Center for Strategic and International Studies

The Impossible State Podcast

“Third Visit”

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H. ANDREW SCHWARTZ: North Korea is The Impossible State. It’s a place that’s stumped leaders and policymakers for more than three decades.

REPORTER: (From recording.) Regrettable and dangerous is how North Korea’s spokesman described talks that just concluded with Mike Pompeo.

MR. SCHWARTZ: It has a complex history, and it has become the United States’ top national security priority.

SECRETARY OF STATE MIKE POMPEO: (From recording.) We had detailed and substantive discussions about the next steps towards a fully verified and complete denuclearization.

MR. SCHWARTZ: Each week on this show we’ll talk with the people who know the most about North Korea.

In this episode of The Impossible State, we have with us CSIS’s Victor Cha and Sue Mi Terry back on the show. Secretary of State Mike Pompeo returned from North Korea last week, but the result of those discussions with officials there remain unclear, including whether or not they made any progress on the issue of denuclearization. Victor and Sue join us from the studio to talk to us about the latest meetings and the road ahead.

So, Victor, Sue, Secretary Pompeo’s North Korea meeting went as badly as it could have gone by just about all accounts. What are you hearing?

VICTOR CHA: I’m not hearing anything dissimilar to that. I mean, you can put as much lipstick as you want on this pig; it’s still going to look like a pig. (Laughter.) This was not a good meeting. Even the language he used when he left was all about, you know, candid and productive talks.

MR. SCHWARTZ: Right.

MR. CHA: But if you listen to the substance of what he said, there is a promise of a working-level meeting on the repatriation of remains, which is a meeting. It’s not a decision; it’s another meeting. And then, on the nuclear side, there was – there was talk about more working-level discussions, but no date. And the whole purpose of Pompeo’s trip was because the working-level discussions were going nowhere, so that was a big nothingburger. So, in the end, for all these reasons, you know, I think the general reaction was this was not a good trip.

SUE MI TERRY: Well, I had very low expectation to begin with. But even with that and even by North Korean standards, this was quite bad because they could have just played along – give nothing, but still don’t come out with this very negative Foreign Ministry statement that they came out with criticizing American delegation, criticizing –

MR. SCHWARTZ: They said it was regrettable. They called us gangsters. I mean –

MS. TERRY: Yeah, the whole meeting was – exactly – robber-like, it was regrettable. They didn’t have to go that far. So, clearly, it did not go well. I think we are very far even just agreeing on
denuclearization, on what it means. We still have very different definition of denuclearization itself, difference between Pyongyang and Washington.

MR. SCHWARTZ: All right. But why did they use such strong language? I mean, have we seen this playbook before from them?

MR. CHA: Yeah, we have. I mean, the – I don’t know if we’ve ever used – they’ve ever used the term, you know, robber-like, thief-like, gangster-like. But certainly all the points about how the United States is asking or demanding unilateral denuclearization or disarming by the North, and – I mean, I think it reflects two things. One is that the North Korean talking points have not changed, despite a summit with President Trump and a signed agreement between the two sides. And, two, that – and this is not necessarily a bad thing, too – that our position hasn’t changed, which is, you know, we want to see CVID or whatever it is, the term that they like to use now because the North Koreans don’t like the term CVID.

So in that sense, yes, as Sue said, these two are still pretty far apart. And it’s not really clear how to close the gap at this point.

MS. TERRY: I think when you look at the Singapore declaration, which was obviously very vague and aspirational, they talk about peace regime before they talk about working towards denuclearization of the Korean Peninsula. So I think what North Koreans are looking for right now is saying they want to talk about peace regime. They talk about peace treaty ending the Korean War, the larger picture, a security guarantee – all of that should come before we can talk about the nitty-gritty of actually denuclearization – actual denuclearization.

So, again, we are very apart. And when you look at even the criticism, the Foreign Ministry criticism they came out with after the U.S. delegation left, they still didn’t criticize President Trump himself. So appealing – making an appeal to President Trump to say, hey, let’s talk about the big picture, which is again I think they want – their goal is peace treaty right now over denuclearization.

