambassador Mark Lippert is here with us today to moderate the discussion with Senator Gardner, but also provide us an opportunity to ask him questions before he asks questions of Senator Gardner with regards to what happened in Hanoi.

Victor Cha: So for those of you who are not aware, Ambassador Mark Lippert was our ambassador to South Korea during the Obama administration. In addition to being a seasoned U.S. government official in the DOD, he’s also Korea’s number one baseball fan, I think, as some of you know. And he’s got other things coming down the pike that we – that you all would be very interested in in terms of Mark’s relationship with Korea.

Mark Lippert: Well, thanks, Victor. Great to be here.

Mark Lippert: And moreover, I was sort of told there was going to be no math today. I didn’t really prepare for any of this stuff, but always a pleasure to be here. And I will note that it’s just about two weeks, a little over two weeks away from the start of the Korean baseball season. (Laughter.) So I’m counting that down, and I already have my tickets for opening day. So I’m ready to go.

Mark Lippert: I mean, I think – you know, I do think that – I thought the – first of all, I thought the panel was excellent today and really covered the waterfront. So I’m trying to think about what I can say that’s not repetitive. But I guess what I would say is – maybe I’ll make a little bit – play a little bit of the optimistic case. And I’ll maybe talk hypothetically, as opposed to my – you know, my precise personal views.

Mark Lippert: But I know everybody’s concerned, and I got a lot of questions from the Korean media right after this about, you know, all the activity the North is – may or may not be doing right now. And I think that maybe I’ll just make a glass-half-full argument.

Mark Lippert: I do think, as Ambassador Vershbow noted, that in the summit that this summit did show the limits of the top-down, leader-to-leader approach. And I do think
that it did sharpen in the North Koreans’ mind how far President Trump is willing to go. I think that will help change the North Koreans’ calculation.

Mark Lippert: I also think that it – I think also it showed that they definitely need sanctions relief, right, as you noted, Victor. And I do think that, at the end of the day, what I think it does for the next kind of month or so is I think, if I were in the U.S. government, it would put a premium on me to be in deep talks with Beijing and Seoul immediately and to try to get Beijing and Seoul out of the mode that you described, which is get the U.S. to be more flexible and get those two capitals in the mindset of telling the North Koreans something like this: President Trump has now done two summits. He’s gone further than any other American president. The Americans are clearly interested in something, and they’re showing some flexibility. You, the North Koreans, we think, probably were willing to come off of your initial offer if you believe some of the press events that the North Koreans held on the margins of Hanoi. So it’s incumbent upon you to get back to the table quickly.

Mark Lippert: And that would be my – the diplomatic approach I would be taking at this moment, to try to really utilize the good relations, especially with Seoul, but also with Beijing, to try to get the North Koreans back to the table and at working-level talks.

Mark Lippert: So I think there’s a little bit of a glass-half-full scenario here, if played right and if the chips fall in the right direction, that might actually work to the advantage of accelerating that process.

Mark Lippert: And finally, what I would say is really putting aside kind of this last round of summity you’ve seen, both the inter-Korean and the two U.S.-North Korean summits, I always take people back to the 2015 events that – at the demilitarized zone, which is really the last serious negotiation anybody really had with the North Koreans, right? And you know, with all due respect to some of the stuff that’s happening, I mean, real brass tacks stuff.

Mark Lippert: And remember that if you talk to the South Korean negotiators at that time, they felt that one of the key reasons they were ultimately able to reach a deal, and reach a deal that was advantageous to them, was that they walked out. And the walkout catalyzed North Koreans behavior, and they came back the table relatively quickly. So it’s all a long way of saying that this is very typical of both North and South Korean negotiating behavior. There is some reason to be optimistic. And there are things that the U.S. administration needs to be doing now, today, immediately to try to get this back into a positive direction. Because I would say, all is not lost here. And in fact, there might be some green shoots and some positive momentum coming out of this in a very strange and counterintuitive way.

Victor Cha: Could you – that’s very interesting. Could you speak to the domestic political context for the actors? I mean, we talked a little bit about Trump and the challenges he had while he was in Hanoi. But also on the North Korean side, as well as the South Korean side.

Mark Lippert: Yeah. I mean, I have always been of the view – and this is maybe where I would quibble with you just a little bit – that the North Koreans – time is probably not on their side. And here’s why. I think what the summit showed was that the sanctions are pretty strong, especially the ones that go beyond the nuclear and
WMD programs. And remember, that’s – the audience here knows this well, but just to restate it – you know, everybody used to make the case when we were in the Obama administration – not everybody, but a lot of people would say – the sanctions won’t work. We’ve sanctioned these guys out, and they’ve been going on for years. And remember, what this showed is these larger, more broad, comprehensives sanctions are exerting pressure. I think that’s point one.

