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VERBATIM TRANSCRIPT OF  
A 38 NORTH PRESS BRIEFING

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MR. WIT: Thank you, everyone, for showing up today, for a special 38 North press event. As many of you know, we have our [monthly] press breakfast, but I think this is a very special occasion. It is also a very timely occasion because of all the discussion in the press about North Korea and its ICBM program, how to deal with the overall policy towards North Korea and, of course, we have a new US administration taking office in a week or – I guess it's January 20<sup>th</sup>.

So today we have Dr. William Perry, who I think most of you – all of you – should know who he is. And I'm not going to go into a long introduction about all the US government offices he has held, ending up with being the Secretary of [Defense] and then he conducted "the Perry process" after he left the Department of Defense. And, if you haven't seen it already, I think you should all look at the op-ed piece he wrote in the Washington Post the other day, which is a very sober, realistic, approach for dealing with North Korea. And that's very rare these days, when we see all sorts of ideas floating around.

So, our format will be Dr. Perry will talk for about 10 minutes or so, some introductory remarks, and then afterwards, of course, he'd be happy to take questions from everyone, and I may throw in a few of my own questions. So, please, Dr. Perry?

DR. PERRY: Let me start off by saying how pleased and honored I am to be sharing the platform here with Joel, who is a real specialist on Korean issues, which I am not. Nevertheless, I have got quite a lot of experience dealing with North Korea, beginning in 1994, when we had what I have described, without exaggeration, as a period when we came very, very close to a second Korean War, another war. If you want to elaborate on that, and if you think I'm being exaggerating, I'll be happy to tell you and give more details about where we were at that time.

In October of 2000, we had already come to a full verbal agreement on a detailed agreement

on North Korea, by which they would agree to give up their nuclear program, and their long-range missile program. We were, I think, three to six months from having a signed, formal, agreement for doing that. Of course, it can, and should, be stated that, at that time, we could not be a hundred percent certain we would actually get that agreement, and even if we got the agreement, we could never be certain that North Korea was going to comply with that. So, I make that caveat.

But, we will never know, because in 2000 the Bush administration in, it was about March of 2001, I believe, broke off all discussions with North Korea. It was a whole negotiating process which had gone on for more than a year before that, that broke down.

They said they had a different, and hopefully better, strategy of pursuing. Whatever that strategy was, the results of it are pretty clear. Namely, that North Korea actually, during that period, that administration, built and tested nuclear weapons. So, whatever you can say about the theory of this strategy, I have to say the results were bad.

They were followed, in 2009, by the Obama administration, which actually articulated their strategy. It was called “strategic patience.” The results of “strategic patience” were more nukes and more missiles. So again, whatever you can say about the theory of this strategy, you have to conclude the results were bad.

I hope you will note that my criticism is entirely bipartisan – (light laugh) – because I think both the Obama administration and the Bush administration let us get in this what I consider terrible situation we are in today.

Today, in the last week or so, all the excitement, all the headlines, have been about North Korea’s announcement that they’re going to – they’re ready to begin testing an ICBM capable of reaching the United States. But, whatever they do on ICBMs, I’d like to point out to you they already have operational missiles capable of reaching both South Korea and Japan.

So, as we look at this problem, as we look at the dangers that it poses, we have to consider not just the dangers to the United States but the dangers to South Korea and Japan as well. And those lie primarily in missiles not yet under test but missiles already operational, already deployed.

So, the question has to be “How do we deal with those dangers, not just the danger of the ICBMs, but the danger of the whole program of ballistic missiles, for which they are preparing nuclear warheads?”

So, I see two different questions, really. “How do we deal with the present dangers? And secondly, what can we do to reduce those dangers?” There are two separate questions here.

I say it as clearly and as loudly as I can, we cannot do nothing. The time for patience is over. Because time is really not on our side. I emphasize that as clearly as possible: time is not on

our side; we have to do something. So, what?

I consider those two questions separately, “How do we deal with the present dangers?” And my answer is very clear, simple and straightforward; we deal with it through deterrence.

We already implicitly have that deterrence. I believe we should make that explicit, quite clear and quite specific, to North Korea. We do it with deterrence.

