

Center for Strategic and International Studies

TRANSCRIPT
CSIS-Korea Chair

**Prospects for the Trump-Kim Vietnam Summit Session II:
North Korean Human Rights and Humanitarian Issues Going Forward**

EVENT DATE
Friday, February 22, 2019

TIME
11:00 a.m. EST

LOCATION
CSIS Headquarters, Washington, D.C.

FEATURING
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Lindsay Lloyd: (Off mic) – Lindsay Lloyd. I'm director for human freedom at the George W. Bush Institute in Dallas, Texas. Very happy to be here. We have our own modest North Korea effort, which focuses on the topic of this conversation, on human rights in North Korea and why that matters.

Lindsay Lloyd: I think you all have bios, but just very briefly, starting with Roberta Cohen. Roberta is the co-chair emeritus for the Committee for Human Rights in North Korea. Also a nonresident senior fellow at the Brookings Institution, and has a long, long record working and studying these issues. Next to her is Ambassador Robert King. Bob King is senior advisor here at the CSIS Korea chair. Served notably and with distinction as the special envoy for North Korean human rights throughout the Obama years. He is the most recent person to be in that position, as that position has gone unfilled for two years now.

Lindsay Lloyd: Next to Bob we have Jung Pak, who is the senior fellow at – also at the Brookings Institution. She is the SK-Korea Foundation chair in Korea studies. She held a number of senior positions in the intelligence community, at the Central Intelligence Agency, and the Director of National Intelligence. And then on the end is Victor Cha, who addition to his CSIS role and Georgetown role we're proud to have as a fellow in human freedom at the Bush Institute.

Lindsay Lloyd: The first panel's a tough act to follow. I think it's probably likely that the strategic issue, the nuclear issues, are going to form the bulk of the conversation in Hanoi next week. But we believe there's another dimension that's equally important and, in fact, linked very closely to the security issues. And those are the human rights concerns. If you haven't seen that, I'd refer you to a piece published yesterday on Bloomberg by Victor, where he outlines four principles that maybe can serve as a bit of a guideline or framework for this conversation about human rights and the talks with North Korea.

Lindsay Lloyd: The first is integrating human rights into our strategy as a necessity not an option or a choice. The second is that human rights and denuclearization are interlinked. And they really can't be separated. The third is that raising the human rights issue actually strengthens our hand in these conversations. And fourth is that mainstreaming human rights into these conversations is a politically smart thing to do. So I hope we can look into that a little bit.

Lindsay Lloyd: But maybe to start off, Roberta, the scope of human rights in North Korea, maybe a little refresher for maybe those who aren't as familiar. Why does this matter? And specifically, if we were going to raise human rights with North Koreans, what topics, what subjects do we need to be thinking about?

Roberta Cohen: Thank you, Lindsay. Good morning, everyone.

Roberta Cohen: I'd like to just recall that President Trump said last year, I believe, that the character of the North Korean regime makes the nuclear threat more dangerous. And I think that would follow that no real peace can take hold on the Korean Peninsula if half is governed through political oppression, suppression of information, labor camps, crimes against humanity at the state policy level, not to mention the failure to provide for the welfare of the population.

Roberta Cohen: So, yes, there are changes occurring in North Korea, as was mentioned in the first panel, particularly with the markets. But we are speaking about normalization of relations with a regime that is not normal. For normalization to succeed in any meaningful way, human rights will have to become part of the equation. It's not an option. First, the U.S. must negotiate a hold to the routine political detentions of its citizens of 15 to nine years. If Americans are going to travel to North Korea and do business there and teach, they cannot be subject to intimidation, constant surveillance, arrests on spurious grounds, harsh sentencing, and denial of visits from the protecting power.

Roberta Cohen: The three freed Americans last year, one of them was a businessperson. Another was an agricultural specialist teaching at Pyongyang University of Science and Technology. The third was also teaching there. He was in accounting. And of course, there was a fourth, who was a student and who was a tourist, and who came back in a coma.

Roberta Cohen: Second, economic investment can't proceed well without attention to labor standards, protection of property, the rule of law. And let me refer to Victor's op-ed in Bloomberg, because he points out that the international financial institutions and general counsel to American companies aren't going to be able to support involvement where the forced labor or abuses of workers are part of the supply chain.

Roberta Cohen: Third, the U.S. will have to press for the loosening of restrictions on freedom of information. If there are to be people-to-people exchanges, and seminars, and training, and travel, it can't go hand-in-hand with arresting North Koreans for listening to Voice of America or any other independent media, jamming these broadcasts, or arresting people for watching an American film or South Korean film.

Roberta Cohen: Fourth, the U.S. law calls for unrestricted family reunifications. So if we're going to be negotiating on that, which we should, family members should be able to see each other and be in contact after the initial reunion. But that will require telephone calls to other countries. That will require mail. That will require some kind of travel. And all those are heavily restricted in North Korea, if not criminalized.

