

Center for Strategic and International Studies

The Impossible State Podcast

“Episode 3: Swinging In The Dark: Eve of the June 12 Summit”

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H. ANDREW SCHWARTZ: All right, so we have the dream team here today. Everybody wants to hear from all three of you. What's going on? We're on the eve of the summit. What's happening here?

MICHAEL J. GREEN: Well, the president is going to meet with the leader of North Korea, Kim Jong-un, which will be theater the likes of which we have never seen before in diplomacy with North Korea. And Dennis Rodman will be in Singapore at the same time, which just adds to the –

MR. SCHWARTZ: Why is Dennis Rodman going to be there?

MR. GREEN: Because this is –

MR. SCHWARTZ: Is he part of the official delegation?

VICTOR CHA: No, he's not. (Laughter.)

MR. GREEN: No. Despite the efforts of the State Department and the Singaporean Foreign Ministry and others, this is not diplomacy in the tradition of Dean Acheson or George Kennan or George Schultz. This is a little more akin to a World Wrestling Federation match. I mean, it really is a lot about the drama. There may be some outcomes. We can talk about that. But it has, in my view, devolved from a negotiation into more of an event.

MR. SCHWARTZ: All right. Well, Dennis Rodman, former NBA player, hall of famer, a.k.a. "The Worm," said yesterday he's going to be there. What does that have to do with this?

MR. CHA: Well, I think in his own mind he thinks he brought these two people together, because as we all remember a few years ago he made numerous trips to North Korea, considered Kim Jong-un one of his best friends. He was the only American that the North Korean leader, then quite a mysterious person, had met, and he had talked about trying to bring the two of them together. And although we – you know, we all know Dennis Rodman is a little bit unusual. He did say back then that he thought these two would get along.

MR. SCHWARTZ: He did.

MR. CHA: We all laughed at the time. But it just goes to show, as Mike said, what a spectacle this is. I don't think the listeners really understand how much of a world media event this is going to be. All of us have been talking to media around town over the last week and everybody is – everybody's going to Singapore and basically going to basically do their core newscasts out of Singapore with the summit as the backdrop as if we were at the Olympics, although this is probably even bigger than the Olympics. NHK is sending 100 reporters.

MR. SCHWARTZ: One hundred.

MR. CHA: One hundred reporters there. And –

MR. SCHWARTZ: NHK, Japanese news stations.

MR. CHA: Japanese news, yeah. So this is – this is going to be a media event – a news media event like one we really haven't seen in – I can't –

MR. SCHWARTZ: All right. So we heard from – yeah, tell us. Sue, tell us about this Dennis Rodman thing.

SUE MI TERRY: No, by the way, I don't think Dennis Rodman going there is necessarily a bad thing because I think he could help break the ice. I don't think he should be sitting in the negotiation room, but maybe he can sit in the dinner and he'll break the ice, because you want to establish a good rapport and chemistry.

MR. CHA: I don't think he's part of the official delegation. (Laughs.) But he may be hanging out in front of the – he may – he probably won't even be able to get on the island.

MR. GREEN: He has a better chance than John Bolton, maybe.

MR. CHA: Yeah. (Laughter.)

MR. SCHWARTZ: What happened with Bolton?

MR. GREEN: Well, the reports are he's not going, which is really unusual for –

MR. SCHWARTZ: So the national security adviser is not going to the biggest negotiation.

MR. GREEN: Well, that's – we'll see. That's the reporting right now. We'll see. I mean, all three of us worked on the NSC staff, and for the president to go into a consequential meeting like this without his national security adviser would be really unusual. But if he's not going, it's because he, John Bolton, said that the North Koreans should follow the Libya model, you know, very quick denuclearization. The North Koreans didn't like that, partly because Gadhafi got killed in the end, and that's why there is speculation and reporting he won't go. But we'll see. It would be pretty amazing if he didn't.

MS. TERRY: Well, it was telling that when Kim Yong-chol, the North Korean official, came to the White House and met with President Trump, John Bolton was not sitting in the office – the Oval, right?

MR. SCHWARTZ: Right.

MS. TERRY: It was just Pompeo and Kim Yong-chol.

MR. CHA: Which is highly unusual. It would be highly unusual for a meeting of that consequence for the national security adviser not to be in the room with the president. That was quite unusual.

MR. SCHWARTZ: Does it hurt our ability to negotiate?

MR. CHA: Personally, I don't think so. I think in any negotiation you need a hardliner. You need someone there to sort of be the backstop against anything. You know, I think all of us worked with Bolton when he was in the government last time, when he was undersecretary and then when he

was U.N. ambassador. I mean, he's a very experienced individual, and I think as an experienced individual he knows if the president wants to do something on the diplomatic side he's not going to stand in the way. But I think where his influence will be most felt is when we get to – if we get to a point of talking about sanctions relief, because that is where an experienced hand such as he, who knows how to operate within the U.S. government, will do everything that he can to prevent the lifting of sanctions, even if there are principals who want it to happen.

MR. SCHWARTZ: Sue, let me ask you about Kim Jong-un. Dennis Rodman thinks he knows Kim Jong-un, John Bolton thinks he knows something about Kim Jong-un, and maybe they both do. What do we know about Kim Jong-un and about how he feels about his people? Is he different than his father or his grandfather? What do – what do we know about this man?

MS. TERRY: Well, I do think there are aspects of Kim Jong-un – I mean, there are differences between Kim Jong-un and his father, Kim Jong-il. Kim Jong-il was a strange man, to be honest. He was introverted. He was not a people person. Kim Jong-un looks more like his grandfather. He acts more like his grandfather.

MR. SCHWARTZ: By design.

MS. TERRY: By design, and by probably temperament and character. He seems more like a people person. He likes to run around. And he's much jovial, much more friendly. When you see him running around the country, he's holding people's – I mean, he shakes people's hands. He hugs people. He's hanging out with, you know, a lot of people, young and old. He's much more warm. When you see his behavior with – just when he met with Xi Jinping twice, President – South Korean President Moon Jae-in a couple times, very friendly, very jovial. So I think just at least, you know, in terms of social chemistry, he might actually get along with President Trump. He's more of a people person than his father, certainly.

