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TRANSCRIPT

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“Navigating Geostrategic Flux in Asia: The United States and Korea”

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SPEAKER

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National Security Advisor (2018-2019) and U.S. Ambassador to the United Nations (2005-2006)

INTRODUCTION

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John J. Hamre:

Good morning, everybody. My name is John Hamre and I want to welcome you, but I first want to thank Seok-hyun Hong for a very strong and courageous speech. I mean, that – my American friends will not have understood the strength and the importance of what he said, so go back and take a read at it again. Very important what he shared with us today.

We're very proud to welcome all of you. This is, I think, our 10th JoongAng Ilbo-CSIS conference. We normally do these in Seoul, but this time we thought it was timely to be in Washington. And I guess – I think all of the cameras here are probably evidence of that. We're very grateful that you could all be here.

My role today is limited. Let me just first say I want to say thank you to our ambassadors who are here. Kathy Stephens and Mark Lippert are on the program. And Sandy Vershbow, I'm so glad to have a chance that you would come. Sandy so ably served, ambassador, when he was there, and grateful to have you here.

We're very, very fortunate that John Bolton is going to initiate this conference. You know, many times keynote speakers are rather ornamental. That's not the case today. He's going to be – give us a very deep and substantive discussion, and Victor Cha is going to engage him in a Q&A that will bring out even more of the content of his intellect, as he's been thinking about these issues. He has a remarkable career, having of course been the national security adviser, ambassador to the U.N., undersecretary, a long and very distinguished career.

If you were to give a label, however, to him, you would have to say he's an energetic patriot. This is a man who believes strongly in the fundamental civic values of American democracy, and he's spent his entire career championing that. We're going to hear some of that today as he helps us think through one of the most complicated and challenging questions that we now face. So I would ask you, with your very sincere and warm applause, welcome to the stage the honorable John Bolton.

John R. Bolton:

Well, thank you very much, John. I appreciate the kind words of introduction. And I want to thank the Center for Strategic and International Studies and JoongAng Ilbo, the host of today's forum, for their invitation to speak. I think this is the 9th or 10th such forum, and it's a great opportunity, very timely, to discuss a lot of critical issues. And I also want to congratulate CSIS and John and Victor Cha for the – this is also the 10th anniversary of the Korea Chair at CSIS. And so it marks a decade of contributions that the chair's nonpartisan, objective research has made to the public policy debate on Korean issues that are so important to the American people and to the Korean people. It's really been a significant accomplishment for Victor, and John, and all of CSIS.

I am delighted to be here today. I'm also sure the leadership of North Korea is delighted that I'm here today in a private capacity. At least, that's what I've read. Perhaps they'll be a little less delighted now that I can speak in unvarnished terms about the grave and growing threat that the North Korean nuclear weapons program poses to international peace and security. Let's start

with a couple of what I think the main precepts of dealing with the North Korean nuclear weapons threat are.

First, it remains unacceptable for North Korea to have deliverable nuclear weapons. Now, by the word “unacceptable” I don’t mean some rhetorical flourish by a politician. I mean that our policy should be that we do not accept it, we will not accept it. Second, it seems to me clear that the DPRK has not made a strategic decision to give up its nuclear weapons. In fact, I think the contrary is true. I think the strategic decision that Kim Jong-un is operating through is that he will do whatever he can to keep a deliverable nuclear weapons capability and to develop and enhance it further. He may try to get relief from international sanctions, he may make some concessions, but under current circumstances he will never give up the nuclear weapons voluntarily.

Now, this is, if you will permit a personal observation, this question of whether there is a strategic decision to give up nuclear weapons is what the Libya model of 2003 and 2004 properly understood actually means. At that period we saw Moammar Gadhafi make an unambiguous decision that he and Libya would be better off without developing nuclear weapons. He came to that decision for a variety of reasons – because of the overthrow of Saddam Hussein by a U.S.-led coalition, the subsequent capture of Saddam Hussein, and the seizure of the ship the BBC China and its delivery of nuclear components – uranium enrichment components – manufactured by the A.Q. Khan proliferation network that told him that we knew what he was up to. And at that point, he made the clear decision that he was going to give up nuclear weapons.