Roberta Cohen: Next point I would refer to is insistence – if humanitarian aid is going to resume – insistence on humanitarian standards so it's not reinforcing the regime and its favored groups. In part, attention must be paid to addressing the significant constraints on humanitarian operations that the secretary-general of the U.N. has drawn attention to in his last report. And he has appealed for full access, free movement, private contact with beneficiaries and with the local population. Reaching the most vulnerable, effective monitoring. These are very basic humanitarian standards and he's had to appeal for that. This has to be part of any arrangements.

Roberta Cohen: Reaching the neediest, I would add, means seeking access to those who are suffering the most acute cases of hunger and disease. And those are the tens of thousands of men, women and children incarcerated in the political prison camps and the reeducation facilities. General Assembly resolutions highlight these people and so do U.N. reports. It will be a moral lapse – I repeat, a moral lapse – to look away from that.

Roberta Cohen: Finally, let me say there is need to explain to North Korea the terms of bilateral U.S. sanctions. Under U.S. law, sanctions can be lifted not only for denuclearization steps but for human rights improvements. And the law sets forth what these steps are, and it includes release of political prisoners. It includes free flow of information. It includes repatriation of abductees. It includes standards for distribution of aid and monitoring. This is bipartisan legislation with strong backers in Congress. So I would just say that progress toward normalization will not move forward in a meaningful and a substantial way unless human rights is part of the equation.

Lindsay Lloyd: Thank you.

Lindsay Lloyd: Bob King, moral lapse? There's more to it, though, as well. It's – apart from the moral dimension, there is this sort of practical dimension that Roberta touched on at the end, that in fact we have sanctions, we have other provisions written into U.S. law talking about the human rights issues. Could you maybe speak about that for a moment?

Robert King: Yeah, one of the things that I think is particularly important is that, with regard to the nuclear program, we are trying to move North Korea in a direction of accepting standards that have been accepted and adopted by the international community. The international order that has been in place since the end of World War II has set a framework for the relationships between countries. And the enormous increase in trade and in contacts between countries and the fact that we have not had a major war involving great powers in the last 70 years, is largely the result of the international system that's been created.

Robert King: If North Korea is going to be able to participate the way it wants to in terms of its economy and so forth, it needs to be part of that process. If we are going to be successful in terms of moving North Korea in the direction of denuclearization, it is to get the North Koreans to accept the international standards that were set up – the International Atomic Energy Agency, various other kinds of processes. Part of that process is the international commitment to human rights. North Korea is one of the 171 countries which has signed and ratified the International Declaration of Human Rights. If North Korea's going to be fully accepted – economically, politically, and in any other way – they've got to be part of this broader international consensus, this international agreement on standards.

Robert King: The North Koreans clearly want to be part of that. Even in the area of human rights, the North Koreans have tried to participate. They haven't gone as far as we'd like to see them go on human rights, but they have made progress. In the situation, for example, of the U.N. Human Rights Council, there's a process there called the Universal Periodic Review, where every five years or so each country in the world goes through a process of evaluating – self-evaluation of its own human rights record, its achievements, its problems. And then all of the other countries have the opportunity to comment on that country's examination of its human rights record. North Korea has participated. North Korea has been very anxious to be seen as a member of the international community. We've had a couple of very interesting occasions of where the North Koreans have spoken up and talked about what they've done. They've given very glowing reports about how good human rights are in North Korea.

Robert King: But the other countries who have participated have raised issues and raised questions about North Korea's record. When North Korea went through the process the first time in December of 2009, North Koreans presented, you know, a rosy scenario of how beautiful human rights were in North Korea. Several countries, including the United States, raised questions about North Korea's record, about areas where there was room for progress. There were some non-sensitive areas that were singled out including, for example, dealing with persons with disabilities.

Robert King: The North Koreans, by the time they went through the process five years later, had ratified the Convention on Persons with Disabilities, had made some progress and was quite quick to pronounce how – what progress they had made in terms of these areas. There's a lot more they need to do and Roberta has outlined a lot of those areas.

Robert King: But it seems to me that if we don't involve North Korea and press the North Koreans on human rights, we are not encouraging North Korea's full participation in the international system, which includes limitations on nuclear weapons and other kinds of activities we'd like to see the North Koreans cease carrying out. So I think that's an important part of what we need to do in terms of moving forward with North Korea. We need to press them on human rights.

Robert King: Unfortunately, this administration has taken human rights as, largely, an instrument with which you beat the North Koreans until they pay attention to you, and as soon as they make positive signs, no word about human rights. Trump spent – in his first State of the Union speech in January of 2018, he spent 10 percent of his speech talking about North Korea and particularly North Korean human rights. There were North Korean defectors in the hall of the House of Representatives. There were family members from the Warmbier family who were there who were recognized, acknowledged. Human rights was given great attention.