MR. CHA: And so in this sense, again, it’s not that different from where we’ve been in the past because in the past people said, you know, the term of art for those of us who were doing the negotiations was something called sequencing, right? How do we sequence these pieces? And the U.S. position has always been denuclearization is the key to everything. If there is denuclearization, that is the key that unlocks all these other things: economic benefits, lifting of sanctions, peace regime or peace treaty, normalization of relations. And what the North Koreans are essentially saying is, no, we want the sequencing the other way, right?

MR. SCHWARTZ: Right.

MR. CHA: We want all of these things first that then make for an environment in which they could consider disarming. So, again, in spite of the fact that we sent the president 10,000 miles for a meeting with the North Korean leader, we are literally back to square one, where we’ve been in the past.

MR. SCHWARTZ: And Secretary Pompeo’s been there three times now.

MR. CHA: He’s gone to North Korea more than he’s gone to any other country as secretary of state, yeah.
MR. SCHWARTZ: That’s amazing.

MR. CHA: Yeah. Yeah, it is.

MR. SCHWARTZ: I didn’t know that. He’s gone to North Korea more than any other place. I mean, he’s only been secretary of state for a short time, but still.

MR. CHA: That’s right. Yeah.

MR. SCHWARTZ: That’s pretty amazing.

MS. TERRY: Three times. And this time he didn’t get to meet with Kim Jong-un, even though I think the plan was for him to meet with Kim Jong-un the second day.

MR. SCHWARTZ: Yeah, tell me about that, Sue. I mean, was he – he was pretty disappointed, I think, that he didn’t meet with the leader.

MS. TERRY: Right, because Secretary Pompeo did meet with Kim Jong-un twice in the previous trips. I think that was the plan. But because the negotiation went so badly on the first day, it didn’t happen on the second day. So this just shows you how far we are from – you know, how – you know, there is a vast difference to overcome, and this – it just – it was worse than we expected.

MR. SCHWARTZ: So what does he have to do to get a meeting with him next time, bring Dennis Rodman? I mean, what’s – (laughs) – what does he have to do?

MR. CHA: Dennis Rodman can’t even get a meeting with him.

MR. SCHWARTZ: Yeah.

MR. CHA: So, you know, I think – so normally the convention would be that Secretary Pompeo would go; the North Koreans will never tell you in advance what your schedule is, whether you were going to have a meeting. As you saw, he didn’t even know where he was staying when he arrived. You know, when he landed in Pyongyang, he did not know where they were going to put him up, in the hotel or in the guest house, all these details that are normally just accepted as things that a secretary of state would want to know before he goes to a foreign country.

MR. SCHWARTZ: And would need to know for security reasons.

MR. CHA: For security reasons. You know, in North Korea they throw all those rules – all those diplomatic protocols out the window. The North Koreans just –

MR. SCHWARTZ: I mean, when I’ve traveled with a secretary or the president, you know, as a member of the press, you know exactly minute by minute, second by second where you’re going to be and what you’re going to do.

MR. CHA: Right.

MR. SCHWARTZ: And you’re saying with this all that’s off.
MR. CHA: No, with North Korea it’s – and when I went there it was the same thing. I mean, there was no – we don’t have an embassy there, so we don’t have a team there that can arrange this. But even through the Swedes, the Swedish, who are our protecting power in – the U.S. protecting power in North Korea, the Swedes would get no information from the North Koreans about what your itinerary would look like, where you’re staying, all of these other things. But the point of all this is to say even if that may be the case, the normal convention would be that the secretary would have a letter or a message, right, from the president that he could then deliver, you know, written or verbal –

MR. SCHWARTZ: Directly to – yeah.

MR. CHA: – that he could then deliver directly to the North Korean leader. So I would imagine that was the case this time. But, you know, Kim Jong-un would not even meet him for a brief – for a brief meet-and-greet. It just was the – it was just the exclamation point on, you know, the negativity of this visit.

MR. SCHWARTZ: I mean, essentially what you all are telling me is that we’re basically talking past each other. We’re not talking about the same thing that North Korea’s talking about.