We have seen not only nothing like that from North Korea, as I say, we have seen the opposite. And I think it’s important to understand that the current North Korean moratorium on testing of nuclear weapons and testing of ICBM(s) – intercontinental-range ballistic missiles – tells us nothing about either North Korea’s intention or its strategy as it’s playing out. One reason – one very good, very troubling reason why there’s no more testing of nuclear weapons for the moment or of long-range missiles is that North Korea has, in its judgement, for well or ill, finished testing and can produce nuclear warheads and long-range ballistic missiles. That’s not an encouraging sign. That’s a sign to be worried about.

Moreover, the testing of shorter-range ballistic missiles that we’ve seen in recent months doesn’t give us any reason to think that those are not threatening, because the capabilities, the technology, things like maneuverability of close-range or short-range ballistic missiles, by definition, can be adopted to longer-range ballistic missiles, so that indeed the testing that’s going on now is not unthreatening unless, of course, you happen to be in South Korea within range of these missiles, but bodes poorly for the defensive capabilities of Japan and even the United States when you get to the intercontinental range.

Now, in the past we had been very clear what our expectations were of North Korea, both with respect to nuclear weapons and ballistic missile testing. If you look back to U.N. Security Council Resolution 1695, adopted on July the 25th,

2006, and Security Council Resolution 1718, adopted on October the 14th, 2006, after the – in the first instance, 1695, after North Korea broke its moratorium on launched testing of ballistic missiles from the Korean Peninsula, and for 1718 after a nuclear weapons test. The United States and the Security Council were very clear in their response. I know this because I helped write both of those resolutions.

1695 dealt only with missiles. 1718 dealt with both. And I'll quote from 1718 just to remind everybody how clear it was. In operative paragraph two, the unanimous Security Council said, and I quote, "demands that the DPRK not conduct any further nuclear test or launch of a ballistic missile." And in operative paragraph five, the council said that it "decides that the DPRK shall suspend all activities related to its ballistic missile program and, in this context, reestablish its preexisting commitments to a moratorium on missile launching." North Korea today, as we speak, is violating those resolutions.

Now, I say this not because of a theological commitment to U.N. Security Council resolutions. I say it because when the United States, having led the fight to get those resolutions, says, we really don't care, other countries can draw the conclusion that they don't really care about the sanctions contained in those and other resolutions. So when you ask for consistent behavior from others, you have to demonstrate it yourself. And when fail to do that, we open ourselves and our policy to failure.

Now, remember also what it is that caused the concern in 2006 when North Korea broke this moratorium. In 1998 North Korea for the first time launched a ballistic missile that landed in the Pacific Ocean east of Japan, which needless to say got the attention of people in that country. And the moratorium was intended to signify that North Korea was behaving in a more responsible fashion. And yet, the only thing they really gave up was launched testing. Static testing continued, a very important part of missile development.

And all of the evidence we have in the public domain is that North Korea simply shifted its emphasis on launch testing to cooperation with Iran, which was also developing Scud-based missile technology to create delivery systems for nuclear weapons. So that the 1998 Taepodong launch by North Korea and the subsequent enhancement of cooperation with Iran was actually a clear demonstration not of responsible behavior but of the continued aspiration to have deliverable nuclear weapons.

So I think right now we are in a classic standoff with North Korea. They want a piece of something that we should not be prepared to give them. People will say, but, what can be hurt? What can be lost by negotiation? What about partial agreements? Why not have some progress, look for some indication of something that North Korea can do that can allow us to alleviate the sanctions. There are several points, I think, that are important to understand here.