Robert King: Three months later, Trump and Kim Jong-un agreed to meet in Singapore. Not a word since then about North Korea's human rights. Not mentioned in the State of the Union earlier this month. We've got to move beyond the point of where we think of human rights as simply a way you beat up on the North Koreans to make progress in other areas. It's an integral part of moving North Korea in a positive direction.

Lindsay Lloyd: OK. Jung Pak, are you optimistic this is going to be topic one for the U.S. – the Hanoi Summit, that –

Jung Pak: Yes.

Lindsay Lloyd: – there's going to be a conversation about human rights?

Jung Pak: Oh. No, I am pessimistic about the whole summit 2.0 to begin with. But I would have to say that not having human rights on the agenda of denuclearization is like locking the front door but then leaving your garage and your back door and your front porch wide open or it's the effect of having – just opening up the refrigerator and taking all your food and straight – and putting it straight into the trash.

Jung Pak: I think human – before any sanctions could be lifted by law it has to pass the human rights smell test. But, you know, let me step back and talk about credibility. Putting aside the credibility of U.S. negotiations in general, I think we've all seen all of the reports that suggest that there is a little bit of policy dysfunction, a lot – and a bit of disarray in how the U.S. and the Trump administration is approaching the summit and so – and the inconsistencies between what the big progress that President Trump has been touting versus what the intelligence community and what the reports and the various satellite imagery are reporting about North Korea's ongoing activities. They're below the surface, literally, right, with the – with the missile bases and the underground facilities but also that the North Koreans themselves have been pretty clear about what they're willing to give and not give.

Jung Pak: And there's disagreement within the Trump administration itself, despite all the progress that has been touted. Special Representative Biegun and Secretary of State Pompeo and others have said that – and National Security Advisor Bolton have said that there is nothing happening on the nuclear issue; that's why the president has to meet with Kim again.

Jung Pak: So let's put that aside, despite the fact that I spent two minutes on it. But let's go to the credibility of the – what the Trump administration is offering to North Korea – the big bright future – and that – the bright future for North Korea. Kim wants a bright future for the North Koreans. We believe in Kim. Look at all this real estate that Kim has right smack in the middle of – in a very strategic position among the second, third, and eleventh largest economies in the world. Great location. So and the way the president has been couching this is, you know, give up your nuclear weapons and you're going to have this wonderful bounty. That's the refrigerator. Not raising human rights is like putting that bounty into the trash because I think that without – as Victor and others have mentioned and, Victor, in your – in your op-ed – you know, if you don't have human rights improvements in North Korea you can't get investors.

Jung Pak: You can't get – you're not going to be drawing lots of people, and also without improvements in human rights like loosening of the information blockade and freedom of assembly and freedom of expression and the ability for entrepreneurship to thrive, that is not possible. A brighter future for North Korea is not possible with all of that happening.

Jung Pak: So, you know, the Trump administration has talked about how they're going to be different. They're going to be different because they're going to not waste all billions of dollars and squander billions of dollars on making very small or no improvements in North Korea nuclear issue. But we're at the – it's in danger of doing just that. Why would Kim be incentivized to trust the Trump administration, especially given the jettisoning of the Iran deal? Why would he trust the treasured sword of nuclear weapons to a U.S. president who is hampered by lots of, you know, domestic issues?

Jung Pak: So I think, you know, the human rights issue has to be part of this conversation for – even just for the Trump administration policy of this brighter future for North Korea.

Lindsay Lloyd: Victor, you have said kind of a similar thing in this rights-first approach. Can you talk about why that matters and maybe give us your thoughts on the likelihood that this is even going to come up in Hanoi next week?

Victor Cha: Sure. Yeah. Well, so the first thing I'll say is I'm not on the second panel because I like being on the stage so much but we actually invited somebody else – a U.S. official – to join and they did not get approval to join, which may be an indication in and of itself about how much this is going to come up in Hanoi.

Victor Cha: So let me sort of take off from where Jung left off. I mean, the first thing is that the human rights issue is important to the overall strategy of the president, even though he doesn't realize that, right. If we are going – if – I mean, Singapore – if Hanoi is really going to be a success, then, as we said in the last panel, there are things that the North Koreans that'll put on the – will put on the table that we've seen before and so they need to put something new on the table to get us, all the skeptics, to say, all right, maybe it's different this time, right, and so in that sense, doing something on human rights might be one of those things they could put on the table that would cause, you know, like, skeptics like Sue and others to go, OK, that's different, right.

Victor Cha: The other is that if the president really wants final and fully verifiable denuclearization of North Korea, it is entirely implausible that that could happen given how closed and restricted access is in North Korean society, both for domestic people as well for foreigners. How can you have fully verifiable denuclearization when nobody is allowed to move around the country anywhere, right?