The argument had been made that deterrence would not work with North Korea because they’re crazy. I simply do not believe that. Indeed, to deal with either of these problems, namely dealing with the present problem or reducing the dangers, we have to understand what North Korea’s goals are.

Anybody that’s ever done any negotiations understands you cannot succeed unless you know where the other side of the table is coming from, what they’re trying to achieve. And I think a big failure of our negotiations in the so-called “Six Party Talks” is we have not done that and not understood where North Korea is coming from.

I presume to tell you what I think they are. My knowledge is based on two things. Partly on having had numerous discussions with North Korean senior officials on this subject. But, I think more importantly, by observing what they do. What they do makes clear what they are thinking. So, let’s get to that for a moment.

I believe – I believe without any, really, uncertainty – goal number one of North Korea is to sustain the Kim dynasty. You could describe that as survival of the regime. But I put it more specifically: sustaining the Kim dynasty.

The second goal is an important goal for them. It is achieving international recognition.

A third goal is improving their economy. But I want to emphasize that third goal is subservient to the first two goals, and they have demonstrated that over, and over, again. They’re willing to sacrifice their economy if it’s necessary, to achieve those first two goals. So, sustaining the dynasty, achieving international recognition, and a poor third is improving their economy.

The idea of a unified Korea that they talk about I think that’s way behind the other goals. They don’t see that as something that’s going to be operational for many, many – a long, long time.

So, when I say, then, that dealing with the present problem is through deterrence, I have in mind that they have in mind sustaining the Kim dynasty is a critical goal, and they understand – they understand – that actions they take to provoke a war with South Korea and the United States would result in retaliation which would end their dynasty. So they are not suicidal, and we may not understand the logic but I think it’s clear that they are not suicidal and, most importantly, this is not ISIS. This is not al-Qaeda. They are not seeking martyrdom; they want to sustain their

dynasty. So, deterrence will work. We should just be sure that we're very clear and very explicit that they're facing the challenge of a response from the United States, a devastating response to them.

That will deal, I think, with the present threat, both for the United States and to our allies. But let's make it more explicit. The second question is "How do we get them to lessen, take steps to lessen, the danger?" All of our negotiations in the past have been oriented around giving up their nuclear weapons. I just state flatly they are not going to do that; we're wasting our time on those negotiations.

We can achieve, I believe, if we try hard, achieve important goals in lessening the danger of their nuclear weapons. We can formulate that in many ways. Three things I would focus on are, number one, no more nuclear tests. Number two, no more ICBM tests. And number three, no selling or transport of nuclear technology.

I think we might be able to achieve that kind of a deal. I think we can enforce that kind of a deal. And I think it would be something worth achieving, in and of itself. Beyond that, it's quite possible, if we were to achieve that step, it would be a platform on which we could move to the more desirable goal of a non-nuclear Korean Peninsula. I do not think we can go directly to that goal, today. And we've had how many years of Six Party Talks to prove how futile that is. So, I am not at all in favor of restarting the Six Party Talks, based on the same goal we had in the past; it would just be an exercise in futility.

I have no way of guaranteeing that even with setting those goals and even with good negotiating tactics, that we could succeed. I believe we can succeed. But I cannot assure that. So, we have to look at a plan B, "What if? What if we try, seriously and specifically, and still fail? What is our backup plan?"

I think, first of all, any backup plan, at that stage, has to be based upon \_\_\_\_\_, not coercion, and to turn to coercive tactics, and what kind, of course, of tactics? Number one on my list would be disrupting their ICBM tests. There are many ways we could do that. The one way I would not recommend today is bombing their launch sites. Some of you may remember that my colleague, Ash Carter, and I wrote an op-ed seven years ago saying that we should consider that. I do not recommend that today. I think it is too dangerous to South Korea. Any action, any military action, we take against North Korea, South Korea is the one that's going to bear the brunt of the action. Even when we were considering that, which we were back in 1994, we understood we would never do it without consulting and getting the approval of the South Korean President.

So, number one, backup action, if negotiation fails, is disrupting their ICBM tests, in my judgment short of bombing their launch sites. There are many things we – alternatives – for doing that.

The second thing we can do is significantly increase sanctions. Our attempts at sanctions in

the past have not been fully successful, because they have not had the full cooperation of China. So, what would be different? Why might China consider it this time?