MR. CHA: So I think the one big difference is – in addition to what Sue said about the similarities between the grandfather and the grandson, the one big difference between Kim Jong-un and his father was when they took power, all right? Kim Jong-un took power at a very young age, right?

MR. SCHWARTZ: Yeah.

MR. CHA: Say even –

MS. TERRY: Twenty-nine.

MR. CHA: Even, you know, 29 years old. Well, his father took over in 1994 at a much older age. The similarity between Kim Jong-un and his grandfather was that they both took hold of North Korea at a very young age, and therefore, you know, one could argue had a much longer time horizon. In Kim Il-sung's case, he understood it was very important to cultivate relations with the Eastern Bloc, but in particular China and the Soviet Union, despite the fact that China and the Soviet Union were in a decades-long conflict with each other. So he was a master at balancing the two of them.

Kim Jong-un – and this would be the strongest argument. I'm not saying I agree with it, but the strongest argument for whether he's really different and wants change this time in Singapore is a guy who's 30-something years old and he wants to rule for another 50 years.

MR. SCHWARTZ: Right.

MR. CHA: Right? And so maybe, when he looks down the road and he sees 10 U.N. Security Council resolutions, maximum pressure 2.0 like right around the corner in terms of sanctions, maybe he's seeing that he cannot – he will not be able to rule for 50 years under those conditions, and maybe that's why he's coming to the table.

MR. SCHWARTZ: Victor, let me ask you this: In your view, does Kim Jong-un care about his people?

MR. CHA: I think he cares about his people in the sense that he cares about the elite in Pyongyang, I think. But outside of Pyongyang, I mean, there's no indication thus far that he does. I mean, he spends money on building ski resorts and other sorts of things, and apparently wants a casino built in North Korea as one of the deliverables of this summit. But, you know, the human rights situation in North Korea is hopefully well-known to a lot of people: hundreds of thousands of people in gulags, a generation of children that have been malnourished and stunted, and mentally incapacitated as a result of that.

MS. TERRY: But to Victor's earlier point, I do think he wants to be – appear to be a modern leader of a modern nation. He wants to look normal, and he want(s) legitimacy and acceptance by the world. And I do think he's – he doesn't want to rule a poor, pariah, backwards state for the next 30-40 years; that he does care to that degree, that he just wants to, you know, be a modern leader of a modern country. But can he really take this country to another level? I think that's the question, whether he can truly transform this country.

MR. SCHWARTZ: Mike, what do you think Kim Jong-un wants out of this negotiation and out of future negotiations with the United States?

MR. GREEN: He has already achieved two big things he wants. Number one, recognition as a de facto North Korean weapons state. This has been a goal of the North Koreans for two decades. In negotiations I was in in Pyongyang in 2002 and the six-party talks and elsewhere, the North Koreans said that the American president had to meet with their leader to prove we did not have a hostile policy, and he's achieved that by meeting with the president. He's opened up summits with everyone – the foreign minister of Singapore, the Chinese, two with Moon Jae-in, the Russians; even reportedly Assad of Syria is going. So –

MR. SCHWARTZ: He is being recognized on the world stage as somebody who we – people want to deal with.

MR. GREEN: He defied the United Nations, multiple security sanctions – Security Council sanctions resolutions, defied the United Nations and the world's most powerful country, the United States; tested banned missiles and nuclear weapons; and the entire world leadership is coming to him. That's a huge coup.

The other thing he wants is relief from sanctions. And I am sure the North Koreans knew what when they tested their Hwasong-15, their ICBM, and their next nuclear test, I'm sure they knew they'd be heavily sanctioned. And I'm – and I'm quite certain they had a plan to get out of it, and the plan was a peace offensive, a charm offensive. And it's working because the president of the United States himself has said we're not using maximum pressure anymore. The Chinese, who account for 90

percent of North Korea's trade, are already backing off on sanctions. So even if this summit doesn't deliver for the U.S. sanctions relief, he's already achieved significant relief from pressure. So that's two big goals.

The president, Donald Trump, goes into this having achieved nothing diplomatically, but he has achieved some political goals. I mean, I think the whole world's paying attention to him, and that's a bit of a political goal.

I think the South Korean president, Moon Jae-in, has achieved his most important goal for now, which is getting the Americans away from talking about a military strike.

The country that's most despondent right now is Japan, which sees no upside in any of this, and a real potential they get isolated and that U.S. alliances start unraveling because of a – of a declaration of peace in this summit and no actual reduction of the threat.

But of all the people involved in this, Kim Jong-un is the only one who's put two points on the scoreboard already just by having the meeting.

MR. CHA: And then even – I mean, if you think about this, you know, as long as the meeting is not a total disaster, like a complete flameout, what's going to come next? Well, in the fall he'll probably be invited to the U.N. General Assembly, right?

MR. GREEN: Yeah.

MR. CHA: There's already been rumors that if the meeting goes well Trump wants to invite him to Mar-a-Lago, right? I mean, just – it just rolls on and on. And again, to Mike's point, 10 U.N. Security Council resolutions designated against this one country, right, and they are at a point where they are the toast of the town, right?

MR. SCHWARTZ: Yes.

MR. CHA: Everybody is trying to seek a meeting with them. You know, Lavrov came to try to get a meeting for Putin. I mean, it's just – it's just – it's amazing.

MR. SCHWARTZ: Suddenly he is the most popular figure on the world stage.