Mark Lippert: I think point two, I’ve always subscribed to the theory that there are markets and information flow within North Korea that are changing North Korean society, making the regime uncomfortable. And, three, it dovetails with the broader point that the model that Kim Jong-un has that has got to change in some way, shape, or form. And the sanctions accelerate and/or put more pressure on him to change and give him less options to change comfortably. So it puts an imperative on relief. So I think that’s why I do think that there is some incentive to come back to the table.

Mark Lippert: On the South Korean side, I do think that, you know, the South Koreans are probably the most disappointed. I do – I do subscribe to the notion that they were very interested in the end of war declaration. They were very interested, I think, in getting Kaesong and Kumgang reopened. And you know, those are – I think if you talk to South Koreans friends who are in the Blue House now I think they would argue those are important accelerants of the denuclearization and the peace process.

Mark Lippert: I think ultimately, though, as – not ultimately – but not mutually exclusively is that, you know, they’re important domestic political symbols for the left too, right? Kumgang and Kaesong are sunshine era – pillars of the sunshine era policy, I think. And I think the president – President Moon has does have some imperative to deliver on this strategy. It’s popular in South Korea. But I think the South Koreans are also starting – you can sense the South Korean population is starting to get a little bit more – let’s put it this way – guarded about the process.

Mark Lippert: Finally, I would say, though, the thing that I think is new and will cause – will be interesting to watch in the South Korean political sphere is what this imagery you put up will do to that discussion, right? If the – you know, things have been relatively quite for a while. And if things get choppy again, what impact will that have on the dynamics there.

Mark Lippert: Final point on South Korean politics, I would say that it is interesting. You know, there’s no doubt that the economy is the issue. The conservatives just – they’re getting more organized, but they’re still fairly disorganized. But they’re – even despite disorganization, they’re ticking up in the polls, right? And they’re ticking up in the polls largely because the bread and butter issues of the economy at home. And so that I do think puts more emphasis on – or, at least more of a premium on this North Korea pillar, if you will, in terms of Moon Jae-in’s domestic political appeal and popularity rating.

Victor Cha: And what is it that – so if we look at the – first, in terms of the time being, I mean, I don’t disagree with that. I mean, I think that the sanctions really are having an impact. You know, depending on whose estimate you looked at, the North Korean economy shrank by between 3 and 5 percent in 2017. That’s a direct function of sanctions. The trade deficit with China is way up, right, up 30 percent. That’s clearly a function of the sanctions. So that’s a point well taken.
Victor Cha: But as we go forward, I mean, clearly the actor that’s the most disappointed of all the non-outcome in Hanoi is South Korea. And I think they sort of feel it’s their responsibility now to try to pick up the pieces. I mean, what do you think that they’re going to do in terms of trying to get this, you know, railroad car back on the tracks again?

Mark Lippert: It’s a really good question. I mean, first, I would say, if I were the North Koreans – and I know you asked about South Korea, but I think their first play will be to try to get the Chinese to basically reduce implementation, right? That’s what I would do first, right, and see if they can get relief there. And I think that directly impacts the South Korea question, because if they don’t get what they want from the Chinese then they’ll come back to the South Koreans, right, and that will put – that will be a – I think that will impact South Korean – or at least factor into South Korean decision-making.

Mark Lippert: I think the South Koreans with us have two basic options that we talked about, which is try to get us to be more flexible or try to persuade the North Koreans to come back to the table, or they could probably try to do both. And I would – I guess what I would say if I were – if the South Koreans asked me I would say – I would remind them that even though the summit collapsed, the way in which it collapsed – quotes around “collapsed” – is that by and large the U.S. side did not burn the bridges behind them, right? It was – amicable is not the right word, but it was – there were not – there were not heavy recriminations. There was not a lot of name-calling and – at least what I saw. And I kind of felt that that did leave the door open. So I mean, that would be a point that I would stress.

Mark Lippert: So I think that’s where their sweet spot is going to be because I – and this comes back to the North Korea issue, which is I just – it’s hard for me to see another North-South summit – and I probably should have said this first – without the U.S. denuclearization sanctions track in play, right? If that is dormant or off or – and I think that gets at your question, which is – explains some of the South Korean disappointment, because I think the South Koreans know that if that track – U.S.-North Korea – is in trouble, it really does impact the inter-Korean process in this go-round. So I do think that they’ll probably try to get that track going. How they do that is important, but it does – it feels to me that it does – even if they try an inter-Korean play, it seems less likely to work, and even if it does work seems less likely to have tangible outcomes that would be concrete deliverables both in terms of real deepening of the exchange and domestic political considerations as well.

Victor Cha: Yeah. Yeah. I mean, I agree. I think that – and they have a – well, I mean, both President Moon and President Trump have a limited amount of time right now, right, because both of them have elections next year. In the South Korean case their national parliamentary elections, and we know what’s happening here. So they don’t really have a lot of time before they get distracted by other things.