Victor Cha: And then, third, I think is the point that everybody else has made, which is that, you know, President Trump has gone from calling Kim Jong-un "little rocket man" to the economic rocket, right – that North Korea is now the economic rocket of Asia. Well, you know, I think, as everyone has said, if they come out of Hanoi next week and the president says, you know, they're committed to denuclearization – now, you know, the World Bank, the IMF, you can all go in there – you know, Pepsi, Kentucky Fried Chicken, you can all go into North Korea now, it's all open for you, you know, including a Trump casino or whatever else, you know, again, nobody – none of that is going to happen given existing U.S. law and the fact that there are – you know, there's forced labor, human-rights abuses, along the supply chain. You know, no company will want to be in violation of U.S. law, you know, simply to get into North Korea. It just doesn't make sense. So for all of these reasons, it is in the president's interest to raise this issue to achieve what he wants to achieve.

Victor Cha: Now, the point that Bob made about human rights being sort of this baseball bat we use to hit the North Koreans over the head with – I mean, the reality is that after the Commission of Inquiry report, the U.N. Commission of Inquiry report that came out five years ago, it was – that called on – that the international community came behind to call for the North Korean leadership to be taken to the International Criminal Court for crimes against humanity, you know, this was, for the North Koreans, a real vulnerability. They were quite concerned about it. And they did two things. And the first of these, I think, is not debatable. The second one may be debatable.

Victor Cha: The first thing they did was they started sending their diplomats to Russia and other members of the European Union to lobby against, both in the U.N. General Assembly and the U.N. Security Council, to raise the issue of human rights as a topic of debate. And that is something the North Koreans have never done, right. So they clearly felt vulnerability there.

Victor Cha: The second thing they did – and this is some – this may be debatable – is that they quietly became more open to discussions on humanitarian assistance. I mean, Bob is probably the best who could speak for this because he was in the position at the time, and possibly to discussion on human rights.

Victor Cha: But the point is that they're not going to raise this in Hanoi unless the president raises it. And again, so for this reason I'm reminded of that famous line from Jerry Maguire, you know, help me help you, right. (Laughs.) I mean, there is an opportunity here to raise this issue in ways that are positive, not negative, for both the president's agenda and for North Korea's integration into the international community.

Lindsay Lloyd: Roberta, Victor just alluded to this sort of Achilles heel, that this is a sensitive issue. It's one that provoked reactions from Pyongyang. If you had the president's ear, where would you start? You know, what issues might you suggest this is a good place to start the human-rights conversation with North Korea?

Roberta Cohen: Let me say that North Korea has taken the view – and they've publicly announced it – that human rights is an obstacle to peace. And I think that, unfortunately, the Republic of Korea, South Korea, has deferred on that line. And I see even that Steve Biegun, in speaking at Stanford, refers to the fact that the United States and North Korea have different views about human rights, as if it were a kind of a think-tank discussion and that there's a parity of views and that, on one side, we have one view, and then there's another view, and they're all legitimate. They're not, because the Commission of Inquiry has found systematic, widespread crimes against humanity in North Korea. It's a very different situation.

Roberta Cohen: So with the president's ear, human rights is the identity of the United States. It's not a jacket that you say, oh, we're going to leave that by the door and take it off. It's the history, our heritage, our laws. It's a very strong identity. And the same should be for South Korea. So the idea that we become something else, that we do not deal with this issue, that we put it aside, is really putting aside one of our greatest strengths, what our reputation is built on, and making that a kind of a – putting that aside and deferring to North Korea. So immediately the negotiations become an agenda set by North Korea rather than set by what are in our interest.

Roberta Cohen: Now, some of the issues I believe I've indicated before. And they're not – they're issues that are American interests. As I mentioned, the arrest of Americans in North Korea is an issue that has to be taken up if there's going to be any kind of normalization and new relations with the countries. That has to be taken up. And the reunification of families issues, these are American interests. These are human-rights issues. This also has to be a stronger point, and greater information flow and the ending of the jamming of Voice of America in North Korea.

Roberta Cohen: These are all part of what we should be promoting as our goals. And if humanitarian assistance is warranted, then there are standards. These have to be

discussed. And as everybody has mentioned, we have U.S. laws. And I think that the – what was also mentioned; Bob mentioned it – part of the international human-rights system, if they are to have a place in that system, they have to move toward some kind of compliance with international standards.

Roberta Cohen: And one of the biggest blots on that exclusion of them are these political-prison camps, to which the U.N. has no access, to which humanitarian organizations have no access. And I will repeat for the third time that this has become one of the great moral lapses to look away from that, because it's a distraction when one talks about nuclear weapons. It has to be part of the agenda.

Lindsay Lloyd: Bob King, is there any sort of low-hanging fruit? Where would you start if this were your task for the day?

Robert King: One of the difficulties with human rights is you – it's hard to say which is the most important. And we don't take our own Bill of Rights and say the most important provision there is freedom of speech or the most important provision is the right to bear arms or something like this. So, I mean, I'm reluctant to say, you know, let's focus on this one.

