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Online Event

"Mitigating the Impact of Sanctions on Humanitarian Action"

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FEATURING:
Representative Andy Levin (D-MI),
Vice Chair, House Foreign Affairs Subcommittee on Asia, the Pacific, Central Asia, and Nonproliferation

CSIS EXPERTS:
Jacob Kurtzer,
Director and Senior Fellow, Humanitarian Agenda,
CSIS

J. Stephen Morrison,
Senior Vice President and Director, Global Health Policy Center,
CSIS

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J. Stephen Morrison: Good morning, or afternoon, or evening depending on where you are. I'm J. Stephen Morrison, senior vice president here at CSIS, where I direct the Global Health Policy Center.

This event today, "Mitigating the Impact of Sanctions on Humanitarian Action," features a conversation with Congressman Andy Levin, a Democrat, represents the Ninth District of Michigan. He comes with a pretty remarkable background as a union organizer, as a workforce policy expert, human rights advocate, and green energy entrepreneur. He's a graduate of Williams College, Harvard Law School, has a master's in Asian studies from Michigan. For the purposes today, what's most important for us to keep in mind, he's vice chairman of the House Foreign Affairs Committee Subcommittee on Asia, Pacific, Central Asia, and Nonproliferation. We work very closely with the chairman of that committee, Congressman Ami Bera, who's been part of the CSIS Commission on Strengthening America's Health Security, now for three years. He's also part of a panel – high-level panel focused upon vaccine confidence and misinformation here in the United States.

We'll be talking, I hope, in the course of this conversation about a bill submitted by Congressman Levin, H.R. 7218, Enhancing North Korean Humanitarian Assistance Act, which argues, as we'll hear from Congressman Levin, argues for greater flexibility, speed, wider exemptions on humanitarian action in North Korea, as well as ease of travel by NGO personnel there. We've had a very special interest here at CSIS, both our program and Jake Kurtzer's Humanitarian Agenda program, on North Korea. We've published an analysis through our commission of the humanitarian access issues and done a short doc – 19-minute documentary on that. We've also shared with Jake in the – and participated in the Humanitarian Access Taskforce, which he organized a few years ago.

These issues could not be more timely when we're talking about DPRK, North Korea. This is a country which in the course of the pandemic has resorted to a complete closure of its borders. It's walled itself off entirely from the surrounding world. It's a self-imposed economic decline of well over 10 or 20 percent of its GDP, steep economic decline. It's had severe weather, flooding, which has also set the country back. It is denying that it actually has any cases of Covid. It's appealed to the COVAX facility for 2 million doses of vaccines, which would cover about 4 percent of its population. But it's still not clear exactly how to access – how the – Gavi – the Gavi vaccine alliance will go about accessing North Korea for that purpose.

U.N. personnel, who are so critical for humanitarian action inside North Korea, the numbers have dropped from the normal levels of 40-50 to two or three personnel inside the country. And international NGOs, including American NGOs, have had to scale back their operations significantly, including some very prominent American faith-based NGOs that have been

doing work for decades in the health sector doing great work, have really been heavily constrained.

So Congressman Levin, thank you so much for your leadership on this matter, which is so important. And thank you so much for being with us today. I'm going to turn the floor over to my great colleague Jake Kurtzer, who heads the Humanitarian Agenda here. I want to offer special thanks also to John Goodrick, to Cat Rowland from Congressman Levin's staff, and Mary Wright and Clifton Jones who are producing this for us. Thank you so much.

Jacob Kurtzer: Thanks, Steve, for that introduction. Without any further ado I want to just turn it over to you, Congressman Levin. And thanks again for being with us. So we're here to talk, you know, starting – the starting point for this conversation is this legislation. And I want to understand a little bit what motivated you to introduce and to write this Enhancing North Korea Humanitarian Assistance Act. Was there a specific moment or issue that compelled you to take this on? And what are the primary concerns you're seeking to address through this legislation?

Representative Andy Levin (D-MI): Well, thanks, Jake, and thanks, Steve, for having me. It's so great to be here.