Victor Cha: What about – I mean, we talked about in the podcast – and I’d love your view on this – what about this possibility that the – perhaps one of the more lasting impressions of the failure of the Hanoi summit is that the president may start losing interest in the issue because, like you said, they’ve really – we really got – the North Koreans got to see the limits of what – the most forward-leaning president in a long time on diplomacy with North Korea, we saw what the limits were there. And the president, I think, also sort of walked into this and pushed
it as far to the edge as he could, didn’t get the results that he wanted. I mean, what’s the chance that he may start losing interest in this?

Mark Lippert: I mean, I think it’s a very real possibility. And that’s – you know, we could go through the downsides. I mean, I think the big downside to me was that, you know, there was a moment here, right? And had – I think – and I put a lot of responsibility on Kim Jong-un on this, right? Had he grasped the moment and made some concessions up front. And there were a handful of concessions that wouldn’t, you know, significantly undermine their security situation, but would be significant enough to show that they’re serious, right? There’s a landing strip in there that a lot of experts have defined. And they just, for whatever reason, didn’t do that. Maybe they were going to walk out and come back and lower the bar throughout a series of negotiations and they were surprised by the U.S. walking out. Who knows? But the point is that had they gone in, taken this in a different direction, been a little more strategic, a little less tactical, there was a moment here, right?

Mark Lippert: And that’s – that is disappointing. And I think it comes back to your question, which is – you know, I think that – I’m not going to pretend I can get inside the president’s head. But I will say, having worked in a White House, the presidency by and large, which you try to leverage and use it for, is for big moments, right? And when you have these big events and big runups and leadups, you want, generally speaking, big results. Now, you know, and I’ll just say this, there was – and it was an interesting theory of the case, right? A lot of experts here in town have argued for years that we’ve got to get Kim Jong-un, or the leader, or whoever that may be in with the U.S. president because that’s the real decision-maker. And, you know, I think there is a little bit of disappointment in that we did do that, and that the North, at least at this point, wasn’t able to seize the moment.

Mark Lippert: And I think part of the reason I’m disappointed is, you know, that’s the cleanest shot in, right? Everybody wants this problem solved, right? And if you can get everybody in a room, and start talking, and make real progress, that’s probably the quickest way to actually solve this problem. And that’s one of the disappointments. So I would say there’s a danger that there is a loss of interest, but I would say that, you know, if we talked about it just a little bit ago, I do think there’s enough incentives running one way – or, at least in a certain direction – that there is some cause for hope that we can continue this, and actually make some discernable progress before the political season both in Seoul and Washington get to far along.

Victor Cha: Yeah. I mean, the flipside of that is, of course, Donald Trump could still believe he’s the greatest negotiator, dealmaker in the world, and say: I just need another shot at this, right?

Mark Lippert: And he didn’t close the door completely.

Victor Cha: He didn’t close the door.

Mark Lippert: They didn’t close the door.

Victor Cha: And significantly, we move forward with terminating these exercises. Are they terminated, or are they just suspended?
Mark Lippert: I think suspended.

Victor Cha: They’re suspended.

Mark Lippert: But I think the danger is – you know, if you – you know, it’s a little like team spirit, right? Dave Maxwell is here. He can tell you this chapter and verse, right? If you suspend and start putting this on the table, it all of a sudden becomes terminated. You know, and I think that’s the danger. And I do think – you know, that I think the point that Sandy made earlier about just in general lumping military exercises as political deliverables is a pretty dangerous road, in that – you know, the reason we do exercises is because – I mean, having worked at the Pentagon, the Pentagon, for lack of a better term, is the lender of last resort, right? Like, you’re sitting there in the Secretary of Defense’s office, as his chief of staff. And when people press the button, right, you’ve got to be ready, right? You can’t say, well, I just – I need a little more time to get the talking points in order, or the – you know, it’s the – you’ve got to go immediately.

Mark Lippert: And that’s what exercises do. They allow you to have confidence that you can go immediately, in addition to deterrence and all that good stuff. But I just think people sort of often lose sight of that, that, you know, at DOD that culture, and the building is charged with it, you plan. You know, for alliances you have plans, you have resources, you have exercises, because those alliance commitments are real. They are immediate. They’re prescient. And things could happen, you know, tomorrow that would send you into some sort of scenario where you have to respond. And you want to be obviously at the top of your game when you respond.

Victor Cha: Yeah. Yeah. And then also the exercises, I mean, they – the North Koreans have been invited to observe these exercises in the past. And, again, some of the research that we’ve done at CSIS, I mean, the president has talked about these as provocative and expensive. And, again, some of the work we’ve done at CSIS shows that North Korea only reacts to the exercises when we’re actually not in a – in a dialogue, in a negotiation with them. Then the exercising tends to elicit very violent North Korean reactions. But if we’re actually in a dialogue with them and exercises take place, then there’s not much activity by the North.

Victor Cha: So switching topics to sort of the lighter side, so you’ve been back in – how long have you been back in D.C. now?

Mark Lippert: About two years.

Victor Cha: About two years. So how often do you get back to Korea?

