

# **Center for Strategic and International Studies**

## **The Impossible State Podcast**

### **“Third Summit”**

#### **Speakers:**

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#### **Host:**

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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.) An air of celebration in Pyongyang as the leaders of North and South Korea are claiming a diplomatic breakthrough.

REPORTER: (From recording.) There is a lot of skepticism about whether North Korea is actually taking concrete steps towards denuclearization.

MR. SCHWARTZ: It has a complex history. And it has become the United States' top national security priority.

PRESIDENT DONALD TRUMP: (From recording.) Tremendous progress on North Korea. Asking for a second meeting, and we will be doing that. It looks like we'll have a second summit quite soon.

MR. SCHWARTZ: Each week on this show we'll talk with the people who know the most about North Korea: CSIS's Victor Cha, Mike Green, and Sue Mi Terry.

In this episode of The Impossible State, we welcome back David Kang. Dave is the director of the Korean Studies Institute at the University of Southern California and he co-wrote "Nuclear North Korea: A Debate on Engagement Strategies" with CSIS's Victor Cha. The second and revised edition of "Nuclear North Korea" is just out. Dave joins Victor and I by phone to talk about the recent Korea summit, the U.N. General Assembly, and what to expect from a potential second Trump-Kim summit. We'll also talk about how the arguments that Dave and Victor lay out in their book are playing out today.

Gina Haspel, the CIA director, said today that the North Korean leader, Kim Jong-un, will not give up his nuclear weapons easily, and he sees these as crucial levers to preserve his government. What do you think of that, Victor?

VICTOR CHA: Well, I think it fits with a narrative that I was seeing. I spent the last week, actually, in Korea.

MR. SCHWARTZ: Right.

MR. CHA: And I was in the country during the big three-day summit. And it kind of fits with a narrative that I think is quite popular here in Washington, which is that North-South Korean relations seem to be just going absolutely fabulously.

MR. SCHWARTZ: Right.

MR. CHA: And we saw that from the three days of summitry and all the handholding and the bear hugs and –

MR. SCHWARTZ: Atop the mountain.

MR. CHA: Atop the mountain, you know, going to the – going up to the mountain and the lake where supposedly, you know, a bear made it with an ostrich or something and a pure Korean race was created there.

MR. SCHWARTZ: Right. (Laughter.)

MR. CHA: I shouldn't –

MR. SCHWARTZ: Five thousand years ago.

MR. CHA: Five thousand years ago. I shouldn't – I shouldn't make fun; someone's going to get angry if I make fun of that. But –

MR. SCHWARTZ: No, it's a serious thing in both Koreas. It's part of the – yeah.

MR. CHA: Yeah, it's a serious thing. Yeah, it's huge. Yeah, it's one of – it's like a – it's like a unifying, you know, identity thing for them.

MR. SCHWARTZ: Right.

MR. CHA: But at the same time, while all that is going on, a lot of the information that seems to be coming out or leaking out of intelligence agencies and among experts is that there's a lot of good stuff happening in inter-Korean relations and a lot of talk about denuclearization, but if we look at what's happening on the ground North Korea is not ready to give up anything. And what they – I mean, they probably would have a different – I wouldn't say different, but more of an optimistic view on this. But on denuclearization, what they said – the North Koreans said coming out of this third summit was essentially recycling something they already did, so.

MR. SCHWARTZ: Dave, are you optimistic?

DAVID KANG: Yes, am, and Victor is right. I agree in broad brush-strokes with what Victor said, particularly about the mythical birthright of the Korean people. (Laughter.) But on this the thing that I –

MR. SCHWARTZ: Wait, can we – can we back up? Can you guys explain the significance of the mountain and what – because some of our viewers may not know. They obviously saw the photo-op, but what is the significance of the mountain, the volcano, and the lake, and the scenery that the two leaders were on?

MR. KANG: Sure. Yes. And can I – this is Dave. Can I do that? Because this is a point that I actually made while they were doing this. You know, many countries in Asia have mountains that are viewed in sort of sacred or spiritual terms: Mount Fuji, Baekdusan in Korea. I mean, there's – most countries have them. And for all Koreans, this is the mythical birthplace 5,000 years ago. Tangun, a bear, came down and et cetera. The origin stories are less important to me than the fact that, of course, both Koreas went there because we often like to say, oh, the younger generation doesn't want unification.