Robert King: On the other hand, I think there are ways we can make progress with North Korea, and we probably should do that. There are a couple of things that I think are useful. One, as Roberta has said, access to information is critical. And I think if we're going to see change in North Korea, it's going to come about in part through access to information. We broadcast with Voice of America, Radio Free Asia. There are other broadcasting into North Korea. South Korea has extensive broadcast operations.

Robert King: Listening to the radio is an old-fashioned thing to do, but in North Korea it is one of the only ways you have of access to information. We need to do what we can to increase the availability of information in North Korea, and we need to press the North Koreans so that people in North Korea have access to that information.

Robert King: One of the things that we need to do is try to create a situation where pressure in North Korea pushes the government in more positive directions. And critical to that process is people in North Korea having access to information. So I think, you know, if I were going to prioritize, that's one that I would put very high on the list.

Robert King: It is very difficult when you look at political prisoners and what they are forced to go through, and there have been enough defectors who've had experience with the North Korean prison camps to know that this is one of the most horrible experiences that a human being could endure. And we certainly need to press on that.

Robert King: I'm not sure that starting with that as the first point we need to press the North Koreans to make progress on is the best way to go. The North Koreans are likely to respond much more negatively. Pressing on rights for people with disabilities is something the North Koreans made progress on. It does not threaten the political monopoly. There are, in fact, members of the elite who have children or family members who have disabilities. And so, I mean, there's some support for making progress in those areas.

- Robert King: My sense is that you can't go in and do the entire thing, but there are areas which maybe are less sensitive politically that we can and should push on.
- Robert King: I think, in terms of, for example, providing humanitarian assistance, both through the United Nations, through private organizations, and even through United States involvement in humanitarian assistance, has benefits. We do not make decisions on humanitarian aid because that has political benefits. In fact, our laws prohibit that. But the things that are required if we are to provide humanitarian assistance, either the United States or other organizations, are certain things that are helpful in moving North Korea in a positive direction.
- Robert King: One of the things that we are required by law to do if U.S. assistance is involved is to be able to determine independently the need for assistance. The United Nations agencies that are involved also are required to do that. This means that people who are making decisions on humanitarian aid in North Korea need to have access to areas where people are in need. They need to be able to go to areas which, in some cases, are off limits to foreigners. I think we need to press on that. I think we should be providing humanitarian assistance. We should insist that we be able to determine the need.
- Robert King: Also in providing aid, we need to be able to monitor the distribution of assistance to make sure that it's going to those for whom it was intended. This means short-notice visits to check on distribution and so forth. These are things that we need to do, and we can and should do.
- Robert King: And so these are important humanitarian things that we ought to be encouraging. And we certainly ought to be encouraging private organizations that are involved in humanitarian aid, but we also need to make sure that the international standards in terms of assessing need and determining monitoring distribution are carried out. These are things that I think we can make progress on now, and I think we ought to be pressing on those things. That shouldn't be where we stop, but I think that's where we can begin.
- Lindsay Lloyd: A good place to start.
- Lindsay Lloyd: Jung, you heard a little bit about – just now about broadcasting and information getting in. Can you offer any insights into sort of where South Korea is on these issues and why that may matter where the Moon administration is, where South Korean policy has changed in human rights in some of these issues?
- Jung Pak: I think what we've seen in some of the reports is that the funding has been cut severely for human-rights type of organizations and defector organizations. And I think that creates a pall – even if you're not targeted directly, it creates a pall or a fear of being singled out and being punished for bringing up human rights.
- Jung Pak: And the assumption is that you don't want to offend Kim and that you have to preserve this delicate moment of peace in this – in the summitry with Kim. But I think when you bring up human rights, if Kim makes any movements on human rights, I think that would be one of the key signposts that he was serious about denuclearization, because I think, in a way, that, you know, these would be costs would be – these are actions that would be costly for Kim to go back on.

Jung Pak: And so if he had – if he starts to – if Kim starts to loosen up, you know, the information blockade or he releases some people in the prison camps, that that would be a sign that he is willing to open up and that he is – he does envision a bright future for his country, and that that would make me much more comfortable and I think a lot of skeptics more comfortable about the Trump administration’s approach to the North Korea nuclear problem.

Lindsay Lloyd: Victor, you touched on it earlier, but the United Nations. Can you talk about what we can be or should be doing at the U.N? And how do we – we just marked the fifth anniversary of the COI, as you noted. Have we lost momentum there? And, if so, how do we regain it?

Victor Cha: Yeah. I mean, I think it’s a great question. We’ve lost a lot of momentum. I mean, it was actually five years ago that we held an event in this room, and everybody here participated in it to a standing-room-only audience with members of the commission. So there was a lot of interest. There was a groundswell of international attention to the issue. And it really has dropped off quite a bit.