I guess, to answer your question, I've got to start with a little background on myself. I've been a human rights advocate for decades. And a lot of that work is focused on Asia, on South and East Asia. In college I spent a year in India studying Tibetan language and Buddhist philosophy, and then I went on to get a master's degree in Asian languages and cultures from the University of Michigan. I was supposed to get a Ph.D. and teach Asian religions, but I ended up getting a master's degree and going to law school because I realized I wanted to focus more on current issues than have my nose buried in ancient Buddhist texts, however much I love them. (Laughs.)

So in 1989, as part of that, I actually traveled to Tibet and Hong Kong and was in Chengdu during the crackdown on dissent on June 4th and thereafter, which we call the Tiananmen massacre, but of course, it was a national crackdown. In between college and grad school, I spent five years helping healthcare workers form unions with SEIU here in the United States. Limitations on freedom of association at work in our own country is another whole human rights discussion we can have another day.

But in the course of that work, I learned to speak Haitian Creole and got involved in doing human-rights work in Haiti. And I continued that later when I went to law school after Haiti's first democratically elected government was overthrown.

I bring all that up because what prompted me to seek a seat on the human – on the Foreign Affairs Committee of the House, and on the Asia Subcommittee in particular, during my first term was all that experience I

had. And it's really to fight for human rights was one of the reasons I came to Congress. And now it's just a great honor to be the vice chair of the Asia Subcommittee.

One of our first hearings that we had of that committee in 2019, during my first term, was titled "Making Sanctions Effective: The Case of North Korea." And one of the things we heard during that hearing was that humanitarian organizations were having a really hard time navigating the sanctions that were in place in order to meet the North Korean people's needs, and even though there were exemptions that were supposed to mitigate that problem.

It was sort of shocking for me to hear that. And you think, OK, these sanctions are in place because of this awful regime hurting its own people, but now you're saying the sanctions themselves are hurting people too.

So as somebody who's looking at foreign policy through a human rights lens, I wanted to explore how we might do a better job of that when it comes to North Korea and our sanctions policy. How can Congress help ensure that human rights are protected and humanitarian needs are met when the sanctions policies are implemented?

I also wanted to draw attention to the unintended consequences that sanctions have quite commonly. The previous administration was really heavy-handed when it came to sanctions. They believed the best way to get the foreign policy outcomes they wanted was through maximum pressure, not diplomacy. And I really disagreed with that approach, in part because clearly it didn't work, but also because it harms people.

So this bill, I hoped, could shine a light on some of those harms. And that's essentially where it came from.

Mr. Kurtzer: Thanks for that; a fascinating background. I mean, my own background, I spent a lot of time thinking about the roots and origins of international humanitarian law and human rights law. And I always had a slide in my presentation showing the historic – you know, the traditional underpinnings of the same concepts of humanity even in conflict that transcends all cultures and faiths. And we had a slide from the "Tao Te Ching" and all these other texts and Sun Tzu, you know, "The Art of War." There's all this stuff about even in a situation of conflict, virtually every conflict has some language about, you know, the innocent, the civilians, must be protected.

You mentioned in your comment, you know, the awfulness of the regime in DPRK. And I think one of the challenges we're thinking about is there is a lot of interest in fixing the unintended consequences of sanctions, but in the context of North Korea, how do you think about sort of disaggregating or distinguishing between the harms caused by this awful regime and those –

you know, the unintended consequence of the sanctions? And then how do you think about distinguishing between those harms when you – when you crafted this bill and as you try to work it through the legislative process?

Rep. Levin: Wow, that's a really great question, Jake. I mean, you know, I am – I think we need to be really realistic in our foreign policy, even as it's a human rights and humanitarian forward foreign policy.

I guess one way that's helpful to think about this question in this particular case is what should the ruling elite or the government be responsible for. And clearly, a big thing that is a government's responsibility is public health infrastructure. I think we all like to assume that government's going to do its best to ensure that there's an infrastructure in place to take care of people when they're sick, and that the government's committed to preserving people's health and well-being. Well in North Korea we know that's not the case. The infrastructure and the commitment just aren't there. And that's especially alarming now because of Covid, but even before it was a huge issue.

North Korea has one of the highest burdens of tuberculosis in the world, for example. Year after year, TB is the world's top infectious killer even though it's curable. So that's clearly something that would be part of public health infrastructure, but it's also something that humanitarian organizations can help tackle. So it's an interesting example because it shows the negative impact of sanctions.