I think what might make a difference to China is if we really had already gone through a really serious attempt at negotiation, offered a real alternative to North Korea. And, if they turn that offer down, then I think we're in a much better position to go to China and say "We want to really tighten the screws on sanctions." We can't be sure of that outcome but it's worth a try.

The third is strengthen our anti-ballistic missile forces, both in South Korea and in Japan, to help defend those two countries. As many of you know, I am not a big ABM fan, both for technical reasons and for strategic reasons. But, in this case, I think they make sense. A very limited scale attack we're considering, I think they have a reasonable prospect of, A, diminishing the effectiveness of the attack and, B, creating uncertainty in the minds of the attacker. So, in this case, I would recommend increasing the ABM capability both in South Korea and Japan.

And the fourth recommendation I would make is increasing US military presence in South Korea, including a consideration of nuclear weapons. I have never been a fan of deploying nuclear weapons in South Korea, and I am not, today, a fan of that. I look at it only as a backup position if our negotiations completely break down.

They are not necessary, to defend South Korea with. We can do it with the other nuclear weapons we have, both land-based and sea-based. What may be necessary, though, is to give the South Korean people the confidence that their nuclear deterrence is there. So therefore, in this case, if negotiations completely break down, I would consider that as a reasonable alternative.

That concludes my opening remarks, and I will be happy to take questions. Joel, do you have any further comment?

MR. WIT: No. Thank you, Dr. Perry. Why don't I open the floor for people to ask questions? And I will sort of moderate and point you out. Please identify who you are, who you work for, when I pick you. Yes, I saw this gentleman over here. His hand went up first.

QUESTION: Thanks, Joel. This is Nico Pandi from Jiji Press, Japan. Thanks for doing this. If, in the negotiations to achieve those three goals, if North Korea asks for –

DR. PERRY: Four goals.

QUESTION: -- four goals, excuse me – for signing a peace treaty, would you be willing to consider that, in exchange for achieving those goals of non-proliferation, halting ICBM tests, halting nuclear tests?

(Pause.)

DR. PERRY: That's a very good question and I neglected to answer it. I told you what our

goals were. I neglected to say what would we have to offer North Korea, to get this. And my starting point on that would be looking at what we offered them in the year 2000, which in those days they were willing to accept. And we offered them three things.

We offered them recognition, in various forms – there are several dimensions to the recognition – that was something primarily the United States could do. And we offered them economic incentives. Not “we.” In this case, it was South Korea and Japan. South Korea had one form of incentives, and Japan had another form of incentives.

So, there were three different incentives on the table for them, at that time. They were interested in all three of those, and in those days they were willing to accept those three, in return for the non-nuclear and the no ICBM thing.

Now, today, the situation is very different. They already have a nuclear arsenal, so they’re not going to agree to those same three incentives. But I say we look at those incentives as a starting point for what would be required to achieve these lesser goals. I think we could get by with lesser incentives, but I would start off with that package and sort of scale down from there, holding out the whole package for a later negotiation which might eventually get to a non-nuclear Peninsula.

But, there’s no doubt in my mind that they are very much interested in the economic incentives of the kind South Korea had offered, which is helping build up some of their industry, for which those of you who are familiar with the Koreans know that the Kaesong factory, which is a joint South Korean-North Korean, is one good example. It could be based on that model.

And from Japan we were considering great economic incentives, and the United States would sell them dimensions of recognition, one of which would have included the preliminary steps for setting up an embassy in Pyongyang, another which would include signing a formal peace agreement, which has never been signed after the Korean War. All of those things were very, very important to the North Koreans then. I think they are still important today. But, in and of themselves, they’re probably not enough, today, to make them give up what they were willing to give up in 2000.

There’s a big difference negotiating with somebody not to develop nuclear weapons than getting them to give up nuclear weapons they already have. It’s a much steeper area to go.

MR. WIT: Yes, David?

QUESTION: Thank you very much. David Brunnstrom from Reuters. Mr. Secretary, when you talked about the possibility of disrupting their ICBM tests, I’m just wondering how you would envisage going about that.