MR. CHA: Yeah, I think that’s right, and it’s something that many of us pointed out going back to the April 27th inter-Korean summit and then this period between the inter-Korean summit and the Singapore summit June 12th, was that nobody was working to try to align very disparate definitions of denuclearization. And people said, well, maybe the summit will be the place where that can happen, and it didn’t. So we shouldn’t actually be surprised that there hasn’t been any major progress because we are talking past each other.

MR. SCHWARTZ: But we’re negotiating in good faith. We’re doing everything we can to engage them. It seems like they have some understanding of what our weaknesses are and they exploit them at every turn.

MR. CHA: Yeah. I mean, I think – I think that they – you know, one thing you can give them credit for is being consistent, the North Koreans.

MR. SCHWARTZ: Yeah.

MR. CHA: They have been consistent over time. And, you know, I think many of the working-level negotiators who’ve been in these negotiations before – people like Sung Kim, Ambassador Sung Kim; Allison Hooker at the NSC – I mean, they’ve seen all this before. And, you know, everything that the North Koreans were saying to them across the table must have sounded like déjà vu all over again for them because they’re the same things they said to us 10 years ago, right? So, in that sense, it’s not that different.

But I do think we’re negotiating in good faith. I mean, again, Pompeo, three trips to North Korea. The president, you know, meeting the North Korean leader. I mean, this is the only diplomacy that we’re doing in the State Department right now. This is it. There’s nothing else that we’re doing. Aside from, you know, ending trade agreements and slapping tariffs, there’s really nothing else that we’re doing. So, yes, I do think we’re making an effort.
MS. TERRY: Yeah, we are negotiating in good faith, but there’s not a single evidence that North Koreans are negotiating in good faith. And the reason why many of us were skeptical that President Trump should have met with Kim Jong-un when he did in Singapore is because we knew there was not even an agreement on the definition of denuclearization. Again, as we talked about, they’re still talking about denuclearization of the Korean Peninsula, the larger picture. They’re still talking about U.S.-South Korea alliance commitments – our troops in South Korea, our extended nuclear umbrella that we have over South Korea. They are talking about all of this when we are still talking about, you know, CVID or FFID (ph) – fully, final, whatever the words are now. We’re talking still very different things.

And what I’m very concerned about is that North Koreans are – they are sensing weakness. They are sensing that President Trump wants some sort of a deal and they think they can get more out of President Trump.

MR. SCHWARTZ: Tell me about that. What are – what are the weaknesses that they sense?

MS. TERRY: Well, first of all, after Singapore meeting, we suspended joint military exercises with South Korea without having gotten a single thing from North Korea. We have been also talking about U.S. troop presence in South Korea. So I think North Koreans are sensing that they can push President Trump and get some sort of a deal. And right now, if they can just give something, because our expectation is so low – imagine now if North Korea decides to do just a few things, like give some remains back or just dismantle the test site, that ancient test site that they are talking about – very few things, cosmetic things – now we’re going to take that and say it’s success and that we’re headed in the right direction. And so they are sensing these things. We have a November election coming up. So I’m afraid that we are again going to be in a position where we are giving away things to North Korea without really getting anything that we need from North Korea, which is denuclearization.

MR. SCHWARTZ: Right.

MR. CHA: Yeah. No, I don’t – I don’t disagree with that at all. I mean, I think the POW/MIA remains conversation is supposed to happen on July 12th, apparently. That would be the one-month anniversary since the Singapore summit. And so if they can reach an agreement on that, that will be trumpeted as a big deal, right? I mean, both the U.S. and the North – the administration and the North Koreans, President Trump in particular, will trumpet it as a big huge deal. And, you know, his supporters may like that, the media may cover it, because it is a good thing to bring back 200 sets of remains.

MR. SCHWARTZ: Yeah, the last – you negotiated this in –

MR. CHA: Yeah, in 2007. Yeah, it was the last time.

MR. SCHWARTZ: Right. And it means – and, as you’ve said, it means an awful lot to the families to get the remains of their loved ones back.