So the sanctions provide exemptions for food and medicine, right? But drugs aren't the only thing you need. Like taking the example of TB, in 2018 the AP reported about doctors in North Korea finally getting the machines they needed to do rapid TB tests. But those machines need special cartridges to operate, and those cartridges were getting held up because of sanctions. So this is an example where I think it's relatively easy to say the government's to blame for the lack of public health infrastructure and therefore the failure to keep TB under control, but the sanctions are to blame for impeding the delivery of humanitarian aid meant to fill that gap.

So that's kind of an example of how I walk that line.

Mr. Kurtzer: Thanks for that. I mean, I think it's clear – and I think this is also one of the – generally speaking, one of the complicated issues that humanitarian organizations grapple with is when they are in this functionality of replacing the essential role of the state, in this case in terms of providing, you know, basic health care.

In the legislation it references a U.N. report, the panel of experts talking about some of the issues you challenged – that you mentioned about how sanctions challenge the provision of these, you know, basic essential services. And so in thinking about improving the overall process, what are

some of the policy options that you've put into this legislation that you think would help mitigate this process?

Rep. Levin: Well, I guess I think the first step is acknowledging that this is an issue, and I'm optimistic on that front at least. The interagency review mandated by the president's January 21st national security memorandum – so the day after Joe Biden – (laughs) – took office – offers a chance to adjust U.S. and multinational – multilateral sanctions so we can make sure they're not hampering humanitarian efforts. And that's not just in North Korea, but really around the world. So I absolutely applaud the Biden administration for undertaking that review and getting going on it so quickly.

Beyond that, let me give you a couple examples of specific things I think could be done to mitigate this problem. First, I think the Treasury Department should prioritize authorizing licenses for humanitarian organizations that seek to operate in North Korea. But I also think they should consider making it easier for groups that have a good track record. So if organization "X" is constantly applying for a license to do TB relief work in North Korea, and they're getting those licenses and following whatever guidelines they're supposed to, is it really the best use of their time or Treasury's time to make them go through the same process over and over? Could we put together some kind of expedited pathway for those kind of groups? I think that would be really practical.

It's the sort of thing I think could make it a lot easier for organizations that want to do relief work in North Korea, and it would save time and resources for the Treasury Department too, Jake. So that's, you know, an example.

Mr. Kurtzer: Thanks for that. And I think it's an important example, and it's one that we hear about quite a bit in the community. You talked specifically now about Treasury and the licensing process, but there's a lot of agencies involved. It's the, you know, dreaded interagency process.

And so you've got – you've got Treasury, but there's also – the State Department plays a role, and Commerce in some cases, and USAID as the – you know, the – and PRM as the organization for the agencies that, you know, give out the humanitarian funding, or provide or engage with humanitarian organizations. And the NGOs themselves I think argue regularly that the process is opaque from the outside, and there's a disconnect in some senses between, you know, agencies that have more policymaking responsibility and agencies that are meant to implement – you know, carry out those sort of orders.

And so I'm wondering, you know, what's the role here for Congress that in untangling what at many levels is a bureaucratic mess – I mean, how do you see that responsibility in your branch of government and how do you plan to work with the administration on it?

Rep. Levin: You know, Jake, it's such an important question. And right now my beloved Uncle Carl – Carl Levin, who served in the Senate for 36 years – just published a little memoir, and I'm reading it. And it's reminding me how much, especially early in his Senate career, he was all about trying to counter the unintended consequences of setting up all different parts of government – different programs, different rules. Each one with good intentions and – but then in the operation of them over the years, it can become – it can create a lot of problems. And we're, at least in a more modest way than Uncle Carl, we're trying to tackle this issue in the bill.

I think the disconnect that you're talking about is part of the reasons that sanctions end up having unintended and negative consequences. And so I really do hope Congress can play a helpful role by requiring the sort of consultations that aren't necessarily happening on their own. So in this bill, we ask Treasury to put together a whitelist of sorts. Basically, a list of items beyond food and medicine that are necessary for humanitarian work in North Korea and shouldn't be held up because of sanctions. We also direct Treasury, State and USAID to review that list every six months, or when an NGO that does humanitarian work in North Korea asks for such a review, so that it remains up to date and responsive to current needs.