DR. PERRY: I can’t elaborate too much on that. Seemingly the most obvious way is simply shooting them down over international waters. But there are other ways of doing that as well, and

so I would leave that up to the military, to decide how to do it. The goal would be disrupting their tests, disrupting them with the least – (pause) – the least political impact. I can think of three or four ways of doing it, but the one which is most obvious, the most straightforward, is simply shooting them down over international waters.

They cannot really verify the effectiveness of an ICBM if it's never gone through complete testing. And, to this date, their ICBMs have not gone through complete testing. Particularly, they've never tested the reentry aspect of it.

Some of you know that technically speaking reentry of an ICBM is a pretty challenging technical problem, because of extreme heat generated on the reentry vehicle when it enters the atmosphere. So, that is a technical challenge which has to be – which I am willing to believe they probably have developed something they believe can do that, but it still has to be tested. So I think disrupting testing is a pretty effective way of stopping their ICBM program. To me, though, that is a far less attractive alternative than getting a diplomatic solution to the problem.

MR. WIT: Let me – I'm going to follow up on that a little bit, because this is a very unique opportunity to actually hear from someone who participated in planning for a preemptive attack, in 1994. And so I was wondering if you could talk a little bit about that experience, of planning for a preemptive attack, considering the consequences...

DR. PERRY: Yes, I would be happy to do that. In 1994 – I've already said that in '94 I thought we were very close to a war. I was, in fact, in the Roosevelt Room – I mean, in the Cabinet Room – with the President and his national security staff, for the final meeting to get approval for deployment of many tens of thousands of troops to Korea, and other actions, which might very well have precipitated a North Korean attack. We were preparing for that to happen.

And, I was actually in the room about the decision on how many we were going to deploy. Not "whether" to deploy, but how many to deploy. When the telephone call came in from Pyongyang in the middle of the meeting. I have never believed that was a coincidence, that that meeting – they knew the meeting was going on and they wanted to shortstop it.

So...now let me get back to the question, the question, now, in particular – would you repeat the question in the question?

MR. WIT: I think you answered David's question.

DR. PERRY: Well, okay. We did consider, and I had actually, on my desk, a plan for attacking Yongbyon, and taking the reactor out. We were satisfied we could do it with a few Cruise missiles with conventional warheads, and we could do it without undesirable contamination to the people of North Korea. So, it was a plan that was easy to implement. What we did not know, of course, was what the repercussions would be from that plan, and the extent to which it would call upon military action against South Korea.

So, we strongly favored diplomacy as an alternative to that, and diplomacy, in fact, was what finally won out. So, that plan could have been done. I never recommended it to the President. Had I recommended it, he would have, then – and had he agreed to do it – he would then have had to go to the President of South Korea and get his agreement also. Because, as I said, any action, military action, that we take against North Korea, the most likely consequence would be military action against South Korea.

So, we cannot separate that out. The United States, in my judgment, does not have the right to take unilateral action, military action, against North Korea; it has to come in conjunction with our allies, in particular our ally in South Korea, which would face the brunt of any reprisals.

So, that action, even aside from those issues, that actually makes no sense today, taking – namely, bombing Yongbyon – because they now have nuclear weapons and their nuclear weapons are undoubtedly not located at Yongbyon. So, taking out that facility would not take out their nuclear weapons. So, that's an alternative, that's an option, whose day has passed.

MR. WIT: Questions? Yes, please.

QUESTION: Thank you. Jessica Schulberg with the Huffington Post. President-elect Trump has suggested that it could be helpful for South Korea and Japan to acquire their own nuclear weapons, as a form of deterrence. What do you make of that, the efficacy of that? And also, his idea that it's really China that should be taking the lead in persuading North Korea to negotiate?

(Pause.)

DR. PERRY: Two good questions and two very different questions. To get China's cooperation, I think our only prospect is to demonstrate by our action that we're offering a serious diplomatic alternative to North Korea. That was basically what I proposed.

I believe, if we made that offer and negotiated in good faith and North Korea walked away from negotiations, then I think there would be a much better opportunity to get cooperation from China, much more effective sanctions.