Mark Lippert: A lot, actually. You know, it’s been surprising – you know, three to five times a year. So, yeah, it’s great. But I sort of always forget that the Koreans like to really stay out late. So you know, here in Washington you go to bed at, like, 8:30, right? And in Korea, it’s a night town. So, you know, it takes some getting used to. (Laughter.)

Victor Cha: Did you – so when you were, you know, working with a state senator and did you ever think that you would end up becoming, first of all, the Ambassador to Korea, and that you would – you know, would leave Korea with this sort of
deeply held affection and tie to Korea? Could you have ever imagined that happening in your wildest dreams?

Mark Lippert: No. I mean, in fact, you know, when people ask me – you know, a lot of young people come up and ask for career advice. And, you know, in the capacity as a foreign policy hand, or whatever it is. You know, I just said, you know, you just got to treat it as a journey, because you never know. Like, and, you know, how I became ambassador is literally – I remember it. I had two very senior State Department people contact me about it. And I said, you know, I just got the job with Secretary Hagel. And they were – they were sort of, you know, pushing back. They said, look, you’d be very good for the job. They said, you know, you’ve got the Pentagon experience. That’s really important. You know the president. The Koreans want someone close to the president. You know, you’ve been around the Korean policy stuff. You know that. And besides, we really just don’t have anybody else. (Laughter.) So can you do it? I was like, you could have left the last one out. (Laughter.)

Mark Lippert: So that’s – the point is, you just never know. But I’ll just say this, it was – you know, my phone’s ringing. Sorry, I forgot to mute it. I didn’t realize we were going to be on stage so quickly. I guess what I’d say to this is that, you know, you just – you just never know. I didn’t think we’d have two kids over there. I never, obviously, anticipated this crazy knife attack that had all these repercussions. And I just never – I guess sort of – you had a 20-year career in government. And people who have served in government in this room know, like, it rarely works out. You have these crazy jobs, they’re kind of OK. You’re beaten down. You’re in some cubical with a pile of paper. It’s not “West Wing.” This isn’t sexy stuff. It’s – you know, it’s a tough slog. And then you – you know, once in 20 years you drop into a job that just plays to all strengths, you’re there at the right time, and it’s great for you and your family. And that was that.

Mark Lippert: And I should say the other thing too – and I’ll end on this – is that, you know, you’re also very lucky because you were there at a really good time for the relationship. And, you know, as a Navy guy, I would say you can be the best sailor in the world, but if the sun, and the tide, and boat are all working against you, your seamanship only goes so far. (Laughs.) And so that was the other thing that was just really lucky. And I’ll stop after this and say it’s just something – we’ve fallen in love with it. We’re back all the time. I think we’re going to go back in early April, with my wife. And it’s just a lot of fun. And it’s – you know, we miss it every day. And don’t necessarily miss, you know, the 18-hour days of being ambassador, getting calls at 2:00 in the night by either Washington or the Blue House or both simultaneously. But I do miss the culture, do miss the people.

Victor Cha: So – please indulge one story with Mark, when he was appointed. And I hope you don’t mind my sharing this story. He called me, and he said: So how do I – Mark said that one of the key reasons they wanted him there was because of his close relationship with the president. And he said to me, like, how do I lower Korean – South Korean expectations that I’ll be able to call President Obama anytime – every time the South Koreans want something? And so, you know, I said – I mentioned a couple of things to him.

Victor Cha: To make a long story short, we – I was invited to his swearing in ceremony at the State Department. And – (laughs) – and so we’re at this swearing in ceremony. And it’s – you know, it’s a small, modest swearing in ceremony. And
while we’re in the middle of this, all of a sudden there’s a lot of commotion down the hallway, like lots of people shuffling, and doors moving, and people – you know, big guys in suits. And who shows up for the confirmation, but President Obama, right? So I said to Mark afterwards, I said: That’s a great way to lower expectation. (Laughter.) Being the president’s appointee in Seoul.

Victor Cha: So, anyway. So we will transition to the next part. Senator Gardner has joined us. So let's transition to the next part. And let me – please thank Mark for our discussion. And we will invite Senator Gardner to the stage. Thank you. (Applause.)

Victor Cha: OK. So it is our pleasure to have Senator Cory Gardner with us. Let me do a proper introduction since we have the cameras rolling. Let me do a proper introduction for you.

Victor Cha: So Senator Gardner is a fifth-generation Coloradan who was born and raised in Yuma, which is a small town in Colorado. He began serving in the Colorado House of Representatives at the age of 30 and was elected the House of Representatives in 2010. He became a senator in 2014 and serves on the Senate Foreign Relations Committee where he is chairman of the Subcommittee on East Asia, the Pacific and International Cybersecurity. As many of you know, Senator Gardner has been instrumental in a lot of the work with regard to new sanctions against North Korea for both nonproliferation and human rights. The North Korea Sanctions Policy and Enhancement Act was signed into law by President Obama in February of 2016. He also coauthored the Asia Reassurance Initiative Act, or ARIA, with Senator Markey of Massachusetts, which is a landmark piece of legislation signed into law by President Trump, which establishes a multifaceted U.S. strategy to increase U.S. security, economic interests and values in the Indo-Asia Pacific, authorizing $1.5 billion in spending for a range of U.S. programs in the region.