The idea here is that this kind of collaborative review process will get agencies talking to one another and perhaps make it easier for folks implementing sanctions to feel confident that humanitarian exemptions that they're considering are in line with U.S. policy. Without that kind of assurance that kind of nudge – (laughs) – I worry that implementers will be overly restrictive as a precaution – you know, covering their own behinds. And I understand that impulse. I ran a large agency of state government in Michigan, and I saw it all the time. But it's really why I included that here. I hope this piece of the bill alleviates that. And it's something that I want to battle on a going-forward basis in many ways around the world.

Mr. Kurtzer: Thanks. I want to kind of turn the question around a little bit, because I think even as the administration has talked about reviewing sanctions and thinking through – looking at this question of unintended consequences, there are also – I think there's a commitment to continue to use sanctions and other, you know, what they would call coercive or restrictive measures in cases where they're really trying to target legitimately bad actors. And we have – you know, even since January there are plenty of cases around the world – the ongoing coup and extreme violence in Myanmar, you know, some of these other conflict-affected areas.

And one thing that I found interesting in my own professional career is that in many cases it's some of the same voices that argue about the restrictions that sanctions impose on their own work. You know, human rights and humanitarian actors are often also calling for sanctions where there is a – when there is a real human rights or humanitarian crisis happening, and as a way to try to do something. And, you know, there is in some – in some

communities, I think, a sense of sanctions are the thing you can do when you don't know what else to do.

But how do you – how do you feel about – how do you see the tradeoff here between keeping these tools in the toolkit to try to actually influence behavior of bad actors, you know, and navigating these second- and third-order harms? You know, do you see sanctions as a viable future option? And how do you try to carry out that balance when looking at some of these, you know, particularly acute contexts around the world?

Rep. Levin: You know, that's really the nub of the matter, isn't it, Jake? And I – I mean, I just reflect, when I was a law student and I went to Haiti for Human Rights Watch to, you know, interview people in hiding after the first democratically elected government there was overthrown, I mean, it's human rights workers on the ground and humanitarian workers who see the violence of a coup regime, in that example – who see the violation of human rights, and who at the same time cry out for effective measures to punish them, control them, do something. But at the same time, are trying – are the ones on the ground trying to help people who are, who are, you know, having health problems, having all kinds of problems.

So I – but we've got to strike that balance because we – you know, unless you think the answer to everything is military intervention, which obviously that's not correct, I think sanctions have to be there as a useful foreign policy tool. You know, of course I didn't introduce this bill to get rid of sanctions altogether. (Laughs.) It's trying to make them be more of an effective and subtle tool, I guess. I think that the key thing is to impose sanctions thoughtfully and deliberately. And so it's basically the opposite of a kind of a maximum pressure idea. It seems to me, when you reflect on the last administration, that they were just throwing everything at the wall to see if it stuck. And with a lot of saber rattling and chest beating. And there didn't seem to be a lot of care taken ahead of time to examine what impact sanctions might have on people, or to monitor those impacts once sanctions were imposed.

So that's why I'm glad the Biden administration is conducting its review of sanctions policy. And basically, I think that sanctions – we need to use sanctions but we need to do so in a way that is thoughtfully modulated to put pressure on those who are causing harm while trying to, you know, create the least unintended consequences or harm on the people who are the victims of the bad actors in the first place. That's the way I'd put it.

Mr. Kurtzer: Thanks, Congressman. You mentioned in one of your earlier comments, you know, that this bill is clearly focused on North Korea but the issue is obviously not limited to North Korea. It affects other contexts around the world. A recent GAO report, so U.S. government report looking at sanctions on Venezuela, talked about how nine U.S. government partners – so implementing NGOs carrying out humanitarian work – had, you know, bank

accounts closed or transactions held up not because of their own concerns about being in violation of the sanctions, but because the banks themselves – so, the second – you know, the second part of the chain here were concerned.

And this issue of bank de-risking is a really serious one for humanitarian organizations, because even if they have the licenses or they have the approvals from the U.S. government, the banks as a private actor are making a business decision, in some cases, that the risk is not worth it for them. And so how do you think this bill or other future legislative action can address that problem of the private-sector component of this, which has a different calculus when looking at the effects or the impacts of U.S. sanctions?