MS. TERRY: Kim Jong-un has already gained international acceptance as a nuclear power. He has legitimized his role. I think so much better off right now than where he was last November/December, right, in 2017. With all this summitry and diplomacy also, as Mike talked about, political will to implement sanctions is gone. China – there's already reports that China is not really implementing sanctions anymore. We have reports that North Korean seafood is showing up in the areas – in Chinese part – China's part. We have reports of surface to surface-ship transfer of fuel. So it's already political will to implement sanctions is, I think, weakened. And we have inter-Korea projects which is going to continue. Not the South Korean president is going to find ways to violate U.N. sanctions, but outside of that I think they are going – they are going to continue with the inter-Korea projects. And so I think Kim Jong-un is far better off right now than where he was a few months ago.

MR. GREEN: So if we get an – if we get an outcome, if – and we can talk about what that might look like – it's very unlikely, but if we get an actual measurable and verifiable significant step towards eliminating part of his nuclear weapons threat or missiles, then maybe this will all have been worth it. But if we get nothing, the net outcome of this summit will be that we are in a significantly weaker position to deal with the North Korean threat.

I think we partly got here because the president started off threatening war. And Moon Jae-in of South Korea and the Chinese were so desperate – desperate – to get us out of that that they were doing whatever it took to get this summit. Now, by doing whatever it takes – doing whatever it takes to get this summit, the president has sort of enabled that. It doesn't mean he can't get an outcome. We'll see. But he's going into this having already given North Korea points on the – on the scoreboard.

MR. SCHWARTZ: OK. So let's table the outcome for a second. Have we given Kim Jong-un too much? Because you guys just said we've given a lot. Have we given him too much?

MR. GREEN: Yes.

MR. CHA: Yeah. I mean, I think we have. (Laughs.)

MR. SCHWARTZ: So it's a yes for Mike, a yes for Victor. Sue?

MS. TERRY: Well, it's not that we have necessarily given him too much. We have just agreed to a summit. I think Kim Jong-un himself also played this very well. So we have to give him – give Kim Jong-un some credit because his own strategy and tactics have worked.

MR. CHA: Well, I think, I mean, we've given him a meeting, right? We delayed military exercises.

MR. SCHWARTZ: Right.

MR. CHA: Right? We have now said that we're not doing maximum pressure anymore. We've also said – the president said he's not interested in the Libya model. So, you know, all of our – I mean, usually you walk into a negotiating – negotiation with your starting positions, you know, so high, and we have already lowered our starting position and our negotiation objectives before we've even walked into the room. And I think that speaks to the fact that what has been driving the president has been the meeting itself more than the actual objectives or the deliverables. And that's – you know, that's quite concerning.

MR. GREEN: You know, I think the odds are very long. It's very unlikely that we'll get something that those of us who follow this would say counts as real denuclearization. I think we'll have very vague statements and declarations. And I think next act matters a lot. The president's not going to pay attention to the details. What happens next when Pompeo's in charge?

MR. SCHWARTZ: Wait, he's not going to pay attention to the details, what do you mean?

MR. GREEN: I don't think so. I don't think – I don't think –

MR. SCHWARTZ: He's a pretty sure negotiator.

MR. GREEN: Maybe in a different context.

MR. SCHWARTZ: OK.

MR. GREEN: And maybe we'll see that that's the case. I don't see Kim Jong-un bringing out schemata of his nuclear facilities and talking about how to dismantle them. I don't see Donald Trump doing that. I think it's going to be more about the atmospheric and sort of broad principles. And then I'm see it's very likely it then reverts to Pompeo and negotiators to try to put meat on the bones. And –

MR. SCHWARTZ: Secretary of State Mike Pompeo –

MR. GREEN: That's right.

MR. SCHWARTZ: – and his team to then go back with who? With North Korean counterparts? With Kim Yong-chol?

MS. TERRY: Kim Yong-chol.

MR. GREEN: Well, with – that's right. That's right. And then start saying, OK, you agreed to denuclearization, or you agreed to peace. We need you to – for example, one of the first things they would ask for is a declaration. Tell us what you've got. We don't – they've never confessed what they have. We have a pretty good idea, but where are your facilities? What have you got? What uranium enrichment missiles? And what are the verification procedures? How would we go about denuclearizing? I mean, they'll try to get some documentation to begin the process to follow up on any commitment.

MR. SCHWARTZ: Documentation of what they have in their nuclear arsenal?

MR. GREEN: What they have, and some sort of terms of reference, verification protocol it's called, for how we'd inspect it. And, you know, something on paper.

MR. SCHWARTZ: OK. So we have goals.

MR. CHA: Well, so what has –

MR. GREEN: Well –

MR. CHA: Well, we – but what has leaked out –

MR. SCHWARTZ: We don't have goals?

MR. CHA: What has leaked out –

MR. GREEN: I think the U.S. government has goals.

MR. CHA: Yes, the U.S. government. What has leaked out of the White House this week has been what we want – what Trump wants out of the meeting with Kim is a commitment to denuclearization along a compressed timeline, right? A concrete, compressed timeline.

MR. SCHWARTZ: OK.

MR. CHA: And that would – and then a declaration and then verification, as Mike just described. That’s a high bar, right?

MR. SCHWARTZ: Right, because you’re asking Kim Jong-un to declare that he’s going to get rid of his nuclear weapons, and then get rid of them, and allow us to verify that he’s gotten –

MR. GREEN: Well, the declaration isn’t – the declaration, to be clear, is not saying I’ll declare I’ll get rid of nuclear weapons, because he’s already said that. It doesn’t mean anything. But the declaration is the piece of paper, the documenting –

MS. TERRY: Listing all your –

MR. GREEN: – listing what you have, how you’re going to get rid of it.

MR. SCHWARTZ: I see.

MR. GREEN: You know, the first step in a 12-step program is confessing what you got.

MR. SCHWARTZ: How would we be able to verify the list?

MR. GREEN: Well, we wouldn’t, but we’ve never even gotten the list before in negotiations.

MR. SCHWARTZ: So that would be something.