MR. CHA: Yes. Yes, I mean, it’s a very important thing. And people who have been unaccounted for since 1953, right? So it’s hugely important. But, on denuclearization, that does not move the ball one inch forward.

MS. TERRY: One inch.
MR. CHA: Because that is POW/MIA remains. That is not anything on verification, declaration, you know, any of this – suspension and monitoring, none of these things.

MR. SCHWARTZ: Well, and Victor, you – in 2006, you and Bill Richardson negotiated POW/MIA remains.

MR. CHA: Right, yeah.

MR. SCHWARTZ: And what does it take to get that back? I mean, I think that you’re concerned that they may use this as an opportunity to extort money from this administration, extort money from the United States that they would use for their military.

MR. CHA: Yeah. So North Korea has all these remains that they have excavated from different battle(s) – Chosin Reservoir and other sorts of places in North Korea – from the Korean War. And they have always been very much in favor of returning these to the United States, not as a goodwill gesture but because they then charge us for the remains, accounting for all the work they did to excavate all these remains. And this money would come from the U.S. government, from the Pentagon, and it goes directly to the Korean People’s Army. And the reason I know it goes directly to the Korean People’s Army is because when we met with them to negotiate seven sets of remains in 2007, all of our conversations were with uniformed military. Nobody from the Foreign Ministry, who we normally dealt with. It was all KPA, Korean People’s Army. So you know all that money goes directly to them. I imagine the holdup over this issue after it being the fourth item in the Singapore summit between Trump and Kim – I imagine the holdup over this issue is because the North Koreans are asking them to pay.

MR. SCHWARTZ: And they’re asking them to pay directly to the military and not for aiding their people.

MR. CHA: Right.

MR. SCHWARTZ: Not for humanitarian –

MR. CHA: Yeah, we’ll never see whatever – you know, if we choose to pay – and President Trump doesn’t like to pay for anything, so it’s not a foregone conclusion that we will – but if choose to pay, we will never see what happens to that money. It’ll go directly to the Army.

MR. SCHWARTZ: So this is pretty emblematic of our dealings with them. Even though this isn’t – this isn’t going to get us anywhere, as you both have pointed out, this is emblematic of the way we’re dealing with them and the way we’re forced to be dealing with them. Have we given them too much leverage?

MS. TERRY: I think we have already given them a lot of leverage just by, first, having the summit.

MR. SCHWARTZ: By meeting with him.

MS. TERRY: Just meeting with Kim Jong-un. We know that we have legitimized his rule. I mean, look what he’s doing. He looks like a – you know, he met with now Xi Jinping also three times,
four times. He met with President Moon Jae-in how many times, also the foreign minister. We have legitimimized him. And I’m afraid that, again, if they give us something back – the remains or dismantle something – this momentum will continue. And I think he’s – Kim Jong-un is looking for a second summit with President Trump, and what if he comes to either U.S. or they meet in Switzerland or somewhere. And he may even come to New York, come to UNGA. Can you imagine that?

MR. SCHWARTZ: To the U.N. General Assembly.

MS. TERRY: Yeah. And that will be just the finale for Kim Jong-un in terms of, you know, sort of his – how he is showing himself on this world stage. That will be the finale, when he comes to UNGA in New York.

MR. SCHWARTZ: And I’m guessing he wouldn’t pitch a tent like Gadhafi did, you know.

MS. TERRY: No. (Laughter.) But, again, as Victor pointed out, the point is it doesn’t still move us towards denuclearization if that is still our goal. I mean, you know, that’s fine President Trump keeps talking about, well, we are avoiding war and we stopped – I stopped a war. That’s fine. But we’re not moving towards denuclearization, which we are still claiming is our goal. So that’s my concern.

MR. SCHWARTZ: So what’s the smart play for us?