MR. SCHWARTZ: This is Mount – this is Mount Paektu?

MR. CHA: Yeah, yeah.

MR. KANG: Yeah, Baekdu, right. It's called Baekdu. And if – and, sure maybe they don't want unification, but that's the wrong question. If you ask young South Koreans is Baekdusan a Korean mountain, they say of course it is, right?

MR. SCHWARTZ: Right.

MR. KANG: I mean, this is incredibly important symbolism for what it means to be Korean. And both sides basically take for granted that that's Korea.

MR. SCHWARTZ: Right. Well, I mean, the photos showed a brilliant blue sky and the deep crater lake that tops the volcano in the background, and the two leaders toured the shores of the lake. And so all looked – if you just looked at the way they – their body language, it seemed like the North and the South were quite on the road to something good.

MR. CHA: Yeah. I mean, certainly on the road to something good. I mean, what struck me most about all the imagery was really the focus on homogeneity of the Korean race, you know. You know, we may be two different peoples in terms of our politics and our economics; and, you know, one is a global citizen, the other is a renegade state; but in the end, we're all Koreans. And, you know, this mountain and this lake on top of the mountain is sort of – you know, the epitome of that – of that – of symbolizing this sort of homogenous race where all these other material differences seem to melt away, although in the real world they – you know, they matter a great deal. But once they're sitting on top of that lake, all those material differences seem to – seem to melt away.

MR. SCHWARTZ: So did this third inter-Korean summit really move the ball forward? And I'll go to you first, Dave.

MR. KANG: I actually think it did. To pick up on the – because I think the symbolics are incredibly important for this.

But a brief comment about denuclearization and what I think they accomplished. You know, denuclearization was not the focus of this meeting. And in America we focus on denuclearization first, and I think what Moon and Kim had clearly decided to do is talk about a willingness to denuclearize but do a lot of other sort of confidence-building or rapprochement first and put off the more thorny issue of denuclearization. And there you got some real mil-to-mil – you know, military-to-military agreements to potentially defuse a lot of tensions in the – in the northern limit line, in the maritime disputes, and ways to potentially take some baby steps back on the DMZ. So I think there was some real substance there that was discussed.

MR. SCHWARTZ: Victor?

MR. CHA: I mean, I think it moved the ball forward in terms of inter-Korean relations, as Dave said. The conventional tension-reduction stuff I thought was important and significant. And then there were all – this slew of economic projects that they talked about where, you know – you know, that clearly is something that's all music to North Korean ears, I'm sure.

In terms of denuclearization, you know, not so much. I mean, I – President Trump after the summit said, oh, you know, big breakthrough, big deal, I'm ready to meet Kim. But there really wasn't

anything there. The North Korean leader basically agreed to essentially recycle the missile test site facility and Yongbyon, the nuclear complex at Yongbyon. So, on the denuclearization side, not much progress on the ground, but President Trump says it's a success and he's ready to meet the North Korean leader again. And then you have Gina Haspel, right, the head of the CIA, saying they're not interested in denuclearization.

MR. SCHWARTZ: Right.

MR. CHA: So, you know, I agree. You know, a number of steps forward on the inter-Korean stuff, but not so much – and I feel like we're back in the same place, which is there's ambiguity with regard – after a(n) inter-Korean summit, despite all the very positive words coming from the South Korean president, there's ambiguity about what North Korea's position really is on denuclearization. And then we're waiting for another summit between the two leaders to see if we're going to get anywhere. And the last time the Singapore summit really didn't get us that much further down the road.

MR. SCHWARTZ: Right. So you don't feel that there's any real sincerity on the North's part to denuclearize.

MR. CHA: I mean, personally, I don't think – I mean, if I were them, I wouldn't denuclearize. (Laughs.)

MR. SCHWARTZ: Right.

MR. CHA: I would want all the benefits that come from opening up to the outside world while keeping their nuclear weapons. I thought at their 70<sup>th</sup> anniversary speech they were very clear that they want economic reform and a better life for their people now that they have achieved security, right?