Victor Cha: So, ladies and gentlemen, I really can’t think of anyone today who has been more of a leader and made more of a difference on Asia policy and strategy than Senator Gardner. And so with this, I hope you will give him a warm welcome to CSIS. (Applause.)

Victor Cha: Thanks, Cory.

Sen Cory Gardner: That was terrific. Thank you. Well, good afternoon. And thank you very much, Victor, for that kind introduction.

Sen Cory Gardner: Thank you, Ambassador Lippert, for your service and sacrifice.

Sen Cory Gardner: You know, when we think about the work that our ambassadors do, no one exemplifies the both hard work that you face, the challenges, but also the dangers that can come with it. So thank you very much, Ambassador Lippert, for your service, and to all of you.

Sen Cory Gardner: The last time I believe I was at CSIS to give a speech of this note was June 18th, which was – June 18th of last year, immediately following the first summit between President Trump and Kim Jong-un in Singapore. As President Reagan once said, there you go again. Alas, in the aftermath of the second summit in Hanoi just last week, of course, much of what I said then remains true today.
Let’s hope that the next time you host me here that I won’t have to repeat myself a third time with what we are going to talk about today. So I’ll keep my remarks short and brief so that we can get into some questions, but I want to make a few points particularly of interest with Congress as it relates to North Korea policy.

At the outset, I think we should commend the president and the Trump administration for moving beyond what I call press release diplomacy and a genuine attempt to resolve a serious national security issue that has bedeviled multiple administrations, Republicans and Democrats alike. Dealing with Kim Jong-un and the Kim family playbook of mendacity and deception is certainly no easy task, but the team, led by Secretary Pompeo and Special Representative Steve Biegun, deserve much credit for attempting to move the ball forward.

And likewise, the administration, though, was right to walk away from a very potentially – potentially, a very bad deal in Hanoi. But the question remains: Why was such a nonstarter offer made in the first place? Did they believe it was in earnest? Did they believe that President Trump would accept the offer? Did it show a willingness to actually deal?

Trading the Yongbyon complex, even if we could agree on what constitutes the extent of the complex, for the entirety of the international sanctions regime against Pyongyang would have had a disastrous outcome. As Mr. Biegun himself stated in a speech at Stanford University in January, of course the purpose of diplomacy is not more meetings, the purpose of meetings is to produce outcomes and progress.

For the Kim regime, it is a time of choosing: Continue the failed game plan of father and grandfather or open a new chapter of opportunity? And this is where we are unfortunately falling short. But make no mistake about it, the blame for the lack of progress lies squarely with Pyongyang. While there has been no missile or nuclear testing for 15 months, North Korea still remains a nuclear threat to the United States and our allies. This incontrovertible fact was most recently confirmed by the administration’s own 2019 Worldwide Threat Assessment released by the Director of National Intelligence in January. As the DNI also noted, we are not any closer to our objective of denuclearization, stating we continue to observe activity inconsistent with full denuclearization.

In addition, North Korea has for years underscored its commitment to nuclear arms, including through an order in 2018 to mass produce weapons and an earlier law and constitutional change affirming the country’s nuclear status.

Two leader summits later, Pyongyang still has taken no concrete, verifiable and irreversible actions to dismantle even an iota of its vast arsenal of nuclear missile, biological, radiological and chemical weapon programs as required – as required – by U.S. law and numerous United Nations Security Council resolutions. In fact, as CSIS has recently reported, North Korea has instead continued to advance its illicit programs and improving nuclear missile infrastructure during these sensitive diplomatic negotiations.

I think, Victor, you just made comments on that today.

The team uncovered that North Korea has rebuilt and returned to operating status a key launch facility. As your reported stated, the rebuilding activities...
demonstrate how quickly North Korea can easily render reversible any steps taken towards scrapping its WMD program with little hesitation. This poses challenges for the U.S. goal of final, irreversible and verifiable denuclearization.

Sen Cory Gardner: Likewise, last week, the researchers at the private cybersecurity firm McAfee uncovered an 18-month-long campaign of cyberattacks against U.S. and European targets by individuals associated with the North Korean regime, which include efforts to hack into banks, utilities and oil and gas companies. The report specifically highlighted that these attacks were being conducted at the same time as the Hanoi summit. Surely these are not signs of a good-faith effort of a regime interested in negotiating in good faith or negotiating with a shared goal of denuclearization and peaceful coexistence in mind.

Sen Cory Gardner: Let us not forget that the neo-Stalinist regime in Pyongyang remains the world’s leading violator of human rights. In 2014, the United Nations said in a landmark report that the regime is committing genocide against its own people. It is still doing this today. This is a serious problem for Kim Jong-un because, according to U.S. law, progress on human rights is as much a requirement to lifting of sanctions against North Korea as is the complete, verifiable, irreversible denuclearization.