MR. CHA: So the smart play at this point would be to go to China and say, look, Secretary Pompeo’s been to North Korea three times, right, the president went 10,000 miles to meet the North Korean leaders, to the Chinese basically: you’ve got to soften them up a little, right, for the next round of negotiation. And by soften them up we mean you’ve got to put more economic pressure on the – on the regime and make them feel some pain so that when they come to the next set of talks they’ll want to find a way to get the pressure taken off by making some concessions. The problem, of course, is that we’re in the middle of a trade war with China.

MR. SCHWARTZ: And we’re about to levy $200 billion against that trade war, against the Chinese.

MR. CHA: That’s right. And so, you know, I think in other circumstances we’ve had difficulties with China in our bilateral relationship, but we’ve managed to compartmentalize the North Korea issue. But this is looking like a full-blown trade war. This is a very different circumstance than any one in the past where we’ve gone to the Chinese to seek some sort of common strategy, so-called good cop, bad cop common strategy to deal with North Korea. And it might work in other circumstances, but it’s definitely been complicated by this trade conflict between Washington and Beijing.

MR. SCHWARTZ: Well, and I would imagine our relationships with Europe is also complicated because it would be pretty hard to get our allies to line up, even though they have the same interest that we do.

MR. CHA: Well, again, that would – the smart play would have been to use the NATO summit to get a very strong statement from all the NATO leaders on three things. One is the continued demand from North Korea to give up their nuclear weapons. Two would be the intention of all the European powers to continue sanctions until North Korea does this. And, three, that the Europeans hold the very
highest verification standards for any agreement, as high as – although the Trump administration may disagree – as high as the Iran nuclear deal. And, you know, that would have been the play to use at NATO, but you know, clearly the president has taken a different strategy focusing much more on pigeonholing each NATO ally for not paying enough for defense.

MS. TERRY: On China, though, it’s true what Victor said. I mean, this is not a right time to be – we’re in the middle of a trade war when we’re trying to get China to help on North Korea. And we’ve been seeing every day – daily, since Kim Jong-un’s second and third meeting with Xi Jinping, we’ve seen reports that China is loosening implementation of sanctions on ground level. Every single day we are seeing new reports coming out saying China is now really cracking down on sanctions as much as they used to. We got China to do more on sanctions front, but that has absolutely loosened since Xi Jinping has been meeting with Kim Jong-un.

MR. SCHWARTZ: And now they’re – now they’re doing less.

MS. TERRY: Absolutely less.

MR. SCHWARTZ: And are –

MS. TERRY: And they don’t have any incentive right now to be helping us because of this trade war that we’ve been talking about.

MR. SCHWARTZ: So we’ve lost leverage there as well.

MR. CHA: Yeah.

MR. SCHWARTZ: And what does this do to our overarching Pacific posture? Has this – you mentioned the only diplomacy we’re doing right now is North Korea. The secretary of state is focused on traveling to North Korea. What about the rest of our agenda in Asia?

MR. CHA: Well, so I think if you went around Washington, D.C. this week and talked to, you know, the people that really focus on our overall Asia policy – you know, on the Hill, in the Pentagon, you know, at the think tanks – the biggest disappointment of the week was not that we got a – we got nothing out of the third Pompeo trip to the North. The biggest disappointment was we got nothing when, instead of going to Pyongyang, Secretary Pompeo was supposed to go to India, right?

MS. TERRY: India.

MR. SCHWARTZ: For the 2+2 dialogue.

MR. CHA: The first-ever – first-ever – 2+2 dialogue with India; 2+2 means the secretary of defense and the secretary of state meet with their counterparts. When I was in government we started the first-ever 2+2 with Australia, and it took us literally a year to organize that meeting just because you’re taking the two most – the busiest people in government, right – the secretary of defense, the secretary of state – and trying to coordinate their schedule to travel to India.

MR. SCHWARTZ: And I imagine it’s a lot easier to coordinate with our ally Australia than just about any other country.
MR. CHA: Yeah. And India, I mean, India is not –

MR. SCHWARTZ: India is very difficult.