MR. SCHWARTZ: Yeah.

MR. CHA: Which means, you know, based on the foundation of their nuclear weapons, which is consonant with the byungjin doctrine, which is have your nuclear weapons and have your economic development at the same time.

MR. SCHWARTZ: Right. So he wants his cake and eat it too.

MR. CHA: Yeah, basically.

MR. SCHWARTZ: You know, now I'm going to throw this by you. My wife has this theory that Kim, who's now become a little bit warm and fuzzy to some people in the world, just really wants to step out. He wants to get a better haircut. He wants to – I explained to my wife that his haircut is modeled after his grandfather's, although she insists that he –

MR. CHA: Or Brad Pitt in "Fury," right?

MR. SCHWARTZ: Yeah, right. (Laughter.)

MR. CHA: It's the same haircut.

MR. SCHWARTZ: Same haircut. (Laughs.) But she insists that he wants to step out, he wants to join and become part of the world, and he wants to continue to have warm feelings from the U.S. president, from the Korean – the South Korean president, and he wants to be feted all over the world, and he wants to party, so to speak. But is he going to get any of that if he doesn't reduce the threat that he poses?

MR. CHA: Well, I mean, I'll go first. I mean, I think he's gotten – he's been able to get some of that already.

MR. SCHWARTZ: Yeah.

MR. CHA: You know, this is – I mean, this is what we egghead academics would call what – you know, what your wife is talking about is what we would call audience costs, right, that now you have an isolated leader who now has audience costs because of these meetings with Trump that were never there before. And the question is, is that going to change the way he makes calculations in the future?

I mean, you know, I mean, Dave is probably less skeptical than I am. I am more skeptical that he will really truly change his ways. But in the meantime, he's enjoying all of the – you know, all of the benefits that are coming from, you know, the nighttime stroll in Singapore. And who knows what else he'll do, Mar-a-Lago for all we know.

MR. SCHWARTZ: Well, Dave's in Southern California where it's beautiful, and we're here in Washington where it's pouring nonstop. So, Dave, give us a –

MR. KANG: I'm actually in – I'm actually in Philadelphia right now.

MR. SCHWARTZ: Oh, OK, so you're feeling this. But, Dave, bring us a little sunshine here. (Laughter.)

MR. KANG: Well, no, I mean, again, I would point out that, to me, denuclearization is not the goal. Stabilizing the peninsula is the goal. And if that's the case, then he won't need nuclear weapons and we won't be nearly as worried about it. And as I like to point out to people, less than nine months ago, let's call it 10 months ago, almost anything that happened that's happening right now would have been unthinkable. If I had told you last September, hey, you know what, in the middle of fire and fury and bloody nose and everything else, we are going to have some mil-mil stuff, we're going to have economic stuff, and he will not have tested missiles or nuclear weapons for 11 months, and in fact had made some symbolic – I admit they're symbolic, but symbolic closings of these test sites – if I had said to you that 10 months ago, people would have laughed at me for being too naïve.

MR. SCHWARTZ: Right.

MR. KANG: But that's where we are.

MR. CHA: Yeah.

MR. KANG: And so I think we need to push that forward.

MR. CHA: Yeah. Dave actually did say that 10 months ago and everybody laughed at him. (Laughter.)

MR. SCHWARTZ: No, OK, yeah, right. OK. So worth pointing out.

MR. KANG: I know. And I'm still bitter. (Laughter.)

MR. SCHWARTZ: Well, rightly so. (Laughs.) But let me ask you this: What do you make of the agreement to reduce conventional forces and guard posts on both sides of the DMZ? Is this a good idea at this stage, or what?

MR. KANG: Yeah, let me say, right, when North Korea doesn't test missiles – and it barely has a missile or nuclear capability if we go by how much the U.S. tested, for example, right? I mean, they barely have shown that they've got this capability. When they take on an 11-month moratorium on that, we view it as, well, whatever, it's not enough. But then when we talk about for our side let's do some minor moving of guard posts and move back 85 kilometers instead of 50 kilometers in the – in the West Sea, people shriek about how our readiness will be impaired. And I think that shows how hard it is for us to conceptualize what it means to actually reduce tension. We're like, we can do anything. And, frankly, North Korea's been doing a lot more if you – purely from a position of readiness, right? So I think that these are – these are steps. And I certainly don't think that North Korea has any intention at this point to sort of hand over all the nukes and account for them fully, but I'd be pushing them that way and I'd see how far we can get.