Sen Cory Gardner: We must also never forget that the North Korean regime brutally – brutally – tortured and intentionally murdered U.S. citizen Otto Warmbier. Otto’s blood will forever be on Kim Jong-un’s hands. We will never forget Otto, as I have told his mom and his dad, Cindy and Fred Warmbier.

Sen Cory Gardner: This leads to the fundamental question that we face today: Where do we go? My answer is that we must always remember the goal of any negotiations with Pyongyang must only be to bring the regime into compliance with international and – international and U.S. obligations, no more, no less. That’s our law. It's international law. It’s enshrined by the North Korea Policy Enhancement Act and the Asia Reassurance Initiative Act, both legislative efforts that I led in the Senate, signed into law.

Sen Cory Gardner: Until such time as the regime chooses to comply, we must pursue the policy of maximum pressure, including full sanctions enforcement, robust military posture and regime isolation in coordination with our allies and our partners around the globe. North Korea’s enablers must recognize that destabilizing – the destabilizing effect and proliferation risk that North Korea – a nuclear North Korea possesses. That’s been my main message, both to the administration and especially to our friends in Seoul, who seem especially eager to advance the cause of inter-Korean cooperation without a tangible change in behavior from Pyongyang.

Sen Cory Gardner: We must immediately ramp up the maximum pressure campaign against North Korea. The North Korean Sanctions and Policy Enhancement Act mandates, not simply authorizes, it mandates the continual identification and designation of new entities for sanctions, which unfortunately has slowed for months now. According to research conducted by the Foundation for the Defense of Democracies, since March 31st, 2017 the Trump administration sanctioned 182 persons and entities for North Korea – North Korean sanctions violations. However, since February of 2018 the Treasury Department has issued only 26 new designations.
Sen Cory Gardner: North Korea remains today only the fourth-most-sanctioned country by the United States after Syria, Russia and Iran. We must do better. And we must do better, especially with clear evidence of pervasive sanctions violations with regard to illicit ship-to-ship transfer of sanctioned goods, financial transactions that illegally benefit the regime and North Korea's malicious activities in cyberspace. That's why in the near future I will reintroduce, with Senator Ed Markey, our legislation, called the Leverage to Enhance Effective Diplomacy, or the LEED, Act. The LEED Act would impose a mandatory trade embargo against Pyongyang and impose sanctions against all of those violating that embargo. Among other new provisions to increase pressure on Pyongyang, the strength of the legislation is clear.

Sen Cory Gardner: It's also my sincere hope that we will maintain a robust military deterrent to guard against any future provocations by Pyongyang. The United States should not sacrifice joint military readiness with our allies to appease Kim Jong-un. The reason why these exercises are necessary is because of North Korea's historically hostile behavior and repeated violations of international law. Likewise, removing any U.S. troops from the Korean Peninsula in the near future would be a profound mistake.

Sen Cory Gardner: I sincerely hope that a pathway to a diplomatic resolution remains open, but it is clear that a pathway can only result in one outcome: a historic decision by Kim Jong-un to denuclearize, to abide by international law, and to show respect for the basic human rights of his people. I fear that additional high-level summits without concrete outcomes will only serve to legitimize a two-bit dictator with an economy one-tenth the size of its neighbor in South Korea.

Sen Cory Gardner: In this unsavory but difficult and necessary task, we cannot allow any appearance of moral equivalency between a brutal dictatorship and free societies that seek to stop their abuses and change their behavior. We should not have a significant difference in our approach toward the mullahs in Tehran or the Maduro regime in Venezuela to the way we approach a 34-year-old hereditary dictator for life of one of the world's most repressive states north of the 38th parallel.

Sen Cory Gardner: There can be no normalization without denuclearization for North Korea, full stop. And we should all unite behind this common-sense goal.

Sen Cory Gardner: Victor, CSIS, thank you very much for the opportunity to be here. (Applause.)

Mark Lippert: All right. Well, thanks, Senator. Thanks for a really comprehensive speech that really touched all the issues and took all my questions. (Laughter.)

Mark Lippert: So I should say by way of introduction just first of all thank you for your service on Capitol Hill. In an era of sometimes partisan fighting, you've been a real bipartisan leader on Asia policy and really politics writ large.

Mark Lippert: And second I should say we actually worked together as staffers.

Sen Cory Gardner: Yeah.

Mark Lippert: And talk about – you talked about dangerous duty; we overlapped as staffers. And I still remember when you called me in the hospital when I was attacked, and you were really one of the first people who called me. And I said, wait,
that's Senator Allard's former legislative director. He's a senator now. I'm in the hospital. How is this working out for me?

Sen Cory Gardner: Oh my God, what is he doing? (Laughter.)

Mark Lippert: But congratulations on a – on a – really a terrific run.