On nuclear weapons, on a South Korean nuclear weapons program or Japan nuclear weapons program, let me be very clear on a few points. First, when either nation – if they were to decide to go to build a nuclear weapon – could have nuclear weapons in less than a year's time. They both have the capability. They both have the ability to get the fissile material. They could move very quickly and very rapidly. They have voluntarily abstained from doing that, I think for good reasons, and I support them continuing to abstain from doing that. I am very much opposed to the proliferation of nuclear weapons from more nations, including even responsible nations like South Korea and Japan. So, I'm not in favor of that happening.

If it gets to the point where either, in particular South Korea, were doubtful that our



extended deterrence would apply to them, and therefore were considering building their own nuclear weapons, I think a preferred alternative to that would be the deployment of US nuclear weapons in South Korea, as an alternative to South Korea building their own nuclear weapons. It's a better alternative, I think, than South Korea building their own nuclear weapons.

That was the situation – and some of you may be old enough to remember the days of the Cold War, when Germany was “under the gun,” in this case from the Soviet Union, and we offered our extended deterrence to Germany from an attack by the Soviet Union. The Germans were a little hesitant, and they said, “Would you willing to sacrifice, if the Soviet Union attacked us, would you be willing to sacrifice New York to save Bonn or Berlin? We would feel much more confident about your offer of deterrence if you were deploying your nuclear weapons in Germany.” And so we did, during the Cold War.

I think – thought then, and I think now – it was a bad decision, from a military point of view. But, from a political point of view, it was the right decision, because it gave the Germans the confidence that our deterrence really did apply to them.

Again, to go one more step in detail, during the Cold War, when we deployed those nuclear weapons in Germany, we deployed them on a two finger on the button policy. In other words, they would be launched not only by the US President giving the authority but by the German Chancellor giving the recommendation. So, it seems to me that's an analogy we can look to.

I didn't think it was a good idea then. I don't think it's a good idea now. But, a far better alternative – but it seems to me – and then it seemed to be a necessary alternative, because Germany was uneasy, uncertain, about our willingness to really follow through on extended deterrence. So, to the extent the South Korean people, for example, feel uncertain about our willingness to really extend our deterrence, and are thinking of building their own nuclear weapons, then I think a good alternative to that would be to deploy nuclear weapons there in the same spirit that we did in Germany during the Cold War.

QUESTION: Thank you.

MR. WIT: Yes, please.

QUESTION: Hello. John Harris from Politico. If you had succeeded, in the closing hours of the Clinton administration, with getting a nuclear deal, that would have solved the security problem. To what extent do you think that would have led to solving the political problem of North Korea? Would it have led to a new North Korea, or did you see yourself as solving only the discrete military problem?

DR. PERRY: John, that's a hell of a good question. And before I answer that one, I want to go back to the history of the Agreed Framework. We had that goal in the Agreed Framework, to not only solve the military problem, but to also solve the political problem.

And the Agreed Framework, besides the specific provisions on nuclear weapons and providing nuclear reactors and so on, also had a provision for improving political agreements, steps each country could take. The United States followed through faithfully on all of our technical agreements, [but] did not follow through on the political provisions. I think it did not, not because the Clinton administration wasn't willing to do it, but because it got a lot of opposition in Congress for doing that. Congress, as you may remember, was not even in favor of the Agreed Framework to begin with.

So, there was a lot of resistance in Congress, for whatever reason. The consequence of that was that we did not really follow through on the political end of that agreement. So, that was one of the reasons, I think, the Agreed Framework did not achieve its full potential.

The same situation applied to, would have applied, in 2001, if we had agreed – if we had come to the agreement we had reached with North Korea at that time. To get the political as well as the military benefits of it, there would have had to have been steps on both sides to try to reach accommodation, to try to bring North Korea back into the family of normal nations, so to speak. But that would require action on the United States' [part] as well as on the part of North Korea.

Finally, the other side of that picture is that North Korea might have signed such an agreement with the full intention of evading it, and I cannot disprove people who claim that would be the case. So that was always – even had we gotten the agreement – there was always the possibility that we would have arrived at the situation that we are today, only except five or 10 years later.

QUESTION: If I may, the contemporary relevance of that historical question, to me, seems most applicable with Iran. Do we expect political change in Iran, as we solved the military problem of Iran's nuclear weapon?