If you believe – and you may not – if you believe it is unacceptable for North Korea to have nuclear weapons, first, for the would-be proliferator, a partial

lifting of sanctions is far more important than it is to the opponent of proliferation to have a partial cessation of a nuclear weapons program. The history, whether it's with respect to North Korea or Iran, is very clear that the economic kick to the proliferator of getting economic benefits and relief from sanctions is far more beneficial than a marginal reduction in the nuclear weapons effort. So from the perspective of the proliferant country, action for action – as the North Koreans call it – is a way to sustain their authoritarian political system, keep their economy going, and yet still have the benefit of the bulk of their ballistic missile and nuclear programs. And there's a world out there that's ready to fall sucker to that kind of argument. Even now we see governments, particularly South Korea, watching North Korea test KN-23 and KN-25 missiles, but providing them food aid because the North Koreans say their harvests have been bad and economic conditions are difficult – not so difficult they can't launch ballistic missiles, but too difficult to buy food for their people. And as I say, there are people who succumb to that line of argument.

Now, this is, I think, something that we can apply, this lesson, both to Iran and North Korea because there's a second common element as well, and that is the element of time. Time for a would-be nuclear weapons state is not a neutral factor. In fact, the more time that goes by almost inevitably benefits the proliferant because it takes time to overcome the complex scientific and technological difficulties inherent in a nuclear weapons program. So when we say, well, we're in no rush for negotiations, we're in no rush for a resolution of this, we're saying to North Korea and Iran: Take your time. Keep going. You've got more time to plan, to test, to produce, to deploy these capabilities. Time works against those who oppose nuclear proliferation, and a relaxed attitude to time is a benefit to the likes of North Korea and Iran.

And then, finally – and this applies specifically to the circumstances on the Korean Peninsula – for about a year and a half, the United States and South Korea have not had what some called “wargames” – we have not had large-scale military training exercises. Now, I'll leave it to the Pentagon to describe exactly what we have been doing, but I think you're all familiar with what I'm talking about. It is inevitable that when exercises are not taking place, readiness can come into question. And a failure to be militarily prepared results in a weakening of structures of deterrence. Now, I'm not going to make any assertions here today about the level of American and South Korean readiness on the peninsula, but someday, whether from the Department of Defense or from congressional investigation, we are going to hear judgments on what military readiness is. And I think that this is something that should be a priority, both for Americans and for South Koreans.

Now, there are other issues here that I don't think are currently adequately addressed in the public debate. Not only should we be concerned with North Korea's own weapons technology, but to the ongoing danger that North Korea will sell nuclear weapons and ballistic missile technology, or actual weapons and missiles themselves, to other aspiring proliferant states. That is a risk of a nuclear-capable North Korea, whether North Korea itself is a threat in its immediate region.

Now, I also believe that there is only one country in the world that can stop nuclear proliferation, and we're in it. We can use help, that's for sure, but if the United States fails in this mission there is no other state or combination of states and no international organization that can be a substitute. If we fail, nuclear proliferation succeeds.

Now, let me just read to you a quotation from Winston Churchill. It's a very pessimistic statement that he made to Parliament in 1935, but I think it applies to American policy over something like 30 years when it comes to North Korea. Churchill said, describing Germany of course – he said, “When the situation was manageable, it was neglected. And now that it is thoroughly out of hand, we apply too late the remedies which then might have affected a cure. There is nothing new in this story. It is as old as the Sibylline books. It falls into that long, dismal catalogue of the fruitlessness of experience and the confirmed unteachability of mankind. Want of foresight, unwillingness to act when action would be simple and effective, lack of clear thinking, confusion of counsel until emergency comes, until self-preservation strikes its jarring gong – these are the features which constitute the endless repetition of history.”

Now, let's hope that Churchill's pessimism is not borne out in the case of North Korea. There are things we should look to and have serious discussions about. One is the possibility, limited though it may be, of regime change in North Korea. Second, we should look at and discuss with China – and we should have done it long ago – aiming toward the reunification of the peninsula under a freely-elected government like that in South Korea. And third, if you believe – and you may not – that it is unacceptable for North Korea to have nuclear weapons, at some point military force has to be an option.