MR. CHA: The thing I like most about the conventional tension-reduction measures is that if we are starting to move in the direction of a peace declaration or something of that nature, my personal view is that I think for the United States it's better off if we do that we trade that for actual tension-reduction measures on the conventional side rather than some sort of denuclearization declaration which will be almost impossible to get from North Korea. If we can get real things for it, like, you know, stability in the West Sea or stopping, you know, altercations in the DMZ, or even the pullback of the artillery threat from North Korea, those would be really good things. Right now we're in a situation where the South Korean president, Moon, the North Korean leader, Kim, the Chinese leader, Xi, Putin for that matter, are all moving in the direction of a peace declaration, and the United States is the one that's most opposed to it because we're not getting what we want on denuclearization, which we're not going to get by the end of this year. I mean, I don't think we're going to get anything close to what we want by the end of this year, which then makes us look like we're the obstacle to peace on the peninsula, which is not a good place for the United States to be in because we've always been the one that's been the one that's been trying to undergird the peace on the peninsula.

MR. SCHWARTZ: Is there enough progress for President Trump to at least claim some sort of victory here?

MR. CHA: No. No, but –

MR. SCHWARTZ: He will, but – (laughter) –

MR. CHA: No, but it's not going to stop him.

MR. SCHWARTZ: Right, right.

MR. CHA: Yeah, you know, I think, you know, the South Korean president probably deserves some credit here. I mean, he's really pushed the ball further on inter-Korean relations

And let me just say, in defense of Dave – (laughs) – that –

MR. KANG: (Laughs.)

MR. SCHWARTZ: – not that he needs defending, because he's more than capable of defending himself. But you know, one thing that we have to say about what he's doing – what the South Koreans are doing in terms of this North-South dialogue is that, you know, they are trying to open channels of dialogue that already exist – like, for example, between China and Taiwan, right, or that existed between East and West Germany. But there was absolutely no dialogue between the North and the South since the Korean War. And what has always made that difficult is the nuclear weapons, right?

MR. CHA: Yeah.

MR. SCHWARTZ: I mean, I don't think China would be having the sort of dialogue it has with Taiwan today – regardless of what you think of that dialogue – if Taiwan had nuclear weapons, right? (Laughs.) I just don't think they would be having that sort of dialogue.

So there is – in many ways, the inter-Korean track is so far behind other rival regimes, you know, presumably of the same country that we see in world politics historically so there is some – I think in that sense it makes sense. So there you go, one for Dave.

MR. CHA: Ok, Dave, one for you.

MR. KANG: (Laughs.)

MR. SCHWARTZ: Tell us what you think about President Trump's role in this. I mean, he said today that he received a very warm and beautiful letter from Kim Jung Un.

MR. KANG: It was beautiful. Beautifully written. (Laughs.)

MR. SCHWARTZ: Yeah, beautifully written. And that Kim Jung Un asked for a second meeting.

MR. KANG: Yeah.

MR. SCHWARTZ: Trump's asked Secretary Pompeo to work that out. So what do you think?

MR. KANG: You know, you could sort of see a second Trump meeting, you know, Kim-Trump summit coming from a long way away.

MR. SCHWARTZ: You mentioned Mar-a-Lago before.

MR. KANG: Yeah, right. I mean, I think we all know that Trump loves this stuff.

MR. SCHWARTZ: Yeah.

MR. KANG: So I don't think a second summit would – a second summit would not surprise me at all.

MR. SCHWARTZ: Well, it's made for TV.

MR. CHA: Mmm hmm.

MR. KANG: Yeah, I meant the first one was incredible. I mean, you know, the second one might not be quite as exciting but still, right? Like – so I'm not surprised that Trump is moving forward, and I think what Moon has done – what Moon and Kim, frankly, have done is very carefully given enough or shown enough looseness about, you know, willingness to move on things with enough rhetoric about real things like, say, economics or military –

MR. SCHWARTZ: Yeah.