Rep. Levin: Well, you know, no question banks are – (laughs) – have an important role to play and they can get caught up in all this. I mean, banks need to transfer funds, process payments for things like humanitarian workers' salaries and so on. So, clearly, humanitarian organizations need financial institutions to do their work. And when a bank is risk averse – as I think almost all of them are – and they try to avoid violating sanctions policies, it can make their work that much harder. Broadly, I hope that my bill and the GAO report that you referenced, which I actually requested back in 2019 I think, and other similar items bring more attention to this problem, and get governments and financial institutions talking more about how to mitigate it.

More literally, though, the bill does a couple of things on this. First, it expresses the sense of Congress that financial institutions should recognize and consider the reputational and practical costs of impeding legitimate efforts to deliver lifesaving aid to North Korea. More importantly, though, it directs Treasury to issue plainly worded guidance that a layperson can understand intended for financial institutions, for shipping companies, for foreign customs officials, and others involved in transactions related to humanitarian assistance that clarifies the applicability of the humanitarian exceptions under the North Korea sanctions regulations and describes best practices for ensuring that activities are consistent with that exception.

My hope is that this guidance will help alleviate some of the banks' concerns and avoid unnecessary situations where a bank feels the need to be overly cautious and they end up blocking aid that should be allowed. We basically need banks to step up to the plate and to follow the sanctions, but in a way that doesn't cut off the humanitarian work that absolutely needs to continue and that, of course, depends on the flow of funds and the services that banks provide.

Mr. Kurtzer: Thanks. I think that the plainly worded language is an essential component here because I think we have a hard enough time understanding it, those of us who work in Washington, and you know, in the humanitarian sector there's, you know, both a need and a desire to move more of the

responsibility to respond and more of the funding to, you know, organizations based in the countries in which this work is happening. And there's a huge challenge for them to understand the regulatory language, the legal language, all this stuff that, you know, we have – we have lawyers and we have, you know, colleagues who are able to unpack for us. But this plainly worded language element is a really important element and I think it's great that it's in there as a sense of Congress in the bill.

Could you just talk a little bit now about the reaction you've gotten since the bill has been introduced? I mean, what have you heard feedback-wise from the nonprofit or U.N. agency sectors? You know, how have they shared their views or their concerns or their hopes for the – for the future of this?

Rep. Levin: Well, I'd say that – a couple things, Jake. One is it's actually hard to draw attention to humanitarian work in North Korea, I think. I don't think it gets the attention it deserves. I think that it's such difficult and vital work. So this event and others like it, I think, are really important to draw attention to it.

That said, the reaction of organizations in the field has been overwhelmingly positive, and what I'm working on now is to see if I can kind of quietly build bipartisan support for this. You know, the House just passed my resolution on the coup – condemning the coup in Burma. And by the way, my resolution didn't just call for the reinstatement of the democratically elected government but noted that the little experiment that had been going on with democracy in Myanmar/Burma, you know, didn't really always include the Rohingya, the Kachin, Karen, and other minority peoples, and that that needs to be addressed as well.

But anyway, we were able to – you know, I got not just Chairman Meeks but Ranking Member McCaul and both the chair and ranking member of the Asia Subcommittee to be co-sponsors. And we actually passed the resolution out of the House Foreign Affairs Committee unanimously, and then we passed it on the floor with just 14 votes against it.

So I'm really hopeful that we can build bipartisan support for this. That's my – that would be my goal, because it has a lot more umph when we pass especially, you know, things relating to foreign affairs, human rights, humanitarian assistance, on a bipartisan basis.

Mr. Kurtzer: I agree. And I applaud that effort, and particularly with respect to the Burma sanctions. I think it's incredibly valuable that it had that level of support for that terrible crisis. And I think it's an interesting time now. We talk about this, you know, off the Hill quite a bit, because there are – many of these sanctions and these counterterrorism restrictions that NGOs have to navigate, there really does seem to be a moment of opportunity here within Congress and in the more broader foreign policy community rethinking the overall approach.

So, you know, I wish you the best of luck in trying to build that bipartisan support, and as you said, not for getting rid of sanctions totally but for rethinking, you know, how we can have this tool in the toolkit without having these second-order consequences impacting the humanitarian and human rights and peacebuilding work that also gets caught up in the sanctions and restrictive-measures regime.

We have a question here from the audience about monitoring the impact of sanctions on humanitarian operations. And how do you think we should be going about monitoring the effect and conditions of the sanctions? And where do you see that responsibility sitting within, you know, the federal-government apparatus for taking on this monitoring and evaluation of the overall impact of the sanctions?