Now, this is, obviously, the most controversial subject, and many people say it's just unimaginable – unimaginable – that you would use military force. So let me quote to you the words of General Joe Dunford, the chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, on his last day, I might say, as chairman. He's done an outstanding job. He said this to the Aspen Institute Seminar in the summer of 2018 on this question of what's unimaginable. General Dunford said, “But as I've told my counterparts, both friend and foe, it is not unimaginable to have military options to respond to North Korea's nuclear capability. What is unimaginable to me is allowing the capability to allow nuclear weapons to land in Denver, Colorado. My job will be to develop military options to make sure that doesn't happen.” I think General Dunford was completely correct.

Now, if you don't like those options, there are others, too, that ensue when North Korea keeps nuclear weapons. The DPRK could become the new A.Q. Khan, the Walmart or the Amazon of deliverable nuclear weapons. Or you could have more nuclear weapons states in Asia, like Japan, like South Korea. So these are questions that need to focus our attention, not can we get another summit with Kim Jong-un or what the state of staff-level negotiations are to achieve a commitment from North Korea it will never honor.

Now, before I close I want to take one minute on the subject of U.S.-Japan-South Korea relations. This is also not a happy subject for discussion of the moment. It's well below the radar screen here in the United States, which is a big mistake for our country in not paying more attention to it.

I am almost without words to describe how distressed I am that these tensions between South Korea and Japan have grown to the point where they currently are. I believe that over the past period of time that American passivity on this point has been a mistake. I'm not saying that the United States should engage in public mediation between the two countries. I think, in fact, that public participation would be a mistake. And I'm not underestimating how serious the issues between South Korea and Japan are. I've heard at length from both sides, and I think I understand well both their logic and their emotions. But I think if the United States does not operate here, we face a very serious deterioration of alliance capabilities at precisely the wrong time.

We see at this point that the hub-and-spoke system of alliances that we've had in the Asia-Pacific region is in need of modification toward a richer, deeper cluster of relations. We've seen efforts at trilaterals with the U.S., Japan, and Australia; with the U.S., Japan, and India. These are all signs of progress. So to see South Korea and Japan moving, in effect, in the opposite direction, from the U.S. point of view is extraordinarily troubling. This is something that, if the other disputes that have ensued in the past few months hadn't made clear, the South Korean decision to suspend the General Security of Military Information Agreement, GSOMIA, has really now brought to an acute point because this has a palpable impact on American ability to coordinate among our various allies. I put this down as something that requires urgent attention by the United States.

Now, all of these concerns – and everything we could say about China's growing international threat militarily, politically, and economically – point to significant risks and dangers in and around Korea. I think there should be better burden-sharing on issues like military base costs, as we're now discussing analogously in the NATO context. But this is not the time for U.S. disengagement or withdrawal. It is a time for more U.S. involvement and leadership on the Korean Peninsula, in Asia, and worldwide – more, not less. Thank you very much.

Victor Cha:

Well, thank you, Ambassador Bolton. That was wonderful. Wonderful remarks on the Korea issue and more broadly about U.S. foreign policy in Asia.

My name is Victor Cha. I'm the Korea chair here at CSIS, professor and vice dean at Georgetown University, and I want to welcome everybody to the CSIS-JoongAng Ilbo Forum. I hope that you all stay with us. I know – I know Ambassador Bolton is the main attraction, but I hope you'll stay with us because we have a great day planned, including two additional keynote remarks by former Foreign Minister Song Min-soon and Undersecretary of Defense John Rood.

My role here is to facilitate a conversation with Ambassador Bolton based on his remarks, as well as ask you some questions from the audience which we've

collected in advance. So, you know, my challenge is that you've answered almost all the questions already that I – that I had in mind, but let me begin where you left off, which is the Japan-Korea relationship. And I guess the question I would have for you initially is, I mean, what specifically should we be doing, then? I mean, what should the – should we be proposing some sort of solution? As you know, for the Koreans it's this whole question, at least immediately, about the whitelist, and for Japan it's being – the termination of the GSOMIA agreement. I mean, is there anything specifically that you would propose on this? And also, as dysfunctional as this relationship has become, who is benefitting from that?