MR. GREEN: It would be something. And I don’t think we’ll get it, because I think it’s – you know, Donald Trump will go in and say, perhaps I want you to do this during my term. And Kim Jong-un might say, OK, we’ll denuclearize in your term, if you end your hostile policy – by which the North Koreans mean pulling troops out, ending sanctions. So the reason I mention the next step is because we won’t know. It will be very, very vague, probably. And then when Secretary of State Pompeo sits down with this team and tries to get, you know, some fine print, I suspect at that point we’ll see we got nothing – but we’ll see.

MS. TERRY: I – yeah.

MR. CHA: And it’s not – there’s nothing wrong with – I mean, we’re saying it’s difficult to get those. There’s nothing wrong with asking for it. I mean, we should go in –

MR. GREEN: Yeah, of course.

MR. CHA: – and be asking for these things, and in particular asking for this complete, full declaration that they would then to commit to being verified by the IAEA, the International Atomic Energy Agency, or some body. The thing that you worry about is that he falls short of that, we fall short of that, but the president desperately wants this to be a success and he accepts something that’s a vague promise of some sort while putting a lot of things on the table, right, to give to the North Koreans in return for that.

MR. SCHWARTZ: So let's talk about that. What are some of the things he would put on the table?

MS. TERRY: Well, he could put peace treaty on the table.

MR. SCHWARTZ: OK.

MS. TERRY: This is what North Koreans really want. And President Trump already talked about peace treaty in some form. He also talked about troop presence in some form. So he could agree to a peace treaty. I don't think North Korea is going to ask for troop reduction or troop withdrawal, because they don't have to say those words. All they have to do is get a peace treaty, and then eventually peace treaty would just naturally undermine rationale for our troop presence in South Korea. So North Koreans don't have to bring that up. They are smart enough to know it will natural come up down the road, as long as they – if they could just get a peace treaty from the United States.

MR. CHA: And the problem is, is that the harder it becomes to get what we talked about, the concrete deliverables on denuclearization, the more, I think, that the president's going to gravitate towards the peace treaty as the success of the summit, right? And then that sets off the dynamic that Sue was just talking about. We don't need to talk about troop withdrawal. Just mentioning that itself will mean, one, the Chinese are not going to go back to maximum pressure. And, two, the South Koreans – the progressive South Korean government are then going to leap five steps ahead to consolidate inter-Korean engagement. Japan, our key ally in Asia, will be marginalized and isolated, right? And the Chinese will be happy because we're not talking about bloody nose, or 2017, or war, or maximum pressure sanctions. So, you know, who is better off at the end of this?

MR. GREEN: So to recap, Kim Jong-un goes into this wanting recognition as a nuclear power, and he's getting it because of all the summits. Number two, he wants sanctions relief, and he's basically getting it because the Chinese are now backing off because of this and that's 90 percent of his trade. Number three, if he can get it, the other thing that he faces is American alliances and military pressure. And declaring a peace treaty creates the political conditions for everything Victor said. Why do you need missile defense in Korea? We have a peace treaty. Why do you need military exercises? Already the North Koreans are saying based on the North-South peace declaration the Japanese and Koreans should not be cooperating militarily. So the third thing he will want he may well get, we don't know yet, which is weakening the military pressure.

What is he putting on the –

MR. SCHWARTZ: Weakening what military pressure?

MR. GREEN: Missile defense deployments, military exercises, intelligence sharing.

MR. SCHWARTZ: United States missile defense deployments.

MR. GREEN: Yeah, in Korea, which are controversial and the left in South Korea doesn't like them, and this will give them an excuse to say no. So all the things we have been putting in place to defend ourselves against these new North Korean missiles –

MR. SCHWARTZ: And to protect our allies.

MR. GREEN: – to deter and protect our allies and be able to retaliate if they threaten us, all those now are up in the air, if the president makes the deliverable a peace treaty. Now, if the North Koreans actually gave up missiles, opened up facilities, then maybe you'd argue it's worth it. But I think what a lot of us are worried about is the president's interest in the peace treaty part actually gives the North Koreans three big things they want. And what they get in terms of the actual reduction of the threat is nothing. If it goes there. I'm not sure if it will.

MR. SCHWARTZ: So what should – what should we want in terms of an outcome?

MR. GREEN: Well, I think – I think a reasonable first step would be a declaration. In other words, the North Koreans do what they have not done in any of the previous negotiations. They say, here's what we have in uranium enrichment, missiles, nuclear weapons. And we're –

MS. TERRY: Chemical and biological.

MR. GREEN: Chemical and biological. And we're prepared to talk about the price for dismantling. We may not like the price. We may not be able to get there. But at least that's something they have not been prepared to do before, is to say what they've got.

MR. SCHWARTZ: They've never thrown out a price before for dismantling either.

MR. GREEN: They've thrown a lot of prices around, they just haven't shown us the menu.

MR. SCHWARTZ: OK.

MS. TERRY: And if we can agree on, in the beginning, the initial steps of timeline, of when the verification regime would actually begin, so we can have the first beginning of the U.S. – of the Americans or the folks who are going to verify go into North Korea. That should be at least within short period of time. Even if the verification process itself take years, at least we begin that process early.

MR. GREEN: That would be –

MR. SCHWARTZ: No matter what, it would take years, correct?

MR. GREEN: Yeah, that's right.

MS. TERRY: Absolutely.

MR. GREEN: That would not mean that they're going to denuclearize, but it would at least – it would be a first date. It would be something. It would be – you know, it would show intent that we haven't seen before. I think our chances of getting that are lower now because our posture towards the talks has been, as Victor said, to lower the demands. So I don't see why North Korea would give that to us, although they might. It's possible Kim Jong-un wants to do something a bit more dramatic, because of what Victor said. He's looking at 50 years and maybe he needs to set the conditions better. Unlikely, but possible. But if we got that, then we'd know maybe all this was worth it.