Mark Lippert: And maybe just to get into the questions, you know, if you held a hearing today on this issue and called Mr. Biegun up, called Secretary Pompeo up, what would you ask the administration? What would you advise them? And what do you think other members of your committee might say on this issue?

Sen Cory Gardner: Yeah. I think, you know, where are we today that we weren't two years ago or three years ago, four years ago? Are we in a better place? Why would Kim Jong-un make the offer that he did? Did we not make it clear that unconditional concrete action was the only way forward?

Sen Cory Gardner: Again, you know, this move beyond press-release diplomacy is important. No doubt about that. But the fundamental misunderstanding of the Kim regime to think that an offer of, you know, a portion of a part of or all of Yongbyon would be enough for complete relief is simply not a starter. And so, you know, did we have a different expectation? What went wrong? Why did they think we'd accept it?

Mark Lippert: Got you. And what do you think they would say at this point?

Sen Cory Gardner: You know, I think they would say, hey, you know, the president's committed to the denuclearization. They went in with good faith, clear that perhaps some of the staff beneath Kim has a different idea or trajectory or conversation than Kim coming forward and doing whatever he wants despite any ground that may have been laid. I think that is a challenge. But you know, I think they recognize now – I hope they recognize now that this regime is awful stubborn in the status quo.

Mark Lippert: Got you. And so while the administration sorts out what its next moves are, what do you think Congress should be doing here? You know, you – as Victor outlined, you've been deep into the legislation, deeply involved in passing legislation on North Korea. You guys have been advocates of certain positions on the Hill. Obviously, you've been in touch with Otto Warmbier's family and human rights issues writ large. What role can the Congress play in this environment?

Sen Cory Gardner: Yeah, that's a great – that's a great question. I think – I remember when I first took over the chairmanship of the East Asia Subcommittee. I was – I labeled Kim Jong-un the forgotten maniac because it seemed like Congress had just – you know, attention was drawn hourly to the Middle East, and rightfully so, but there was no, you know, bandwidth left to address the person who was actually launching ballistic missiles. And so we were able to change the attention off of that to get to a point where we had the North Korea Sanctions Policy Enhancement Act, the first time ever Congress enacted mandatory sanctions on North Korea and its enablers.

Sen Cory Gardner: And so what Congress needs to do now is ramp up the pressure, make sure that maximum pressure is real, because there is no doubt – no doubt – that as a
result of the two summits pressure has been released. And you can see it in the open-source reports of ship-to-ship transfers. You can see it in the terms of commerce numbers that we see. And so that pressure needs to be put back in place. And we need to not only stand up to North Korea; we need to stand up to its enablers and start putting financial sanctions in place. And those who access the financial system to enable North Korea, we need to make sure later on as we look at the progress that we made on North Korean workers that are propping up the Kim Jong-un regime in China and Russia, that that is indeed fulfilled, those remittances are no longer a part of this, and that we stand up for human rights as we know we must – that we have a shaming of the violations in sometimes Chinese territorial waters of ship-to-ship transfers and we continue that effort.

Sen Cory Gardner: I believe we ought to pass the LEED Act. This is a full-on trade embargo. It would be the toughest measure Congress has ever taken. But, you know, strength is something Kim Jong-un responds to, and strength is something the United States is really good at.

Mark Lippert: Got you. And you touched on this; take a slightly different tack. You touched on it in your opening comments, you mentioned it just a second ago, on human rights. Congress traditionally has been a leader on human rights, you know, really was instrumental in creating the Bureau of Human Rights at the State Department and many other human rights initiatives. Where are we on this issue in the negotiations? Where is this heading? How important is this to you in terms of where we go vis-à-vis denuclearization?

Sen Cory Gardner: You know, I think it has to be clear that we do talk all the time, and rightfully so, about CVID, you know, complete denuclearization, but you know, not in the next sentence but in the same sentence is human rights and the requirement of the law to address human rights. I know that it was brought up at the summit in conversations we've had with the State Department. That is something that took place. Obviously, we need more attention being paid to human rights and North Korea, and an understanding that they go hand in hand, denuclearization and human rights. And then – but Congress can step up and do more.

Sen Cory Gardner: One of the ways we have done that, the Asia Reassurance Initiative that Victor talked about, passed. It has a very strong sort of third pillar on human rights, democracy, and rule of law. It highlights some of the violations of human rights. And of course, it provides additional funding for our efforts as it relates to civil society and helping gain the awareness of people through different outreach efforts by the United States, whether that’s Voice of America, Radio Free Asia, other things that we can be focusing on.

Mark Lippert: Got you. Well, thanks. Great answer, Senator.

Mark Lippert: And let me just pivot to another issue you again mentioned a little bit in your opening comments, the alliance with South Korea. And, you know, there's been a lot of concern in the town about U.S. troop presence and what people say alliance equities on the negotiating table, especially after the military exercise issue in Singapore. Can you talk a little bit about how your subcommittee views that, how you view that, and how the Congress writ large views those?