John R. Bolton:

Well, I think actually the answer to the last question is the easiest. I think China and Russia are benefitting from this split. And it's something they can only take delight in, that this effort to try to weave together a more effective South Korean-Japanese-American presence in the region, bringing others in as well – I think the Free and Open Indo-Pacific, for example, has been a major conceptual step forward in American policy under this administration. It's all thrown in severe jeopardy by this split.

Now, part of the problem in the dispute is that it's asymmetric. From the South Korean side, at least in some parts of the political spectrum, the origin of the split is the perceived unfairness in the 1965 treaty, that at least at the time both sides saw as turning a page in history to say, OK, whatever Japan did before, in the 1895 to 1945 period, we're going to resolve, and that's it, and it's finished. That has now been called into question, which obviously causes deep uncertainty about the future of relations in Japan. And I might say it ought to cause everybody here to understand that puts deep uncertainty into any possible Japanese involvement in economic development in North Korea if and when there were ever a successful nuclear deal, because if anybody thinks the Japanese are going to open their checkbook to North Korea after they thought they had solved that problem with South Korea and sat it unstuck, it's not going to happen. That is a – that is a very broad and difficult historical issue to talk about in both countries.

Japan responded with economic retaliation that I think took South Korea by surprised. I think it unnerved South Korea. I don't think they understood the risk that they had undertaken when they challenged the 1965 treaty. And then it deteriorated – it deteriorated further with the suspension – termination of GSOMIA.

So the best I can say at the moment – at least I hope the best I can say – is that they've hit a plateau and things are not deteriorating further. And at this point I'm not sure that the discussions that are going on have any – the bilateral discussions have any prospect of reversing the conflict as it now stands. So I think there's an awful lot of work to do in trying to get this back on track, and I'm not even sure at this point I would know where to begin. And that's something people should be thinking about because the longer the split goes on, that I do have confidence, I can say, weakens all three of us further.

Victor Cha: Thanks. In the very last line of your speech you said that this is not a time for U.S. disengagement from Asia. Do you sense that we are disengaging from Asia?

John R. Bolton: Well, I think there's a risk of it. I think that – I don't want to make this a partisan comment, but I'll just say in our two great political parties one of them has a very vestigial national security wing. You don't hear about the Scoop Jackson Democrats anymore. You don't even hear about the Joe Lieberman Democrats anymore. Within the Republican Party there has always been a residual isolationist component. I would have to be – it pains me to say this, but I would have to say that the strength of that component has been rising recently. And the notion that you could have both major parties with a withdrawn sense of American involvement in the world other than a more slavish devotion to what the U.N. General Assembly does I find very troubling.

Victor Cha: You mentioned in your remarks about exercising and readiness. We are in a period now where the U.S. and South Korea have greatly modified or moderated the level of exercising we're doing on the peninsula. You mentioned it could eventually hurt readiness – maybe it's not happening today, but eventually it will hurt readiness. I guess the question there is, more broadly speaking, do you think that it's a bad policy to be negotiating equities in our alliance for something that I assume you think is not achievable, which is at least the strategic decision by North Korea to pursue denuclearization?

John R. Bolton: Well, I think the U.S. and its allies should be able to walk and chew gum at the same time. I think it's a – it's a high priority for the United States in particular not to let North Korea do as it tries repeatedly to do, to drive a wedge between us and North (sic; South) Korea. Sometimes that's easier for them to do. Sometimes it's harder for them to do. I think it would be better to have an adult conversation on the burden-sharing subject simultaneously with an adult conversation on what we really think Kim Jong-un is going to do. And this is a question, obviously, that divides the body politic in both countries, and you know, we'll see what happens in the next several months. I think on the readiness point, as I say, I'm not making any judgements here myself, but I do think that authoritative voices on this need to be heard. And people need to decide if you're not going to be ready to fight – you know, the slogan of our forces in Korea is "fight tonight." And that's the only slogan that they and the South Koreans can have, given the nature of the threat. If they're not willing to fight tonight I have to ask, for the safety of the Americans, whether they should be there or not. And that's why this question of the effect of the diminution of the exercises, the effect on military readiness seems to be to require authoritative study.