MR. KANG: – with enough rhetoric about nukes that it's enough to entice another Trump summit. So I would not be at all surprised to see one coming down the pike.

MR. SCHWARTZ: Well, what should be on the table for a second Trump-Kim summit? Victor, what do you –

MR. KANG: Well, I –

MR. SCWARTZ: I'm sorry, Dave, go ahead.

MR. KANG: Yeah, let me just jump in. Because what I wrote about – I wrote this in a New York Times op-ed a couple weeks ago –

MR. SCHWARTZ: Yeah.

MR. KANG: – which was the U.S. so far has – the only actual thing, the concession the U.S. has done has been to postpone war game and that the key thing for the U.S. to do is to come up with some kind of concession to move the ball forward. Because the North Koreans are very clear that they say they're willing to denuclearize if the U.S. meets them halfway. It has been an unconditional "we'll go first." So the U.S. needs to do something, and they can start with something. And that could be something about a peace declaration or – blah, blah, blah, blah – you know, this is up to the political leaders in Washington to figure out what they want to offer as a first step, but it needs to be more than just one postponed war game. And that's what I think needs to be on the table for the American side, and then they can push the North Koreans to say, OK, move beyond rhetoric.

Who is this?

MR. CHA: See, so I think the problem here is that we know what the North Koreans are going to ask for, right? It's not so much the peace declaration because they got everybody else asking the United States for the peace declaration.

MR. SCHWARTZ: Right.

MR. CHA: What they want is lifting sanctions. That's what they're going to want from the United States because all those economic projects that the South Koreans and the North Koreans laid out last week – you know, all those projects – none of them can move forward unless the sanctions are lifted. And so that's what they're going to be asking from the United States. Like I said – and I wrote about this for Bloomberg last week –

MR. SCHWARTZ: Yes.

MR. CHA: – the dilemma is that if we start trading the lifting of sanctions for a peace declaration, that doesn't make sense to me because the sanctions are for proliferation. So if they do stuff on proliferation then we lift sanctions, but we don't lift sanctions for a peace declaration.

MR. SCHWARTZ: Because it's not exactly easy once you lift sanctions once you turn them back on again either.

MR. CHA: It's not. And as we've seen with China already, China's basically back to normal in terms of their commerce with North Korea, so it's really hard on the Chinese side. But what these sanctions do is they require every other U.N. member state to comply with the sanctions even if China doesn't.

So I do think there's going to be a lot of asks of the United States at a second Trump-Kim summit, and I just hope that the president understands that going in – that there's going to be a lot of pressure on the United States to give stuff that we haven't been given before. And part, as Dave said, because it looks like we haven't given as much as the other side has. So whether it's sanctions, lifting peace declaration, you know, these are big-ticket items, and in the end, we are not getting what we want on denuclearization, but we're going to get a lot of pressure from the South Koreans and North Koreans, the Chinese, the Russians, not to stop up the whole process, not to block the momentum that we're seeing.

MR. SCHWARTZ: OK, so if you're both advising this administration on what to do next, what do you tell them?

MR. CHA: Fasten your seatbelts. (Laughs.) That would be the first thing.

MR. KANG: (Laughs.)

MR. SCHWARTZ: Yeah. Hold onto your wallet.

MR. CHA: Hold onto your wallet. (Laughs.) That would be the second thing.

But I really think that if the North Koreans come at us and want sanctions lifting, we should be very clear that sanctions lifting has to do with non-proliferation –

MR. SCHWARTZ: Yeah.

MR. CHA: – that they have to take steps on nuclear weapons, not – you know, not confidence-building measures, not, like, stuff on the side, but like real, hardcore, you know, proliferation stuff. That's what they need to do. And that we should keep the discussion of peace declaration focused on conventional tension reduction. That, to me, would be the path to take. It's cleaner. Those are two

separate negotiations, and we don't end up in a position where we are – where we look like – I don't think we are; I should be clear, I don't think we are – but we would look like we're holding everybody else back because we're kind of stuck on this denuclearization thing.

MR. SCHWARTZ: Yeah, this little thing is –

MR. CHA: This little thing, right?

MR. SCHWARTZ: Yeah, this little denuclearization.

MR. KANG: (Laughs.)