MS. TERRY: I actually really think that might be possible because Kim Jong-un is very sure. And he will actually, you know, fit his own strategy – give something to the Americans in the

beginning that looks good, so it can look like a success, and then take your time, right? And then sort of – because that’s – the long game is to really wait out the Trump administration and buy time. So why not do something, give something – a gift – something – some sort of dismantlement of something or ship something out that Trump can say, here, this is a very successful deal and then sort of wait out the rest.

MR. GREEN: That would be smart. And I would have said that’s a little bit possible a few weeks ago, but when the president started saying this is all about getting to know you, it will take more than one meeting, when he made the deliverable of the meeting the meeting, when he lowered the bar –

MR. SCHWARTZ: The president lowered the bar.

MR. GREEN: He lowered the bar.

MS. TERRY: The president lowered the bar.

MR. GREEN: And I think for the North Koreans, why hand that over now? The process itself helps them, serves their interests so much. I wouldn’t rule it out completely, but I’d be surprised.

MR. CHA: Yeah, it’s a very strange dynamic because initially the president was setting such high expectations about the summit. This is going to be great. It’s going to make peace. We’re going to get the Nobel Peace Prize. And then after this very important meeting with the number-two man in North Korea in the Oval Office, he came out of that meeting and he lowered the expectations.

MR. SCHWARTZ: Right.

MR. CHA: But as he lowered the expectations –

MR. SCHWARTZ: He’s not talking about the Nobel Peace Prize anymore.

MR. CHA: No. And he’s talking about a process, get to know you, you know, no CVID, no maximum pressure sanctions. No, we’re not doing that. But as he’s lowered the bar, now Congress and the media have raised the bar again. There was a letter –

MR. SCHWARTZ: That’s fascinating.

MR. CHA: – that the Democrats sent to the administration basically saying the terms of any agreement must – what must come out of this summit is CVID. You know, both Democrats and Republicans –

MR. SCHWARTZ: What’s CVID?

MR. CHA: Complete, verifiable and irreversible denuclearization. I think actually John Bolton came up with that.

MR. GREEN: I think he might have. It’s a Bush administration-era –

MR. CHA: Yeah, Bush administration-era –

MR. SCHWARTZ: OK, so this term was created when all three of you were there.

MR. GREEN: Right, yeah.

MR. SCHWARTZ: And now they're bringing it back.

MR. CHA: Now they're bringing it back. So now, even though the president is trying to lower expectations of the summit, Congress and the media are now raising expectations of the summit saying, no, you have to get all of these – all of these things. So it's a very – it's a very strange dynamic that we're seeing.

MR. SCHWARTZ: And we're all over the place.

MR. GREEN: We are all over the place.

MR. CHA: But I think, just to go back to the other thing both Sue and Mike talked about in terms of – I mean, these guys have heard me say this before – the North Koreans have been waiting for this meeting for 45 years.

MR. SCHWARTZ: Yes.

MR. CHA: I mean, they have been waiting for this meeting. And the same people that you read about in the press, the KCNA statements, you know, meeting with the U.S., are the same people that all of us negotiated with 10 years ago. So they have the same people that have been working this issue for decades. And meanwhile, our administrations change every four years, and our personnel change even less than every four years. So what makes – so the concern is, what may sound new and bright and shiny and different to an administration like this – which doesn't have a lot of experience on this issue, actually aside from John Bolton does not have a lot of experience –

MR. SCHWARTZ: And we're leaving him home. (Laughter.)

MR. CHA: Oh, we don't have a lot of experience, may all of a sudden sound new, shiny and great. And I think one of the concerns that some people that I have, you know, in and around the White House talked to, is they're concerned that the president's going to walk away from this meeting thinking he's got something great, and it's just – it's basically Agreed Framework 2.0 or Six-Party Talks 2.0. And then he's going to get angry. And then, you know, because he's basically gotten a little pull –

MR. SCHWARTZ: He's going to be feel like he's been had, and he's not a person who feels like he's been had.

MS. TERRY: Victor is absolutely right. Even Kim Yong-chol, who's been around since – like, he's been negotiating since 1992-1993 from the Agreed Framework all the way till now. And he's – and he's the one who just met with President Trump.

MR. SCHWARTZ: He's also the guy who took out Sony. He's also the guy who bombed the –

MS. TERRY: Is the guy behind the Cheonan sinking.

MR. SCHWARTZ: Yeah.

MS. TERRY: Forty-six sailors. Yeonpyeong shelling.

MR. GREEN: A real prince.

MR. CHA: Yeah, a real prince. (Laughter.) If he had stepped out of the country on any other given day he would have been arrested. But –

MR. SCHWARTZ: But instead he was –

MR. CHA: He had the company of the president in the Oval Office.

MS. TERRY: And don't forget, he brought a gigantic, big letter.

MR. GREEN: I don't – we're getting into the politics in the U.S. – but I don't see the president saying he got snookered. You can see on Fox News that sympathetic analysts are talking about this as a huge success. Republicans who are running under President Trump's banner and flagging his North Korea diplomacy as one of three big deliverables – you know, with the Gorsuch – the Supreme Court justice, the 3.9 percent unemployment, and peace in North Korea – and peace in Korea. I think politically the president comes out of this and says it was a success, invites him to Mar-a-Lago, runs on it, runs through November on it. And that would work just fine for Kim Jong-un, because that allows him to unravel the sanctions and everything else.

MR. SCHWARTZ: You all have studied Kim Jong-un – you all have studied Kim Jong-un, and his father, and his grandfather for a long time. Sue, I've heard you say that Kim Jong-un is a pretty shrewd 39-year-old. Does he know anything about our politics and how our politics may affect these negotiations?

MS. TERRY: I do actually think North Koreans watch us very, very closely. Unlike the United States, where we're dealing with a thousand different issues at a given moment, North Korea is only and solely focused on us. So, I mean, I don't think we should underestimate him. Clearly for the last seven years he's been doing pretty well. He got his nuclear program to where it is, about 95 percent done. So I do think they're pretty aware. They're very – they follow everything that comes out of Washington very, very closely.