Rep. Levin: Well, Jake, that is really something I'm extremely interested in. (Laughs.) I mean, I feel like, as a, you know, relatively new member of Congress, it's something that I just have returned to and I'm thinking a lot about it. I mean, so, you know, you look at Venezuela. There was a lot of debate about this. So I said to the GAO, you know, I want a report on this. And I got our chairman at the time, Eliot Engel, to join me in that request so it had the sort of imprimatur of the whole Foreign Affairs Committee.

And I think it was quite revealing, right, what we learned from that. And then obviously with this bill, I am taking it a step further, focused on North Korea. But the sort of global implications of it should be pretty obvious.

So I guess the simple way I'd answer this is that ideally the Treasury Department and the State Department and USAID would work collaboratively on this. But I think that everybody is so busy sort of working in their lane that sometimes these collaborative efforts, which this inevitably has to be, are forgotten.

And so what I'm trying to do is make sure Congress gets in there and requires them to do it, nudges them to do it. And stay tuned, because I'm going to keep doing this and will – as we learn what's most effective, we will continue to develop tools to make sure it happens, because it must happen. We cannot be slapping sanctions around the world on different bad actors and then, years later, learning that we caused a lot of damage to the poor people of different countries and to our wonderful colleagues in humanitarian organizations who are devoting their lives to mitigating the effects of the bad, you know, government – the bad actors out there, governments or, you know, non-state actors.

And so it's just something that I'm going to stay on, Jake. And I really appreciate the partnership of so many NGOs out there who are – you know, who've helped us think this through. And we count on you to keep giving us your ideas and sharing your experiences.

Mr. Kurtzer: It's good to hear your energy and enthusiasm for this.

I want to come back to something we touched on briefly about the banks. And, you know, the power of the U.S. dollar, you know, means that our sanctions have – you know, they reverberate in ways that they might not when coming from another country or another institution. But our sanctions also don't exist in a vacuum, right. The U.N. has its own sanctions regimes, and our European partners have sanctions.

So one of the sanctions your bill talks about, the multilateral-sanctions exemptions. And can you talk a little bit about how you see the U.S. piece fitting in within the U.N. and, you know, the idea that in many ways the U.S. leads and others follow? So how do you – how do you think that we can untangle that bit of the puzzle of these overlapping complex legal regimes that impact the humanitarian sector?

Rep. Levin: Well, Jake, let me start answering that in a very, very broad way, if I might.

I don't feel like the United States has really developed a coherent post-Cold War foreign policy – I don't – where we look at human rights, trade, all the problems of refugees, warfare, nuclear weapons, and we look at how we should lead, as we must, in the world, but in a way that is more sophisticated and subtle and honestly and truly recognizes the self-determination, you know, the independence of other countries around the world. So we're kind of a very big kid in the sandbox. But really, when you're the big kid in the sandbox, you know, do you grow up learning to help other kids instead of bullying other kids, to lift folks up, to organize everybody to work together?

So I think that we have to take multilateralism to a point where we've never achieved so far, remotely. And that's a big part of my answer to your question. I would like to see us get to the point where the U.S. doesn't or rarely imposes sanctions without consultation with others. And obviously crises happen, so sometimes that consultation has to happen very fast.

But there's no way we're going to deal effectively with China, which everyone is obsessed with, for example, unless we really make it a global conversation about how to deal with North Korea, for example, or Burma, you know, both cases, but really across the board on intellectual – you know, the theft of intellectual property, on currency manipulation, on trade rules, on human rights from, you know, Xinjiang to Hong Kong. We can only be effective in dealing with China in a global way. And that's the way I feel about other – you know, all problems around the world.

So to go back to my example of Haiti, I'm very – I'm pushing very hard for the Biden administration to take a fresh look at Haiti, because I think the OAS and the U.N., along with the U.S., are on the wrong track, saying we just

have to have elections as soon as possible and, you know, we can't – Moïse is there. You know, I call him the de facto president because his – the Haitian civil society has decided his term ended. And the legal opinion in Haiti really is overwhelmingly that his term ended.