Victor Cha: So when you were last in government during the Bush administration I remember you were quite involved in the creation of the first sort of smart sanctions campaign against North Korea. I think back then we called it defensive measures. You were also involved in the creation of PSI, the Proliferation Security Initiative. I'm curious, when you came back into government this time and you saw the portfolio of U.N. Security Council Resolutions on North Korea,

it was very different from back then we had basically two, right, 1695 and 1718. So my first question is, do you feel like the current sanctions regime against North Korea is more robust than it was when you were last in government? And is that something that the United States should give up and negotiate away? Or is it something that we should hold onto?

John R. Bolton: Yeah. I think since those two initial resolutions each time North Korea has detonated a nuclear device, or done some other form of testing, or taken some other unacceptable action, more sanctions have been imposed. I don't think, frankly, even the way we did it in 1695 and 1718 was right. I think when you impose sanctions incrementally over a long period of time, the country being sanctioned find ways – finds ways to mitigate against the sanctions. I think Iran was expert at that, as was North Korea. I think sanctions to be effective have to be imposed massively and then enforced. And that's something we should learn going forward.

We now have a body of Security Council resolutions and U.S. statutes that make up this web of sanctions. The issue today is, are they being enforced effectively. Same question you can ask with respect to Iran. And the answer is, they're not being enforced effectively. We've seen the development of something that I'm sure occurred in the past, but which was never much the subject of conversation. We now call ship-to-ship transfers. Ships come out of North Korea. They transfer coal or other materials onto other ships, and then take them around the world. Ships coming to North Korea drop off oil onto ships that then take them into port. These ship-to-ship transfers, the same thing is occurring with oil from Iran around the Middle East, take place at sea. They take place sometimes without our knowing about it, because our intelligence capabilities are not 100 percent perfect. And it's a way to evade sanctions that's very troubling.

Now, I think there are steps we can and should take to reduce these ship-to-ship transfers. I think this, in some cases, requires greater cooperation from China and Russia when the ship-to-ship transfers take place in their territorial waters, or very close to them. If you're going to have sanctions, make them effective. And if you're not, then get a different policy.

Victor Cha: OK. You know, I know that you're restricted in terms of talking about things while you were in government, but I just want to ask you –

John R. Bolton: It's a self-imposed restriction.

Victor Cha: It's a self-imposed restriction. I'll just ask you a couple of questions which don't touch specifically on it, but more generally. So when you were –when the U.S. leader and the North Korean leader met in Hanoi, that was about – you were 10 months, I think, into your job as national security advisor.

John R. Bolton: But who's counting?

Victor Cha: Right, who's counting? But you have years, if not decades, of experience on this issue, as you made very clear in your remarks. And so I guess the question I

wanted to ask you is, you know, was the problem in Hanoi that the North Koreans were not giving enough or that they wanted the United States to give too much?

John R. Bolton: Well, I can only speak from my personal point of view, having followed this issue for 30 years. I don't think the North Koreans will ever voluntarily give up enough, because what they have to give up to satisfy me is their entire nuclear structure, and they need to agree to an inspection system that is so robust and so thorough that they could well think that it threatens the stability of their regime. I don't want fake inspections. We've got plenty of those around the world as it is now. We need real verification of any agreement given the untrustworthiness of the North Korean regime since its inception. This is a government that has essentially violated every agreement – every international agreement it has ever made. There is no basis to trust any commitment that that regime makes, absent some fundamental change inside the North Korean system itself.

Victor Cha: And do you think – you mentioned the Libya model in your talk. Do you think that the Libya model is possible with a country like North Korea, that has advanced so far in terms of its program now? I mean, in Libya's case, you know, they had not reached an operational capability or come close to it. I mean, so, you know, I guess the question when you raise the Libya model would be, is that – it may have been feasible before for – is it still feasible today?