MR. CHA: Yeah, I don't disagree with that. I mean, I think I would say that they do follow us very closely. I mean, when we used to do negotiations with them, during some of the breaks they would – I remember, during some of the breaks they would ask, like, do you think Hillary Clinton's going to run, you know, for president? So they have people who study our politics. But I wouldn't say that they are – and I'm sure they understand that in South Korea they have local elections, what, the day after this meeting takes place, and that in the United States we have midterms coming – I'm sure they understand that. But I wouldn't say that – I would say that they have maybe, like, an M.A.-level student's understanding of American politics. I wouldn't say that they are – they have Karl Roves in North Korea.

MR. GREEN: They understand us less than China, or Russia, or Japan, or Korea, or other countries. I mean, they understand us, because they're focused on us to some extent, but it's not – I don't think it's sophisticated. But they know the patterns, they recognize the patterns. They've been in

this cycle before of crisis and then diplomacy. And we kind of do it the same way over and over again. And they know Bolton. They know some of the actors on the U.S. side. And they've met Pompeo. So they're not going into this blind. But they're not as sophisticated as other countries.

MS. TERRY: That might be, but they're more prepared than I think we are.

MR. GREEN: Oh, that's for sure. That's for sure.

MR. CHA: Oh, yeah, that's for sure. And then just – I mean, certainly happy to plug The Impossible State, but also to plug Beyond Parallel, our microsite at CSIS. I mean –

MR. SCHWARTZ: Yes. That's BeyondParallel.org.

MR. CHA: (Laughs.) We have actually data that shows there is a pattern to North Korean provocations around U.S. elections historically – presidential and congressional elections.

MR. SCHWARTZ: So let's talk about troops for a second. Why are we on the Korean Peninsula in the first place? Why are we still there? Ultimately, they want us off – Kim Jong-un wants us off. And that would be an outcome he would like. Why are we there? Why are we still there?

MR. CHA: Well, we're there because we defended Korea against a North Korean invasion in 1950. Our presence since then has been what one would call a tripwire presence. It's a ground troop presence that's largely there to – as a physical manifestation of the U.S. security commitment to Korea. I mean, it is – there isn't a(n) unconditional security commitment as we see in NATO, but the physical manifestation of it are the U.S. troops in Korea. And whether it's U.S. troops in Korea as well as in Japan, these are not only there to show our defense commitments to these countries, they have become symbols of political stability in the region. They're a symbol – even though the United States is a Pacific Rim country – of our physical presence in East Asia, the most vibrant economic region of the world. And they are a symbol – they're a physical manifestation of the commitment that has helped Korea to become one of the most successful market democracies in the history of the modern world.

MR. GREEN: And because South Korea, our ally, faces a nuclear-armed North Korea, and is in the neighborhood with a nuclear-armed Russia and China. And if we didn't have troops there as a demonstration of the commitment Victor describes, then the South Koreans would have to seriously consider whether they need their own nuclear weapons.

MR. SCHWARTZ: And so would Japan, wouldn't they?

MR. GREEN: And then so would Japan. And so some scholars argue, theoretically, well, if everyone has nuclear weapons no one will use them because everyone will be checkmated. That's –

MR. SCHWARTZ: Except there would be a lot of proliferation.

MR. GREEN: That's not a theory I'd personally like to test for my children or my grandchildren, and that's the other dimension. And then we probably can over time reconfigure/reduce the presence we do have, but South Korea itself has certain things they just can't do beyond nuclear weapons, strategic missions.

MR. SCHWARTZ: So, in South Korea today, one of their newspapers, the JoongAng Daily, has an editorial, and it talks about experts in Washington. It references Victor's testimony yesterday before the Senate Foreign Relations Committee. And it says that they're worried that it would be – the Trump administration might make a serious mistake, that it might commit to pulling out some of our troops if not all of our troops, and that they're increasingly concerned about a bad deal between Trump and Kim Jong-un in this summit.

MR. CHA: Well, you know, again, I don't think – I mean, nobody knows what President Trump is going to bring to the table for the negotiation. However, having said that, there is a clear record of his skepticism with regards to the utility of the U.S. troop presence in Korea going back 20 years.

MR. SCHWARTZ: And he expressed that – he ran on that. He ran on that in his campaign. So they actually have some reason to be worried.

MR. GREEN: And he continues to tell his generals, his ambassadors, his business friends that he doesn't think we should be there. And that gets out, and the South Koreans and the Japanese know that. So they're getting nervous.

MR. SCHWARTZ: What are some of the other consequences of us not being there? I mean, so you mentioned proliferation – South Korea building their own nuclear program, Japan building their own nuclear program. Isn't there a danger, also, that without our troops there North Korea could proliferate to rogue states, to rogue non-state actors with chemical, biological, and other WMD like nuclear?

MR. GREEN: So it is – it is very unlikely that we're going to actually, in this diplomatic process, get North Korea to reduce the nuclear weapons threat aimed at the Japanese, the Koreans, and us. Very unlikely. So if the outcome is we can't do that but we retreat from the Korean Peninsula in the face of North Korean nuclear weapons, that does not exactly reinforce deterrence and their confidence that we would punish them if they transferred nuclear weapons or if they used them. So it hurts us on the Korean Peninsula. And if we retreat because we don't want to be there and because we believe that we have a peace treaty and that we've somehow, you know, changed history when in fact we haven't, that sends a very dangerous signal in another chess game we're playing, with China, because the Chinese have worked overtime to punish and isolate South Korea, you know, putting boycotts – billions of dollars' worth – on them for accepting our missile defenses, pushing them to separate from the U.S. and Japan. The Chinese longer-term – actually, near-term strategy in Asia is to weaken our alliances. And if – and Korea, the Korea alliance – as Victor wrote in his book, the Korea alliance is very closely related to –

MR. SCHWARTZ: Victor's book "The Impossible State."