MR. CHA: Is going to be very difficult. And so, you know, he skipped that meeting to go to North Korea, and I think it’ll take a very long time to get that meeting rescheduled. And these 2+2s are meant to be a signal of the strategic elevation of a relationship when we agree – when the United States agrees to do – we don’t do them with many countries. But when we agree to do them, it’s supposed to be a significant elevation of the relationship. And, you know, that, I think, was probably the biggest disappointment for all the Asia watchers in Washington who were – who were, of course, concerned about North Korea, but also concerned about how our North Korea policy is obscuring basically everything else that we’re trying to do in Asia.

MR. SCHWARTZ: Well, so what does that mean for the relationship with India? We’re not elevating it, and so we’ve lost an opportunity for the moment. And what else? I mean, is this a real big mistake on our part?

MR. CHA: Sure. I mean, I think it’s a mistake. I think it would have been – you know, without having the benefit of insight into how the actual planning happened within the government on this, I mean, how hard would it have been for Pompeo to say just wait a couple of days, I need to go to India, and then I’ll go to North Korea right after that? His counterpart – right, it’s not like his counterpart is traveling anywhere. Kim Yong-chol is – it’s not like he’s got a busy travel schedule.

MR. SCHWARTZ: (Laughs.) Right.

MR. CHA: He’s a designated individual. Like, it’s hard for him to travel outside of the country anywhere –

MR. SCHWARTZ: Right.

MR. CHA: – by sanctions. He’s a – you know. So it wouldn’t have been that hard to do that, but you know, I don’t know. I don’t know. It seems to me like it was a big missed opportunity for nothing on the North Korean side.

MS. TERRY: Well, I was just thinking that, you know, maybe Pompeo felt like he needed to run to North Korea so fast also in light of that report that came out, the NBC report that came out about North Korea working overtime on nuclear and missile program.

MR. SCHWARTZ: Right, right.

MS. TERRY: And that was kind of a shocking report, actually, because it cites 12 intelligence officers. And, you know, my experience is, like, there is no leaks usually that come from intelligence community; it’s usually from the policy community. But what was really explosive about that report is that North Korea intends to deceive continually U.S. officials, right? So that was sort of part of the finding – the IC finding. So I thought perhaps Pompeo had to just rush not just to negotiate, but to really confront the North Koreans on this because that was such an explosive report.

MR. SCHWARTZ: And so he rushed, and then he got called a gangster, and he came back with his tail between his legs.
MS. TERRY: Exactly, totally empty-handed, with nothing.

MR. CHA: Isn’t that – isn’t that – I mean, so Sue would be – but that he was the former director of the CIA, right?

MR. SCHWARTZ: Right.

MR. CHA: And so now you have all these – apparently all these intelligence leaks –

MR. SCHWARTZ: Coming out of his former shop.

MR. CHA: – coming out of his former shop, yeah. That’s strange.

MR. SCHWARTZ: A shop that he ran just a couple months ago.

MR. CHA: Yeah. (Laughs.)

MR. SCHWARTZ: That is strange. And all this begs me to ask: What’s next here with them? Do we have anything scheduled? Is anything on the docket? What is – what is our strategy going forward? What’s next with North Korea?

MR. CHA: So I think that even though things have gone really badly – and this is to echo something that Sue said earlier – I think we’re actually going to see some small things happen because, you know, for the North Koreans, they’ve taken it – they’ve taken down expectations so low, but they have an interest in seeing the momentum continue, right, if for no small reason. Kim Jong-un would like to come to New York in September for UNGA. I’m sure he would – he would love to address the U.N. General Assembly. Can you imagine, in that big hall?

MR. SCHWARTZ: Yeah. I think he wants to go to a lot of places.

MR. CHA: Yeah. Yeah, right. (Laughs.)

MR. SCHWARTZ: And we’ve kind of enabled that.

MR. CHA: We’ve enabled that.

MS. TERRY: Take a selfie in front of the United Nations.

MR. CHA: Yeah, yeah. You know, we’ve given him a taste of this, so of course he’d love to do that. So, you know, I think, you know, this POW/MIA repatriation issue will probably be resolved in some manner. You know, this one missile engine test site –

MS. TERRY: Test, yeah, site. Yeah.