DR. PERRY: I think that's exactly right on, John. I think we are getting technical compliance from Iran on the agreement. The question is whether we will also get the political benefits that are the potential of such an agreement. And that requires – “It takes two to tango” – that requires our actions as well as their actions. Neither side seems to be doing that right now, so I think we're losing – we may very well be losing – the potential of getting the political agreements in the Iran agreement.

But I cannot prove it – but I do believe that, in the case of the Agreed Framework, the failures of the Agreed Framework I attribute primarily to the fact that neither side, particularly the US side, did not follow through on the political – the steps that were fully envisioned and fully discussed by both sides.

MR. WIT: Questions? Mat, and then I'll come to you.

QUESTION: Mat Pennington from AP. Secretary Perry, can you say – talk a little bit – about the difficulties in assessing North Korea's capabilities with nuclear weapons and missiles?

Currently, we hear different estimations of their capabilities, even within the US government, but you have people at the Department of Defense who will say – they sort of act on the basis that North Korea probably has the ability to put a nuclear warhead on an ICBM, and yet then we hear people at the State Department saying “We don’t believe North Korea has that capability yet.” Has it always been an issue, in the US government, that you get different assessments of North Korea’s capabilities? And how does that, sort of, influence how you make your policy decisions?

DR. PERRY: We have a shortage of hard, factual, data on which to base such a conclusion. That gives lots of room for a variety of views and a variety of opinion.

My views on that are based primarily on my discussions with Sig Hecker, who I think knows more about this problem than any American. He was, as you may know, the Director of the Los Alamos Livermore Laboratories, that developed our own nuclear weapons. He’s made several visits to Yongbyon, the nuclear facility. He has talked in detail with the head of their nuclear program. So, he probably knows more about that issue, based on factual data, than anybody that I know of. So, I look to him for that kind of information.

Based on that, I think they have the ability, even now or in the near future, to build a nuclear weapon small enough to go on an ICBM. It’s probably a relatively low-yield weapon. But remember, it was a low-yield weapon that destroyed Hiroshima. So, that’s not a very comforting fact.

I would just the biggest deterrence to an operational ICBM lies more in their ICBM than in their warhead. To the extent they have some deficiencies yet in their warhead, they’re probably things that could be tested out in another one or two tests. And, in addition, they may be conducting tests to get higher-yield warheads. So, there are many reasons for wanting to stop the nuclear testing. That’s why I put that number one on our objectives, things we can do to not eliminate the danger but to lessen the danger.

So, if I leave anything else with you today, it is my strongly held view that we don’t have it in our power today to negotiate an end to the nuclear weapons program in North Korea, but we do have it in our power, probably, to lessen the danger, and the number one objective of that would be to stop ICBM testing, stop nuclear testing. That would go a long way, I think, towards lessening the danger.

And, even if they can put a small enough nuclear warhead on an ICBM and neither of them have been tested, it’s a very dubious proposition. They then have to face three dubious propositions. One is whether their ICBMs will even work. Number two, whether their nuclear weapon will work. And three, whether our defense will work. All those combine together to give you a pretty low confidence that they can really do anything, and give a very high risk of trying.

MR. WIT: Yes, I’m sorry. To that I must add I believe this is a government that makes logical decisions, based on their own logic to be sure. The people who think this is a crazy regime are making, I think, a bad assumption that leads them to bad conclusions.

Please.

QUESTION: Hi. My name is Haruyuki Aikawa with Mainichi Newspaper. Could you please address your estimation about when the DPRK will get an ICBM with a nuclear warhead? And my second question is how to [intercept DPRK's ICBMs] I understand that the United States has [different defense systems in Alaska – could the] US intercept North Korean ICBMs?

DR. PERRY: The answer to the first question of when they will be ready to deploy the ICBMs, is I don't know. It depends not just on the factual data and test data we have, but it turns on what are their standards for deployment. Are they willing to deploy something which has not been fully tested? Are they willing to deploy something which they don't have full confidence in?

My guess is they would be, which means, I would say, in a year or two. But if they insist on the standards of testing that we insist on, then they are probably three, or four, or five years away from it.

So, the reason I can't give you a definite answer is that I do not know what standard they're willing to impose before they could actually deploy something. If they want to deploy it for show, for effect, they could probably do it in a year or two.

MR. WIT: The second one is how would we intercept, if we decided to shoot down – (inaudible) ICBMs.