So I think we need to work multilaterally and we need to – I also think that the degree of subtlety and sophistication that sanctions regimes need to have, if they're not going to harm the people we're trying to help, it's actually – we're much more likely to achieve it if we sit down with everybody in the neighborhood and say how are we going to get this done, because neighboring countries, our allies, have a variety of relationships with the country in question. And I just think we're much more likely to get a better outcome.

So that's a bit of a long answer, but I feel incredibly passionately about this. We can really achieve a much more effective foreign policy altogether if we really have intense dialogue on how to do this most effectively.

Mr. Kurtzer: Thanks, Congressman. I think your passion comes through and the enthusiasm for the issue comes through.

And you know, I mentioned the peacebuilding community, that the dialogue is – you know, you're talking about dialogue with all parties – I think multilateral level, you know, peers, adversaries. One of the issues, you know, I think the humanitarian community is seeking is, as you mention, more dialogue with government in the process of thinking of these sanctions. And you know, we saw some really positive signs from the Biden administration at the onset, you know, with hearing the message from the humanitarian community about the designation of the Houthis in Yemen and the potentially devastating impact that would have. So I think there really truly is a moment here for increased dialogue, a moment here for – you know, for putting in place or alleviating some of the regulatory burden that impedes dialogue even with our adversaries, you know, both at the multilateral level but even in countries where we just have to have some exchange to understand and try to get to a better place for – on behalf of the civilian population.

And so I know we're running short on time and you have places you need to be, as well, so I wanted to give you a chance if you have some final thoughts you want to share before we conclude this event, you know, on your next steps and the path forward for this legislation and for this issue.

Rep. Levin: Well, thanks – first, Jake, thanks so much to you, CSIS. This is just the kind of dialogue I think can move things forward.

And let me focus on the bigger picture here. Let's take the example of Yemen. I mean, what a huge humanitarian crisis, not caused by mother nature or whatever but by governments, by we imperfect human beings

and human beings with power in other countries. You know, I am a congressman from suburban Detroit. My own district has the most Iraqi-born people of any in the whole United States. I have many others from throughout the Middle East and North Africa. But metro Detroit more broadly is a huge center of Yemeni Americans. And to – you know, can our government listen to our own citizens who, you know, hail from Yemen? Can we work with peace groups, with humanitarian groups to realize the folly of our ways in supporting Saudi Arabia's horrifying war there, by – when we should be making peace, bringing people together, insisting on lowering temperature, dialogue, full access for humanitarian groups? Instead, we sort of took sides and supported a war and blockades. I mean, are we still supporting, effectively, a – you know, a fuel blockade on Yemen today?

So I think that – I just want to end on a really hopeful note about Joe Biden, Kamala Harris, Secretary Blinken, Jake Sullivan, the team they're putting together. I'm sure we'll have bumps in the road, but I personally, we in the House Foreign Affairs Committee, and you know, the larger community interested in a better U.S. foreign policy I think has started a really great dialogue. You have to realize that we didn't have a normal transition, that right – you know, that the outcome of our election was denied and there was no normal transition. Then we had the shock of January 6th , slowed things down, but they're staffing up and we are going to push ahead to have a really strong dialogue with them.

There's not been a president with more foreign policy experience than Joe Biden in many, many years. And we're pushing super hard to have a more active role for the House Foreign Affairs Committee in a dialogue with them, of course with our partners in the Senate, and with all of our friends who are actually out there on the frontlines in the humanitarian groups, the human rights groups, the peace groups, the nonproliferation groups, and so forth so we can, you know, really move in a different direction.

So I'm hopeful, but very determined to keep up the pressure. And we're going to get this bill passed, Jake, so we can, you know, move forward in a better way in North Korea.

Mr. Kurtzer: Well, thank you very much, Congressman. I can't thank you enough for your time this morning and for taking on this very complicated and intense issue. It is, I think for many humanitarian organizations, besides – and for the people, the communities with which they work – I mean, besides for the work itself, this is – this is the policy issue that many of them have identified as the key to untangle.

So thank you, again, for your time. Thank to Cat Rowland and your staff for working with us. And we look forward to working with you and your colleagues in the House and Senate and the administration on this issue going forward. And for all our participants today thank you for joining us.

And this event will be posted live in its entirety shortly after its conclusion. And we wish you all a great day. Thank you.

Rep. Levin: Thanks, Jake. Thanks, everybody. Take care.

(END)