Victor Cha: And probably one of the lowest points has been this inability of the U.N. Security Council last fall to agree to raise the U.N. – the North Korean human-rights issue for debate in the Security Council. You know, that was one of the biggest achievements, I think, of the momentum behind – the momentum subsequent to the U.N. Commission of Inquiry report. And, you know, I think many of us hope that there will be an opportunity for the U.N. Security Council to vote on this again, but it requires leadership and it requires U.S. leadership, and we don’t have an ambassador in the U.N. Roberta and Bob can speak to – well, there are other potential countries who could or a coalition of countries that could play a leading role, but China and Russia are going to make it very difficult, I think. And so I think there’s a lot of momentum that’s been – that’s been lost there, unfortunately.

Lindsay Lloyd: I want to go to audience questions in just a second. But yes, please.

Robert King: Can I add one more comment? One thing that the United States has done that has severely limited our effectiveness in pressing North Korea on human rights is to withdraw U.S. participation in the U.N. Human Rights Council. The U.N. Human Rights Council in Geneva is the focal point of human rights discussion in the United Nations. It’s an important institution. It’s created a lot of the procedures and the processes that we use to identify and work on human rights issues. We have not – the administration announced a year or so ago that we were not participating. That has limited our ability to use the United Nations institutions, which are critical in this process of pressing for human rights, and we’ve basically weakened our own position by withdrawing, by no longer participating.

Victor Cha: Can I just also –

Roberta Cohen: May I add one?

Victor Cha: Yeah. Go ahead, Roberta.

Roberta Cohen: I just wanted to say that the other piece that we should mention that hasn’t been done is that no one has been appointed to succeed the gentleman next to me. We have no special envoy on human rights in North Korea, so that if we did an advocate

within the system. And even if there was no U.N. ambassador – and there should be – you would have this special envoy, at least, able to go up to New York and begin to strategize of how we move to a Security Council meeting. So I think that that particular lack of appointment – you told me I had the president’s ear before – well, I would raise that as well.

Roberta Cohen: Sorry.

Victor Cha: Yeah, I just wanted to say one thing on what Jung said about South Korea. I mean, I think she’s right; there’s been in this administration a real drop in support for NGO groups that are doing this. The balloon launches have stopped. And I was going to give a shout-out to Sandy, but he left – Sandy Vershbow, our ambassador who was actually one of the first U.S. officials to speak more openly about human rights abuses in South Korea and was, you know, attacked, basically, for taking that position; which, again, speaks to how there’s a political climate in Korea, particularly when you have a progressive government in power where they see this, you know, as, what did you say, an obstacle or an obstacle to peace, or – they see it as something that’s negative. And, you know, I think many of us believe that that’s wrong and it’s the wrong way to look at it in terms of both U.S. and South Korean negotiations.

Victor Cha: I mean, if in the end the goal is – putting aside the weapons piece, if the goal is fully normalized relations with the United States, interaction with the international business community, and acceptance in the international community, then it’s impossible to get to those things without some movement on human rights. So this should, again, be something that is part of both a South Korean and the U.S. strategy.

Victor Cha: Now, for those in the audience who don’t follow Korea closely, you might think: Progressive government, they’re against human rights in North Korea? We’ll explain it to you later. (Laughter.) It’s very complicated. But that is – that is where we are.

Victor Cha: And so I think this should – you know, as Bob said, we shouldn’t look at this as a baseball bat. There is a positive agenda here for everybody – for the North Koreans, for the South Koreans, and for the United States.

Lindsay Lloyd: Yeah. Before I go to the audience here, just can someone speak to the why this issue matters in terms of Congress, the interest on Capitol Hill and why that is – it’s another reason that the administration ought to be considering this as they – as they go forward?

Robert King: Having spent 25 years [on](#) the Hill, these days there are very few issues on which there is strong bipartisan support on the Hill. North Korea human rights is an issue for which there is very strong bipartisan support. A week and a half after the summit in Singapore when human rights was not mentioned, the North Korea Human Rights Act was reauthorized by Congress. The vote in the House of Representatives was 415 to nothing. The vote in the Senate was taken by unanimous consent. That legislation is one of the few issues in the last two years or so that has come through with such strong bipartisan support. There is very strong interest in the Congress in human rights in North Korea, and members of Congress have played a very important role in terms of pressing administrations over the last

20 years to take a more active part on North Korea human rights. And I think that support is still very much in place on the Hill.

Jung Pak: And before the sanctions could be lifted it would have to pass the smell test with Congress before any – to show that North Korea is making tangible progress on the human rights issue.

Jung Pak: I think, you know, let me circle back to, you know, Victor's comment about help me help you. The way to – if I were with the president I would say, listen, you know, you want to make sure that Kim trusts you to make this big deal, but you know that you have to have congressional approval for sanctions removal. How can you be credible if you can't drag – you know, if you can't – if you don't have the support of Congress?

Jung Pak: And just yesterday or two days ago the House Intel, Armed Services, and Foreign Affairs Committees wrote a letter to the president saying that you're not giving us any information; you're blocking our access to information on North Korea. And so that undercuts any progress that we're trying to get with North Korea: Trust us because we can – we can do this for you and deliver on this bright future for North Korea.