MR. GREEN: No, the other one. The –

MR. CHA: "Powerplay."

MR. GREEN: "Powerplay."

MR. SCHWARTZ: "Powerplay."

MR. GREEN: On the formation of alliances.

MR. SCHWARTZ: Yes.

MR. GREEN: You know, the U.S.-Japan alliance depends on the U.S.-Korea alliance because for Japan strategically the Korean Peninsula, as Yamagata Aritomo, the Meiji leader, said, a dagger aimed at the heart of Japan. If we pull out of Korea and leave it open for Chinese or other influence, that's – that dramatically undermines Japan's confidence in us and, I would add, Australia, Taiwan, and even NATO allies. So it's not that we have to have the troops we have on the Korean Peninsula now, but if we just pull out because we – because we pretend we've got peace, what does that say to allies who depend on us?

MS. TERRY: This is why – I mean, Victor and I, we agree on this. You can have peace declaration saying, OK, let's have peace. You can even open liaison offices. You can do all of this but not conclude peace treaty, because then that will then lead to the kind of political and legal rationale of removing troops from the Korean Peninsula. So that should come after North Korea gives us something more, dismantle nuclear weapons program. That should be at the end of the process, not at the beginning.

MR. GREEN: They can't do a peace treaty anyway because it has to be ratified by the Senate, and you know the U.S. Congress.

MS. TERRY: But even agreement of a peace treaty, that should not be the first thing that's being raised at this summit.

MR. SCHWARTZ: Victor, what do you think?

MR. CHA: So, I mean, if we step back and look at this, like, I was over at the State Department last week, and people were saying very frankly, this is the only diplomacy that we are doing in the world today. I mean, if we define diplomacy as turning a conflictual situation into a cooperative one, there's no place else that we're doing this. We're walking away from trade agreements. We're sanctioning allies. We're placing tariffs on Mexico. It's the only place we're doing diplomacy. And if the result of this diplomacy is that we end up walking away from our troop commitment to South Korea without getting something good in return, like Mike said, what sort of message does that send not just to the region, but to the entire – to the entire world?

China's goal in all this is to weaken our alliances in Asia. And they have always seen the weak link, and also the place where they want the United States least on the – on the mainland, right, on the continent of Asia, to be South Korea. And so I think they see a real opportunity here, and that's part of the reason why they're so much in favor of this meeting taking place.

But the ripple effects would be felt throughout. I mean, the United States in the past has done things with its troop presence, a decision that they've made on their own unilaterally, whether it was during the Nixon years or later than that, and those have ripple effects in the region too. But those were choices that the United States made that they could then rationalize as being consonant with a broader military strategy that they were trying to implement for the region and that would make the U.S. stronger in the end. If this is simply a drawdown of U.S. forces as a negotiating chip with the – chip with the adversary, that's the completely wrong message to send.

MR. GREEN: If this doesn't work diplomatically – and it probably won't – where do you want to be? You want your alliances getting stronger, because that shows the North Koreans you can't be intimidated and it shows the Chinese that their friends the North Koreans are ruining China's strategy to weaken our alliances. So you want your alliances stronger. You want missile defense deployments so that you can tell the North Koreans you try this, we're going to shoot you down, then we're going to whack you. You want more exercises with allies that include strategic assets, bombers, to show the North Koreans don't mess with us. You want strong sanctions to make it harder for them to proliferate, harder for them to get money for their programs, and to keep the pressure on so that at some point down the road they do really get serious. That's where you want to be. The problem with this summit is there's a very good chance that all of those tools will be gone and we'll end up, you know, trying to manage this problem in a weaker position. But we'll see.

As I was saying earlier, my sense is that the administration is preparing for the summit and unable to anticipate the outcome, and therefore their real preparation is for what comes after the summit. And how do they do the negotiating process, how do they implement sanctions, how do they coordinate with allies in a way to recover from whatever happens? It may work. Probably won't. And my sense is State, DOD, even NSC, certainly our allies, are focused on what comes next because it's going to be a wild ride and they can't control it. The U.S. government can't control it. The president's going to go in and he's going to go with instincts, so that how do they put in place implementation, continued pressure, alliance coordination so that we're at least no worse off if we can help it.

MR. SCHWARTZ: What do we have to trade them for a nuclear-free peninsula?

MR. GREEN: Well – go ahead, Sue.

MS. TERRY: Well, first – I mean, President Trump keeps talking about economic investment, but what Kim Jong-un is talking about – I think he's very serious about this region security has to be guaranteed. Now how do we guarantee region security? Another piece of paper, a peace treaty, but that's what North Koreans are going to ask for. It is why he comes back to peace treaty because they are saying we could only possibly put nukes on the table if our region security can be guaranteed.

MR. GREEN: But the problem with a security guarantee is North Koreans won't believe it. They don't honor any international agreements they sign – none. So why would they believe us?

MR. SCHWARTZ: Then why would we believe them if they say they are going to denuclearize?

MR. GREEN: Well, but on this – on this thing that they supposedly want, that the South Korean government says they really, really want, to denuclearize, in a security guarantee, a non-aggression pact, something like that – and it's a piece of paper.

I mean, the North Koreans, when Victor and I were doing this, said that they studied previous non-aggression pacts, and they noticed that somebody always cheats – you know, Hitler and Stalin had one; Hitler invaded, surprise attack. Japan and Stalin had one. Stalin attacked Japan in 1945, surprise attack, and a North Korean official, who I won't name because we don't want him to end up on a gulag said, you know, we looked at these and somebody always cheats.

But it doesn't really matter, they – I think they want this, and they'll hold this up as a demand, but what they will do is they will say, we want a nonaggression pact or we want a security guarantee,

and then they'll say, of course, if you really mean it – and we won't believe it until you pull troops out, you end your nuclear umbrella, you stop sanctioning us, you stop criticizing. So it's not a document they would believe for a minute; it's a document they want to use to say, well, if you really mean it you have to do all these things before we would denuclearize. It's a get-out-of-jail-free card they can use on every turn.