MR. CHA: – is likely to be decommissioned, and there are questions about how important that is to North Korea. I don’t think it’s very important to North Korea.

MS. TERRY: It’s not because they have road-mobile – yeah, yeah.
MR. SCHWARTZ: And what’s important to us is what Sue mentioned a minute ago.

MS. TERRY: Optics.

MR. SCHWARTZ: That the leak about the covert program has to stop. That’s what’s important to us. And they haven’t copped to that at all, so we’re nowhere on that, yeah.

MR. CHA: So I think we’ll – so I think we will see some small things and things that the president has already taken credit for. So the small things happen that will then give people hope that, oh, you know, maybe if we invite him to the U.N., you know, he’ll get a – you know, he’ll get a taste of what it’s like to be in this chamber with all the community of nations and to be part of that.

MR. SCHWARTZ: Right.

MR. CHA: So I think – you know, so I think we will see some things, but I’m not expecting anything dramatic.

MS. TERRY: Yeah, I 100 percent agree with Victor. And I think Trump himself has incentive to sort of showcase whatever those small things that North Korea does as – and then turn it into a success because he himself declared after the Singapore meeting that North Korea’s threat is over, nuclear threat is over, he took care of it. So I think he has an incentive to sort of, you know, turn it around and say, hey, look what I’ve done, look what I’ve achieved, I’ve solved the North Korean crisis, we’re moving in the right direction. So I think that’s what we’ll see for the next few months.

MR. SCHWARTZ: So do you guys really think that there’s a good chance he’s going to be at the – at the U.N.? Because, I mean, if – after all, if Kim Jong-un is at the U.N., he’s an Acela ride away from the White House. He’s not far at all.

MR. CHA: Acela ride away from the White House and a crosstown bus away from Trump Tower. (Laughter.)

MR. SCHWARTZ: That too.

MR. CHA: Fifty-seventh and Fifth.

MR. SCHWARTZ: That too.

MS. TERRY: He can just walk there. (Laughs.)

MR. CHA: That’s a possibility, too. You know, I think –

MR. SCHWARTZ: He could stay at one of the Trump properties.

MS. TERRY: His security guards can run while he drives in his Mercedes a little bit, yeah.

MR. CHA: No, I think – you know, again, if – you know, if they get the repatriation of the remains, if there are these small steps like decommissioning the missile test site – the missile engine site or some other small steps like this, that will – I think for the president, that will –
MS. TERRY: It’s enough.

MR. CHA: – be enough momentum to claim this thing is working, it’s successful. You know, I think the U.N. secretary-general will want to try go, again, promote – provide incentives for North Korea to do more, and then at trip to New York. And then, yes, I’m almost certain if he –

MR. SCHWARTZ: Wouldn’t they have to pledge something on human rights to come to the U.N.?

MR. CHA: Yeah.

MR. SCHWARTZ: Wouldn’t the U.N. insist on that?

MR. CHA: One hopes. You know, one hopes that they would. I mean, the Congress just today – today or this week – sent up to the president the new North Korean Human Rights Act bill for signing. So one would hope that that would be an opportunity to get him to address the human rights issue. But then, again, that would be seen as very positive by the president, as another victory that he accomplished that nobody else accomplished, even though on the ground nothing will have changed.

MS. TERRY: I can’t imagine the traffic situation in New York in September if that were to happen.

MR. SCHWARTZ: I don’t want to be there that week, I’ll tell you that. (Laughter.) I’m not – I’m not – I’m not going north of Baltimore that week if that happens.

MS. TERRY: New Yorkers would absolutely hate it. (Laughs.)

MR. CHA: Yeah, yeah.

(Music plays.)

MR. SCHWARTZ: If you have a question for one of our experts about The Impossible State, email us at impossiblestate@csis.org.

If you want to dive deeper into the issues surrounding North Korea, check out Beyond Parallel. That’s our micro website that’s dedicated to bringing a better understanding of the Korean Peninsula. You can find it at beyondparallel.csis.org.

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(Music plays.)

This is The Impossible State.

(END)