DR. PERRY: Those of you who have heard me speak before, on the ABM subject, know that I'm not a big fan of the ABM, though my big negative on them has to do with their ability to defend against a mass attack, largescale attack. If we continue to work to improve our ABM capability, we probably have a reasonably good probability of stopping a smallscale attack, one, or two, or three.

So, we would defend against it, first of all, by trying to catch it early in flight, which is relatively easy because of North Korea's geography and the fact that we have ABM systems deployed on Aegis ships. We also have ABM systems deployed and designed to go for ICBMs specifically, and the reason I'm concerned about them is that they depend on midflight intercept and midflight intercept is highly susceptible to counter-measures and decoys and the like.

But, with a relatively unsophisticated attack, from relatively few ICBMs, I think we'd have a pretty good shot. So, that's a longwinded answer. To give you a short answer to your question, I think our ICBMs [ABMs] probably could be successful against a smallscale attack.

MR. WIT: Yes, yes. I'm going to call on press people as they raise their hands, as opposed to the sprinkling of experts in the audience.

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DR. PERRY: Please don't call on the experts!

(Laughter.)

QUESTION: Thank you. Jae-soon Chang, Yonhap News Agency. Secretary Perry, you talked about disrupting North Korea's ICBM tests as part of plan B that should be considered only after negotiations break down completely.

DR. PERRY: Yes.

QUESTION: What if North Korea test fires one, even before negotiations begin, like, for example, last week? Do you think we should shoot it down?

DR. PERRY: I would not be opposed to some forms of disruption, even then.

To make some point about coercive measures, I think it's useful for North Korea to believe that we are willing to and capable of conducting coercive actions. I want to tell you one anecdote about that, based on the time when I was Secretary of Defense and we were, at the time, I said, we were very close to a war.

The issue then was different. The issue was North Korea reprocessing spent fuel at Yongbyon, with the goal of making plutonium. And they had enough that they could – plutonium – they had enough to make about six nuclear bombs with what they had then. And we considered that a very undesirable outcome. And we were taking strong diplomatic measures to try to keep it from doing that.

At the same time, as I told you, I had requested a study and had it on my desk of how to take out Yongbyon with Cruise missiles. I didn't advertise that, but I had it. But we did state, and I stated unequivocally, that we would not permit North Korea to make that plutonium. And, by the way, we meant it. This was not an empty threat.

What happened, at that time, was a pure accident, as far as I was concerned. But my good friend, Brent Scowcroft, \_\_\_\_\_, wrote an op-ed, I think in the Washington Post, in which they recommended we do the very thing that I had a plan to do, said that's what we should do.

And, two days later, we got the offer from Yongbyon [Pyongyang] to negotiate. I have always believed – I can't prove it – that that op-ed, which was certainly read by North Korea – that they believed that I had stimulated that op-ed. It was not true; I did not. But they believed it. And they believed that was a very serious threat.

So, I think the ability to do coercive actions, and the other side believes that you're willing to do coercive actions, is a great help in diplomacy sometimes.

MR. WIT: Other questions? Mike, did you have a question?

QUESTION: Yeah. Mike Elleman with the IISS. On the ICBM, would you – well, first, if they don't test it, the chances of it actually working, historically and from an engineering risk analysis, is about 30-40 percent, maybe less, which means they couldn't possibly have much confidence in it. They may deploy it. But, if you combine that with missile defense and other measures, reliability of the warhead, it has to impact their calculus.

If that is true, then would it be worthwhile to negotiate with them specifically on the ICBM issue, leaving the nuclear issue as a second negotiating tactic? Work the ICBM and incentive, allow them to do space launch activity under very controlled circumstances, with sufficient transparency. And what I mean by "controlled circumstances," there is a limit to what types of engines and trajectories they can use. Would that be something that we should be considering and working towards?

DR. PERRY: Mike, understanding "the devil is in the details" in negotiation, my answer to that would be yes. Absolutely. They certainly could not have confidence, whether it's 30 percent or – I don't know what the number is – but it's not fifty-fifty. They certainly cannot have that confidence. Add to that the question about whether our ABM system might work. All of that adds together to say that the deployment, if they made it, would be for show rather than because they think it's going to work. But they might find value in deploying it, just for the show

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We could not write it off, but we should not take it too seriously.