Sen Cory Gardner: Look, I think as we have reiterated through multiple pieces of legislation, the decisions as it relates to North Korea, you know, obviously, South Korea and the
United States and the alliance – the strength of this alliance is foremost and critical. The alliance – the decisions we make, the choices we pursue go through the alliance. And I think the alliance is strong. The alliance can always be stronger. We can always work to do a better job. But I think making decisions and choices and actions through the alliance remains the paramount goal.

Sen Cory Gardner: And I think, you know, as it relates to Japan, Korea, and the United States, that relationship is absolutely critical. The three nations and the equities involved by all three can, I think, really provide the leadership that is necessary as we address what is this major concern. I mean, the tragedy of – the people of North Korea face, the opportunities that have been shut off because of Kim Jong-un's decisions, the risk of proliferation throughout the region, all of these need to be addressed. And they can only be addressed by a strong U.S.-Korea, Korea-U.S. alliance, and the relationship between the U.S., Japan, and Korea.

Mark Lippert: No, makes sense. And I'm getting the five-minute sign from your staff here, and both of us being former staffers know how important staff are in keeping members on track and on time. So just let me ask you, you touched on it a little bit on your broader piece of legislation, and perhaps ask you to talk a little bit about how North Korea – the North Korea problem fits into the broader Asia-Pacific strategy as you see it on Capitol Hill.

Sen Cory Gardner: Yeah, that's right. And I do want to say on the broader legislation, ARIA, really to have this kind of legislation move with the strong bipartisan support we had for it really does show the strength of the U.S. Congress when it acts together. You know, we had three different pillars in this legislation: a security pillar; an economic pillar; rule of law, democracy, and human rights as we talked about; $10 billion worth of authorizations over five years. Senator Markey, Senator Kaine, Senator Coons, Senator Cardin, all a part of this, along with Graham and Rubio on the Republican side. And it shows that major legislation can still be done in a bipartisan fashion that can transform our relationship in an area of the world that has 50 percent global GDP, 50 percent global population.

Sen Cory Gardner: That being said, within this, of course, is the acknowledgement we have to our treaty and compact allies of the work that we can be doing on counterterrorism; maritime domain awareness, South China Sea concerns; the relationship between the United States and Taiwan, the relationship between Taiwan and the broader community of nations, and how we can proceed with that. The reiteration of our approach to denuclearization in ARIA as it relates to North Korea, proliferation concerns in ARIA as it relates to the region. So I think providing a solution and finding that solution in North Korea would really – is the goal of ARIA through its sort of economic and security opportunities.

Sen Cory Gardner: You know, the opportunities the people of North Korea have are so significant, so significant if – if – they are able to break away from the tyrannous leadership that they have now. It wasn't that long ago – we've talked about it many times – that South Korea was not as – the opportunities in South Korea weren't as great as they were to the north. But I mean, anybody – gosh, how that has changed today. And anybody would look at this opportunity and say how can we help the people of North Korea overcome, clearly, what doesn't represent their best interests.

Mark Lippert: Well, let me – let me get to the final question here because I know you're short on time. And it dovetails a little bit with what you said about South Korea,
South Korean politics, but I want to bring it home in that I always get the question from South Koreans how this issue plays in domestic politics. So I’m wondering how this plays among your constituents in Colorado. And does this issue break through? Is this a domestic political issue? Question mark.

Sen Cory Gardner: Right. Oh, it is. I can tell you, I mean, when missiles were flying, everyone was talking about it, and people knew exactly what was happening. And they were concerned when there was, you know, rhetoric of “fire and fury” or this or that. I mean, everybody was engaged and in tune with what was happening. And they still know now that we face a significant threat in North Korea. And I go home and people talk, what do you think is going to happen in Singapore? What do you think is going to happen in Hanoi? What happens now?

Sen Cory Gardner: So this is not one of those issues that the American people have tuned out or tuned off. They very much have paid attention to this issue. And why have they paid attention to it? Because there is a rogue leader in North Korea who has said he will use a nuclear weapon against the United States.

Mark Lippert: And that has sharpened –

Sen Cory Gardner: That has sharpened and pretty clear. And that is why we have to not just get this halfway right, but we get this solved once and for all.

Mark Lippert: Well, on that note, let me just thank you. And also I was remiss in the introduction, especially in terms of Colorado politics, in saying that you were endorsed by John Elway I saw.

Sen Cory Gardner: (Laughs.) That's right.

Mark Lippert: So, you know, that’s – as a Stanford guy that’s a high honor, so.

Sen Cory Gardner: Yeah, the closest I’ll ever be to being a professional football player. (Laughter.)

Mark Lippert: Exactly. But thanks again. Thanks for your leadership. Thanks for coming and spending some time with us at CSIS. And thanks for the personal touch you showed me when I was on hard times.

Sen Cory Gardner: Thanks, Ambassador. Thank you for your leadership.

Mark Lippert: Thank you, Senator. Appreciate it.

Sen Cory Gardner: Thank you.

Mark Lippert: Thanks. (Applause.)

(END)