John R. Bolton: Well, it's feasible if they conclude that they are better off and safer without this program. If you believe that North Korea has undertaken the development of nuclear weapons, not simply for defensive purposes but because they still believe the North Korean theology that Korea will be reunited under their rule. There's a very good reason for them to have these capabilities. So if that's – if that's the conclusion, then I think you have to look to other methods to do it. And it may be the Libya model is not possible. But what I regard as even worse, in a way, is pretending that you're getting to a resolution of the nuclear issue when you simply allow North Korea still to have a nuclear capability but give it enough economic assistance through direct provision of resources or through the release of sanctions that gives the regime a lifeline it currently doesn't have.

Victor Cha: So in theory you're not against incentives under the right circumstances with North Korea?

John R. Bolton: Yeah, we gave – we gave Libya plenty of incentives after they allowed U.S., U.K., and other international personnel to come in and dismantle the nuclear weapons program, which was very limited as you rightly say. Dismantle it, put it on ships and planes, and take it to Oak Ridge, Tennessee, where the Libyan nuclear weapons program now resides. And, by the way, where there's plenty of room for the North Korean nuclear program too.

Victor Cha: There's space there.

John R. Bolton: There sure is it.

Victor Cha: So then is so-called bromance diplomacy the best way to try to get to that point?

John R. Bolton: I'm not going to comment on that.

Victor Cha: OK. Then –

John R. Bolton: Nice try. Nice try.

Victor Cha: OK. Let me just ask you another, before I go to the questions that we collected from the audience. So you've met Kim Jong-un. What's he like?

John R. Bolton: I'd put it this way, I believe he is thoroughly in charge of the country. I have no doubt. I know when his father died and there were a lot of questions, is he sort of a puppet of his relations, is he controlled by the military, is he controlled by other factions within North Korea? I think it's clear he's in charge. I think it's clear he makes the decisions. And I think he feels very comfortable in this role.

Victor Cha: Right. OK. So in the remaining time, we do have some questions that we've collected from the audience in advance. Just in terms of efficiency of time, we asked all of you by email for some questions. And we have some.

The first comes from our co-host JoongAng Ilbo. And their question is about –

John R. Bolton: I guess I'd better answer this one.

Victor Cha: Yeah, yeah. You mentioned burden sharing in your – in your remarks. And you know, the United States has asked Korea, at least it's reported, to pay \$5 billion in the next SMA Agreement. You were, I believe, asked to deliver that news. What do you think is going to happen if the South Koreans can't meet that number?

John R. Bolton: Well, let me answer in a more general fashion. And this is a – this is an issue that I think has real resonance in the United States. I think – I think there is a feeling that we have carried more the burden than we should have around the world for too long, and that rebalancing what the allocation of particularly financial measures should be is overdue. We have done this before. And I recall vividly in 1990-1991, during the first Bush administration, when Saddam Hussein invaded Kuwait and the United States, first through Desert Shield and then through Desert Storm, pushed the Iraqis out of Kuwait, liberated the country, and we moved on from there.

President Bush 41 decided at a very early stage that the Kuwaitis were going to pay a very substantial part of the liberation of their country. They weren't going to live in fine hotels in London and not bear some share of that cost, and that others should as well. Not just countries in the region, but countries like Japan, countries in Europe, and others. And senior American officials – the vice president, Secretary of State Jim Baker, Secretary of Defense Dick Cheney – were sent around the world to raise money to pay for the liberation of Kuwait.

Now, it was – I remember they felt a little embarrassed by it. It was sort of hard to say, OK, Japan, your share is however many billion it was. They called it the tin cup exercise because, as I say, they were a little embarrassed by it. But I think the record – the historical record will reveal that we made a profit on the first Gulf War – small profit, small profit. We had our costs reimbursed. Some people would say, well, that's just mercenary. Well, I suppose – I suppose it is. But Kuwait's a free country today. And Saudi Arabia was not – was not invaded.