MR. CHA: Yes, this is really good. So two points: the first point on the actual – on this whole question of a security guarantee. I mean, if you logically think this through, OK – so North Koreans want a security guarantee that says the United States will not attack them, OK? We gave that to them in 2005.

MR. GREEN: Yeah.

MR. CHA: The United States will not attack North Korea with nuclear or conventional weapons.

MR. GREEN: And in 2002 President Bush said it.

MR. CHA: In 2002 – there is the – it is, and the Russians said that's a negative security assurance. We couldn't get that from the United States throughout the Cold War, right? So that's – so it's already been done.

The second would be, all right, you want a security guarantee. You basically want an external security guarantee in a sense. You want the United States to protect North Korea from the threat of other external powers. So is the United States then going to give a security commitment to North Korea like it gives to South Korea and Japan? No, they're not going to do that.

Then the third type of security guarantee is a security guarantee that protects the regime against its own people, right?

MR. GREEN: Which is the greatest threat they face –

MR. CHA: Which is the greatest threat –

MR. GREEN: – if they really open up.

MR. CHA: – which is – in the end, that's what they are afraid of, right? And so of course, you know, we're not going to do that.

So this is – this is a red herring. But this is the thing. This is the maddening thing about negotiating with North Korea. In any negotiation there is negotiation and there is diplomacy. Diplomacy is often very vague words that you use to cover up differences, but usually in any diplomatic document, the vague words – underneath there are very specific understandings, right? The negotiation behind closed doors is about very specific things which then you paper over with diplomacy in the public document, right?

The North Koreans just like to use vague terms. They hold out the things they want from you in very vague language, right? That just changes all the time, so you are like, OK, I can operationalize that as meaning you want a negative security assurance, so we'll give you a negative security

assurance. Then they are like, OK, thank you, they put that in their pocket, and they go, oh, there's still other stuff out there.

This is like the maddening thing about negotiating with North Korea because usually with your negotiating counterpart, you are talking specifics, right – very specific things, and they never like to give you that level of detail, so you are – it's almost like swinging in the dark, right? If you are actually really trying to solve this and trying to through the negotiation, it's like swinging in the dark because they never give you specific words for specific things. They say stuff like “end your hostile policy.”

MR. GREEN: Can I just add one more thing that is almost never mentioned in this discussion, although it is by Victor sometimes? Right now, that as Victor said, though, there are hundreds of thousands of North Koreans in gulags, and there are millions in essentially internal exile. We don't know what they'll know about this summit, but it really bothers me to think that the leader of the free world is meeting with the leader of the most repressive regime in the world, and he's – it appears he has no intention to even raise that.

It may not be strategic – you could make the case it is – but it's deeply disturbing to me, as someone who believes our foreign policy should have some moral element. We made deals with Stalin because we had to deal with Hitler, you know. Nixon met with Mao. There are cases where we deal with guys we don't like. We dealt with the IRA in the peace process – with killers, cold-blooded killers. But there was a real imperative and prospect that you would get something.

It bothers me that we do this to have an event, to have a meeting, and not – with a discipline when – if you're going to do this, if you're going to meet with a regime like that, you should put the discipline and work in to get a result to justify it in terms of the moral dimension. It just bothers me. I'm sorry. (Laughs.)

MR. CHA: Yeah, I agree. I totally agree with that. It's our – especially when you think about – so the real threat to this regime is not from the United States or from South Korea or Japan –

MR. SCHWARTZ: It's from within.

MR. CHA: It's from within, right, and so the notion that if this regime really wanted to be secure, it would treat its people better, right? Then it would have a much better sense of security.

MS. TERRY: Well, Prime Minister Abe is going to be here, and he'll be one of the last persons to talk to President Trump –

MR. SCHWARTZ: Prime Minister Abe of Japan.

MS. TERRY: Yes, and he's going to bring up the abduction issue one more time, pleading with President Trump to at least bring it up with Kim Jong-un, and so at least, hopefully, that President Trump will bring up –

MR. GREEN: Yeah.

MS. TERRY: – a vaguely human rights issue. Even if he is not pressing it as a part of negotiation that they have to open up the gulags or close down the gulags, but that at least he brings it up.

MR. GREEN: I think President Trump will bring up the abductee issues. He likes Abe, and the problem is that – and this worries, I think, the Japanese government a lot – that the president may have concluded all he has to do is raise that, and then the Japanese will give him a pass on all this other stuff we're talking about – pulling troops off the peninsula. The Japanese are particularly worried that he will cut a deal where the North Koreans perhaps freeze missiles that have the range to hit us but not the hundreds of missiles that have the range to hit Japan or – and the Japanese have a long of things that can go wrong in this summit. And they are beginning to worry, and I think when the president talks to Prime Minister Abe, Abe may adjust what he says because the Japanese side, I think, is worried that the president may think all they care about are the abducted Japanese who have not been returned.

I do think the president will raise it, but maybe not for the right reasons – because he thinks that's what Japan needs to get in on the deal. And one of the things they rightly worry about is the president is interested, apparently, in how much money Japan might pay to North Korea if there is a peace treaty, and that – when the Japanese are asked that, they start to wonder why, where is this going, what about all the threats we're facing.

So the Abe meeting is really important – not just because of abductees, as Sue says, but because the Japanese are worried about these other things. And frankly, in their heart of hearts, I believe that everyone we're talking about on the U.S. side, south of the president – John Bolton, Mike Pompeo, General Mattis – are essentially where the Japanese are in sharing those concerns. And so that gives Abe some basis for focusing on the what-comes-next part – how do we make sure that whatever happens at the summit – maybe it works, probably it doesn't – let's get back on track with the pressure and the deterrence, and the military exercises we need to be safe because they – if they haven't given up nuclear weapons.

MR. SCHWARTZ: Let's leave it at that. That's awesome.

(END)