MR. SCHWARTZ: Dave, jump in here, what do you think?

MR. KANG: Yeah, no, I basically agree with Victor on this, which is – in a way being more clear about the various buckets that we're dealing with with North Korea. There is an awful lot of work that could be done on conventional and on, sort of, social or whatever sports teams or whatever else, that aren't sanctions-related, where you can make some progress, that could be showing progress to both sides, even while you say we still have to work on denuclearization and sanctions and all this kind of – and peace treaty. I totally agree with Victor as well that for the U.S. to be involved in the sort of peace declaration thing should be more than what we're doing right now. I mean –

MR. SCHWARTZ: Can you –

MR. KANG: – South Korea and North Korea are clearly in charge of that, which is fine, but the U.S., I think, needs to be a little more cautious.

MR. SCHWARTZ: Can you explain the difference between a peace declaration and a peace treaty, in this sense?

MR. CHA: So a peace treaty would be, you know, a formal treaty ending the Korean War that would have to be ratified by our Senate, which –

MR. SCHWARTZ: Yup.

MR. CHA: – is highly unlikely, I think.

MR. SCHWARTZ: Right.

MR. CHA: A declaration – and a peace treaty could also raise questions about the status of the United Nations command, U.S. forces, these sorts of things. A declaration is really a political statement that – and Moon has even said that the declaration would not affect the treaty with the United States. It would not affect U.S. forces. It would not affect CFC, Combined Forces Command. So it's really just a political – it's just people saying, hey, the war is over; we just want everybody to know that, and that's not a real treaty.

MR. SCHWARTZ: Not a ratified treaty.

MR. CHA: No, no, it's not a real ratified treaty. And it's not clear that if it will – you know, I think with a treaty you'd have things like demobilization of forces, removal of the mines in the DMZ, you'd have all sorts of things. But with a peace declaration, I think you'll get – you'll have more of these sort of – I don't want to call them token, but you'd have smaller scale confidence-building measures like removing some guard posts and some of the stuff they talked about last week.

MR. SCHWARTZ: Do we believe that the North Koreans are sincere in any way about peace with their neighbors to the south and about better relations with us?

MR. CHA: Oh, I think they want better relations with the United States, you know. I mean – I'm going to sound like Dave here – I mean, I think they want better relations – (laughter) – with the United States.

MR. KANG: You wish, buddy. You wish.

MR. CHA: Right. (Laughs.) I think they want that, but they want that as a nuclear weapon state. That's the difference, right. I mean –

MR. SCHWARTZ: And we're – there's no way we can accept that?

MR. CHA: I think it'd be very hard, very hard to accept. I don't know.

MR. SCHWARTZ: Dave?

MR. KANG: Yeah, no, I definitely think they want better relations with both South Korea and the U.S. I mean, if you think about it from Kim Jung Un or the regime's perspective, if fundamentally they're concerned about long-term survival, you know, having better relations with both these countries is really key to a much more stable long-term survival if it's done in the right way from their perspective, right? And so I think they'd be totally willing to do it in conditions that don't involve them simply disarming, and that's what we get between de-nukes and disarm – where do you – how do you thread that needle?

MR. SCHWARTZ: So what kind of credit does President Trump deserve as all this is churning?

MR. CHA: I mean, it's a good question. I think he deserves credit in the sense that his willingness to do these summit meetings with the North Korean leader gives the South Korean president a lot of leverage.

MR. SCHWARTZ: OK.

MR. CHA: I think it gives – you know, everybody's crediting Moon, and he deserves credit. I mean, nobody's working harder on the diplomacy today than the South Korean president.

MR. SCHWARTZ: Than Moon, yeah.

MR. CHA: But, you know, I mean, you have to give some credit to Trump in the sense that if he was not willing to do these meetings, Moon would not have this big ace – you know, ace in the hole that he could pull out at any time, right? I mean, it's because of that ace in the hole that the North has

been willing to talk to the South in these set of talks about denuclearization, something historically they would never allow the South Koreans to talk about. They would just say speak to the hand, right? This is something that we discuss with the United States, not with you, South Koreans. So in that sense, you know, you got to give – Moon’s, you know, prominence in all this in part has something to do with Trump’s willingness – rightly or wrongly – to just do these very highly public, flamboyant, made-for-TV, as you said, Andrew, summit meetings.