Lindsay Lloyd: OK. We'll throw it open to your questions. If you have – if you'll wait for the mic. Let me start up here. I don't know where the mic runners are right now. If you can just identify yourself and if you're representing an organization, please.

Q: Ah, I get two questions. Bill Brown again. Two short questions, actually, one on the low-hanging fruit.

Q: You know, the – President Moon and certainly Kim both seem to be focused on Kaesong.

Lindsay Lloyd: Can you hold the mic closer to your –

Q: Sorry. Yeah, I'm sorry. Yeah.

Q: Regarding the Kaesong industrial zone, it seems like this is one that actually might happen, something might happen on this. Moon and Kim both want something badly. Is there some way we could push the South Koreans – I mean, this is a South Korean project – to force, if Kaesong is reopened, that it become a bright spot for human rights? In other words, much better rules for the workers there. Just a question. Seems like that might be a low-hanging fruit, something that we could aim for.

Q: Secondly, I'm just curious. Last week this guy in the U.N., North Korean in the U.N. mission up there, said something about, oh, their rations are being cut, they really need food aid. I'm wondering how – what all of your all's reaction to that statement was.

Lindsay Lloyd: OK. Thank you. Would you like to take on Kaesong, Victor?

Victor Cha: So that's actually, Bill – you know, it's a great idea. You know, I think – I mean, we know what the North Korean response will be, which is that we said no conditions,

right, that that was what he said in the – Kim Jong-un said in the new year’s speech, that they’d like to see a reopening of the two big inter-Korean cooperation projects, Kaesong and Kungang Mountain, with no preconditions. So I’m sure that’s what they will respond.

Victor Cha: But I think it’s a – it’s a very good point. I mean, one of the reasons that there was so much controversy over these projects, as you know, was that the workers were not being paid directly. South Korean managers were not allowed to have contact with the workers. The workforce was entirely women because they didn’t want a whole bunch of men commingling together. So there – you know, this was supposed to be this beacon of inter-Korean cooperation and the future of inter-Korean cooperation, and yet in the eyes of many people in the West and also in the Congress it was just, you know, a shining example of North Korean human rights abuses even when they are trying to engage with the outside world.

Jung Pak: You forgot your line, Bill, which was just pay the damn workers, right? (Laughter.) I mean, it’s a pretty simple thing to do and it’s a – it’s a reasonable demand for opening up the industrial complex.

Lindsay Lloyd: Do we have any insights on the rations being cut question?

Victor Cha: Yeah, I had heard that too. I don’t know if you – I had heard that too. Go ahead.

Robert King: It’s the normal time when North Korea runs into problems with food shortages. Basically, in the fall they do quite well. The harvest holds them. And how they’re getting to the end of the – what was harvested last year is pretty well running out. It’s not yet warm enough that you can start planting the few garden crops that will carry you through till the harvest later this year. North Korea has that problem. And there’s always a tight time this time of year.

Robert King: The difficulty in terms of dealing with North Korea on providing food assistance is there isn’t enough food because the government system controls agriculture and extracts agriculture products for what they want to use them for. It is very much the problem with the government system. This is a government-created problem. There are things they could do. There are things that a lot of other countries have done to move forward and make progress. On the other hand, people are not having enough to eat. And this puts people who provide humanitarian assistance in a very difficult situation. What do you do if people are starving? And there are probably some instances where this is the case. From the humanitarian point of view, you try to ignore politics.

Robert King: If you can determine, in fact, that there is need, if you’re able to provide assistance, and if there are ways that you can provide the assistance and monitor its delivery to make sure that it’s going to those that are truly in need, and those who are most in need – which tends to include children, women that are pregnant or lactating. These kind of things are ways that you can deal with it. There’s no easy solution. It’s not one – you know, it’s not a problem like you have in other countries where the failure of the weather is the problem. Here, it’s the failure of the government. But people are starving and there ought to be some assistance provided, if it can be provided in ways to guarantee that it goes to people who are in need, and that it’s getting to them.

Roberta Cohen: The United Nations has estimated that 40 percent of the country is food insecure. Those numbers can rise. Thirty percent of children under five are stunted. And 14 million have got limited access to safe water. Twenty-three percent have no access to basic sanitation. And here, I would say that I think the United States has an opportunity to raise with North Korea their own priorities, because these are very, very damning statistics. The U.N. is asking for \$111 million. North Korea probably has that \$111 million, which is used in other ways – on military programs, or luxury items, or infrastructure. And I think that should be a talking point. That shouldn't stand in the way that we don't – that aid is not given, but I think it has to be a discussion point.

Roberta Cohen: Agencies have been operating in North Korea for 20 years. The figures are not – maybe the stunting figures have improved, but the figures are not showing that the aid is used in any way that becomes sustainable. And I think this is really a discussion point. And I do want to just comment on – I guess we do have a slight disagreement on the panel on the issue of low-hanging fruit. At the United Nations, North Korea begins to talk about protecting children. They raise women's issues. And they did allow the rapporteur on disabilities to come in. But – and these are their steps. These are – this is their low-hanging fruit. I really don't think that we should be just picking the low-hanging fruit.