QUESTION: Tom Collina, Ploughshares. Dr. Perry, thank you very much for being here. My question goes to if we do get new negotiations with North Korea, it will, of course, be the Trump administration that carries them forward. What is your sense of General Mattis, who I believe you have some familiar with, who is, of course, the Secretary of Defense designee? What is your sense of General Mattis as someone who might be able to carry these talks forward? Do you have any sense of him, his thoughts or intentions on the North Korean question? Thank you.

DR. PERRY: I have two answers to that question, Tom. The first is that I know General Mattis very well and I have high confidence in him. I think he's very intelligent, he is very cautious. He's also very hard driving. It's an interesting combination. So, I feel good about him on one side of the negotiation, at least making judgments about what should be in the negotiations. That's the question about General Mattis. What was the other half of the question?

MR. WIT: (Inaudible.)

DR. PERRY: Yeah. No, I would like to see him, would hope to see him, confront this issue. Speaking generally, I do not, would not, recommend that the President seek a retired general for Secretary of Defense. There are some generic reasons that I wouldn't do that. But, of the generals he might have picked, I would think General Mattis would be very high on the list of

people who would be qualified to do the job. I think he would go into any sets of negotiations with North Korea from a very sober point of view, understanding the consequences of failure

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MR. WIT: Other questions, comments? I actually have a question now, before going back to – I'll get to John at the end. I'll save him, the best, for last.

Since, of course, you have been Secretary of Defense, you are very well positioned to comment on one of the North Korean demands, which is the suspension of joint exercises, in return for some of the things that you would like to achieve. So, the question is, of course, first of all, do you think we can maybe not suspend joint exercises but modify them, change our exercises in a way that wouldn't adversely affect our security but that the North Koreans might find attractive? Particularly, this whole idea of decapitating the North Korean regime.

DR. PERRY: I would not suspend them as a precondition. In fact, the exercises are a useful pressure for helping bring North Korea to the bargaining table. Once we got into a serious negotiation, would I put them on the table? And the answer is certainly I would. We can do all sorts of exercises; they don't have to be called "Team Spirit." They don't have to be done in the way that was done.

So, I think you could, in good faith, put them on the table without giving up the idea that exercises are a good thing.

MR. WIT: Okay, John, the last question, please. We're almost out of time, so keep it brief.

QUESTION: This is related to Joel's question and your response that you just made. Leaving aside the question of whether we should continue our exercises, do you think there is some wisdom to making our exercises, to borrow a phrase which is usually applied only to North Korea, "less provocative?" So, having dual ICBM shots from Candleberry (?) Air Force Base, out to the Pacific Test Range, and having DOD spokesmen talk about how the next time the target could be Pyongyang, or having South Korea, as they're doing right now, in the midst of their political crisis, talk about forming a "decapitation unit" in the South Korean military, to take out Kim Jong Un, if a war occurred, do you think these types of exercises, and statements, are helpful?

DR. PERRY: That's a leading question. In general, I do not believe in empty threats, and I regard both of what you described there as in the category of empty threats. The old adage of Teddy Roosevelt was "Speak softly but carry a big stick." We've got a big stick; we don't have to talk about it. They know we have a big stick.

MR. WIT: Okay. Any last questions, comments? We have come to 12:30, which is the end of our time. So, I don't see any other hands going up, so thank you, Dr. Perry, for speaking for an hour to us, and I'm sure there are going to be a number of headlines out of this. (Light laugh.) And, let's all join me in thanking Dr. Perry for taking his time to talk to us about this issue.

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(Applause.)

DR. PERRY: I'd like to add one other thing, if I may. I have to say that this was the most intelligent set of questions that I've gotten from a group in a long time. Thank you.

(Laughter.)

MR. WIT: Okay. Thank you, Dr. Perry. Thank everyone for coming today.

END

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*38 North* is a program of the US-Korea Institute at the Johns Hopkins School of Advanced International Studies (SAIS) devoted to high-quality research, analysis, and commentary on a broad range of topics related to North Korea. It is managed by Joel S. Wit, USKI Senior Fellow and former U.S. State Department official, and Jenny Town, USKI Assistant Director.

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