My point is that it's not – it does not – it's not inappropriate to ask for people to pay a fair share of the cost. And in particular now, we are having a debate in the NATO context over appropriate allocation of defense expenditures. And here's it's really – it's very interesting. In 2014, in the prior – in the Obama administration, the NATO countries voluntarily agreed that their target for defense expenditures would be 2 percent of GDP, a target they would all commit to meet by 2024, 10 years later. When the Trump administration came in, that commitment achieved a much higher salience than in the Obama administration. I think all would agree on that. NATO Secretary-General Stoltenberg has reported that, as a result of the pressure that's been applied, aggregate NATO expenditures for defense from January 20, 2017 forward have increased by over \$100 billion. Now, that's ex-the United States. That's a very significant increase, even though many countries still are nowhere close to 2 percent and don't have a path to get to it by 2024.

Implicitly, if we are allowing NATO members not to live up to that commitment while we're spending over 4 percent of our GDP on global defense, we are subsidizing European welfare systems. That's a very hard case to make to the American people. All we're saying to others is: If you believe in your own self-defense, live up to the commitment you voluntarily made.

I remember one European leader at the NATO summit in 2018 said, well, this is – I mean, we were trying to move up, to get closer to 2 percent of GDP, but you know, our economy is growing so fast that it's harder to get there because 2 percent now is a higher nominal currency figure. Now, that's a – and so you've got to cut us some slack. That's a statement that's saying we're doing so well economically we can't afford to defend ourselves. It's not acceptable. It's not acceptable.

So I would say to Korea and Japan I think there will be – there should be a rebalancing. If you're going to negotiate it out, an opening bid of whatever number is an opening bid; see what happens. But don't think it's business as usual.

Victor Cha:

Right. The next question comes from Lindsay Lloyd at the George W. Bush Institute. He asks, to your knowledge, at any time during his three meetings with Kim has President Trump raised the issue of human rights? Maybe you can speak more broadly to the question whether human rights should be a part of our discussion with North Korea.

John R. Bolton:

Yeah, I'll speak more broadly.

Victor Cha: Yeah.

John R. Bolton: Look, I think it is inherent in America's concept of itself that we believe in free people. I think it's a mistake – and it's one reason, just a little footnote on myself here – it's one reason I am not a neoconservative. I don't think it's our job to promote democracy around the world and impose it on other people. But if asked, what is the American response to the question what kind of government should we have going to be, it's not going to be we actually favor monarchy. That's not – that's not how we see things. So of course we talk in terms of our values. It's inevitable. It's one reason why religious freedom is such an important value for us.

So I think it is a – it is a factor. Like all factors in construing what is in America's national interest, what are our vital national security interests, there's no one value that trumps every other value every single time. But I think it's fair to say that the way a country treats its own people tells you something about the leadership of that country. And it was no accident over the past several decades that there was a high correlation between countries that looked for proliferations of weapons of mass destruction, engaged in support for international terrorism, and repressed their own people.

Victor Cha: OK. And then – let me look at the time – the last question, given we're out of time, is from Nick Schiffrin at the – at the PBS NewsHour. And his question is, is the president patient when it comes to getting a deal with North Korea, or is he overanxious? Now, I know that you may not answer that question directly, so let me paraphrase it and ask: You did mention in your remarks that time is usually on the proliferant's side, so when are we out of time when it comes to North Korea?

John R. Bolton: Well, I hope we've still got time left, and that's why I read that Churchill quote. You know, when the – when the danger is perceptible and the costs of acting are low, the failure to act guarantees that the threat will grow and the ultimate cost will be higher. Every day that goes by makes North Korea a more dangerous country. You don't like their behavior today? What do you think it'll be when they have nuclear weapons that can be delivered to American cities? You want to wait till then to act, or do you want to act now?

So when does it become too late? Today is better than tomorrow. Tomorrow's better than the next day.

Victor Cha: Right. Ambassador Bolton, thank you for taking the time and for opening our conference. Please give him a round of applause. I really appreciate it. Thanks.

John R. Bolton: OK. Thank you.

(END)