MR. SCHWARTZ: Yeah. Dave, President Trump said today that he’s calling for a meeting with Kim quite soon. Is that the right move?

MR. KANG: Whether it’s right or not it probably will happen. You know, I think in some ways – if I were both Kim and Trump, I would put it off for six months or so and let the anticipation build, I really would, right? I would milk it for all it’s worth and prepare for all it’s worth.

MR. SCHWARTZ: Yeah, it’s kind of like hype up Trump-Kim two. It’s like Apollo Creed versus Rocky III.

MR. KANG: Yeah, exactly.

MR. CHA: Yeah.

MR. KANG: Yes. You don’t want to oversaturate, you know? And I mean that both for – you know, for fun, but also for specifics about – in pragmatic terms, about what you hope to achieve and give everyone a chance to even catch their breath as to a really fast development that has gone on. And there I would say – also like Victor was saying – that Trump’s willingness to shake up the way that the U.S. and North Korea interact with each other – in ways that all the previous presidents stayed pretty much within the conventional wisdom – has created this space for this rapport for Moon and for Kim in a lot of ways, and I think that Trump deserves credit for. He’s willing to consider things that most American presidents would have said not yet or whatever.

MR. SCHWARTZ: Do you think he’s willing to consider them because all past American presidents didn’t, just to be different?

MR. KANG: I honestly don’t know that much about Trump. I would say that might be a part of it. I actually – if I had to guess – and believe me, I don’t know the guy – it’s more that he has this just innate belief in his own ability to –

MR. SCHWARTZ: To negotiate, yeah.

MR. KANG: – to negotiate deals and to meet people. And so he thinks he can just do it, whereas other people couldn’t.

MR. SCHWARTZ: Well, how far have we come since the last summit? I mean, did we really get – what did we really get out of the last summit up to now?

MR. CHA: We didn’t really get that – I mean – you mean, the inter-Korean summit?

MR. SCWARTZ: No, the –

MR. CHA: The Singapore summit –

MR. SCHWARTZ: – well, I was referring to the Singapore summit.

MR. CHA: Yeah.

MR. SCHWARTZ: What did we get since then?

MR. CHA: So I think I would – so I would say we got some confidence-building measures by the North Koreans with regard to return of the POW-MIA remains, the shutdown of the nuclear test site, and the satellite launch site. So we've gotten some confidence-building measures. I don't call them denuclearization because there's no outside verification, right?

MR. SCHWARTZ: Right.

MR. CHA: That's what, you know, denuclearization – there's outside verification. Now, in the inter-Korean summit last week, the North Koreans said they would allow relevant parties –

MR. SCHWARTZ: Yeah.

MR. CHA: – to verify some decommissioning of the satellite launch sites, so that's – you know, that's, again, a step forward. But in terms of the – if from the inside the beltway, Washington-perspective, which is just inside Philadelphia, where Dave is, there is –

MR. KANG: (Laughs.)

MR. SCHWARTZ: Just an Acela ride away.

MR. CHA: Just an Acela ride away, there is still a view that the North Koreans haven't committed to, you know, the trifecta: a declaration –

MR. SCHWARTZ: Yep.

MR. CHA: – outside verification and a timeline, right? That's the trifecta. And there's been a lot of flashing lights and mirrors and disco balls and all these other things, but when we look for those three things we don't see – we don't see that, and that, I think, for many people, including Gina Haspel, as she said today, that's the thing that they're concerned about.

MR. SCHWARTZ: Dave, do you have anything to add to that?

MR. KANG: No, I think that pretty much sums it up. I think there's a lot more – I have been surprised, but also not surprised by the amount of skepticism in let's call mainstream American foreign policy, you know, views, and I can understand why. But, for me, having watched this stuff closely for 20 years, 25 years, I'm still – I will take these steps forward.

(Music plays.)

MR. SCHWARTZ: If you have a question for one of our experts about The Impossible State, email us at [impossiblestate@csis.org](mailto: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](http://beyondparallel.csis.org).

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(Music plays.)

This is The Impossible State.

(END)