Roberta Cohen: And I'm not saying you're going into some great confrontation. I think that wouldn't make sense. But I think our goals have to be far greater. There are plenty of U.N. agencies, and committees, and other things that deal with the low-hanging fruit. But they've had no U.N. official given – they've given no U.N. official permission to come on a human rights mission. Once did, but they had linked it to a change in the U.N. resolution, to remove paragraphs from it on crimes against humanity in the report with the International Criminal Court. And when that did not happen, they withdrew the invitation.

Roberta Cohen: A U.N. human rights official should be able to go to the United Nations. And the International Committee of the Red Cross should be supported to go into the prison camps, which they do in countless countries. I mean, this maybe is not low-hanging, but really it has to be the fruit that's being put forward in everything we do. Otherwise, I think we ourselves then would be ignoring the 300-plus pages on the Commission of Inquiry Report and everything else we know.

Lindsay Lloyd: Yeah . Victor.

Victor Cha: So let me just – so the thing about low-hanging fruit is that if we start going for the low-hanging fruit, then go talk to the nuclear negotiators, right? (Laughs.) Because that's sort of what we got to do, is just going for the low-hanging fruit. So that's the first one. The second is that, you know, I think on an issue like this it – you know, it requires reaching for more, but it also requires us – us, being either the U.S. or the international community – to tell North Korea what might be – what they could do, right? Largely because – and I feel it's the same way on the nuclear issue. I don't know if Richard feels the same way. But, like, they're not very good with coming up with ideas. Like, we always have to give them the ideas. And so – and that was certainly the case of the nuclear side. And it may also be the case on the human rights side, to actually give them – like, to raise ideas with them of things that they could do. So, yeah.

Lindsay Lloyd: OK. I think we have a question here in the second row. Do we have a microphone?

Q: Hi. My name is Megan McNamara. I'm with the Cohen Group.

Q: And I wanted to ask a question on Kim Jong-un, kind of two-fold. Dr. Pak, you mentioned Kim's reaction to human rights. And, you know, if he was open to that, that would mean that he's serious about next steps. I was hoping that you could elaborate a little bit on his actual openness to that, and similarly his openness to the big, shiny future if opening – if, in fact, opening access to information, business, et cetera, realistically probably puts his own regime at risk.

Jung Pak: I would say that Kim fears his people if not than the United States. And that because the people are his most proximate threat, and that justifies – and that is the reason for the human rights violations, and the incentivizing of the elite and neighborhoods and women and children and workers to tell on, you know, various disloyal comments by their – by their neighbors. And so when you're – when you're incentivizing human rights violations in support of the regime and to get ahead economically, politically, in the party or elsewhere, that you have a system that is built on repression. And that repression stands as one of the pillars of regime survival for Kim. The other pillar is the nuclear weapons.

Jung Pak: So if Kim were to give a little bit on the – on that side, the repression side, it means that he's – that he's willing – that he would be – for me, that would be a sign post that he's serious about this new future, where nuclear weapons are not as important, or important for his survival. So I think that – I think unless we can chip away at both pillars at the same time, I think, you know, in a lot of ways, you know, national security, it's always about us and what we can do. But I think in the North Korea example, the change has to come from within as well. And so I see human rights as a part of the – it should be a part of the strategic conversation on how to get Kim to move on various things. But if we're afraid to bring it up because we're afraid Kim might be – might get angry, then there is no incentive for him to loosen any part or weaken any part of that pillar that is buttressing his existence.

Roberta Cohen: May I add one point?

Lindsay Lloyd: Yes.

Roberta Cohen: You know, in 2002 Kim Jong-un's father, Kim Jong-il, decided to admit that North Korea had abducted Japanese. And that was an admission that was, obviously, a calculation that they would get some relationship and financial help and other economic benefits or political they might want from Japan. And so they admitted it, and they even allowed the departure of some of those abducted. It was quite extraordinary because for a very long time they had totally denied that they ever abducted anyone.

Roberta Cohen: So this, to me, points to that they can take steps. They wanted a summit with the United States; they released three Americans that were held. You know, they can take steps. They can do things if they feel it's in their interest. And if it – if the United States makes it clear it's in their interest and there are positive or incentives, then I think you can begin to make some little progress.

Lindsay Lloyd: OK. Well, we are – we are basically out of time. For my part I'd like to thank our panel for their thoughts and their opinions.

Lindsay Lloyd: Victor, I don't know if you want to close out the conference in general, or?

Victor Cha: Yeah. Well, thank you all for coming and staying with us this morning. I want to thank our – the first panel as well as the second panel for taking time out to be with us. We'll probably do something else after the summit next week, so stay tuned and let's – we'll all see what happens next week. (Applause.)

(END)