

38 North Press Briefing: June 1, 2017

THE US-KOREA INSTITUTE AT JOHNS HOPKINS SAIS

VERBATIM TRANSCRIPT OF
A 38 NORTH PRESS BRIEFING
“TRUMP AND NORTH KOREA: WHERE DO WE GO FROM HERE?”

GUESTS:

AMBASSADOR ROBERT L. GALLUCCI
DISTINGUISHED PROFESSOR IN THE PRACTICE OF DIPLOMACY, GEORGETOWN
UNIVERSITY WALSH SCHOOL OF FOREIGN SERVICE

MICHAEL ELLEMAN
SENIOR FELLOW FOR MISSILE DEFENSE, INTERNATIONAL INSTITUTE FOR STRATEGIC
STUDIES

MODERATOR:

JOEL S. WIT
SENIOR FELLOW AT THE US-KOREA INSTITUTE AT SAIS, CO-FOUNDER OF 38 NORTH

The discussion this briefing will focus on possible next steps for the Trump administration in dealing with Pyongyang in the context of the election of President Moon Jae-in in South Korea and his upcoming summit meeting with President Donald Trump at the end of June. Michael Elleman will briefly address North Korea's latest ballistic missile test, and Joel Wit will moderate a Q&A session.

38 North Press Briefing: June 1, 2017

1 JUNE 2017
WASHINGTON, D.C.

MR. WIT: Maybe we should just start, since everyone is sort of on time. We'll penalize the people who aren't on time.

MR. ELLEMAN: No food.

MR. WIT: No food, yeah. Everyone eat all the food right now. (Laughs.)

Anyway, thanks everyone for showing up. This is our monthly press breakfast for 38 North and what we thought we'd do today is two things. First, since there are continuing missile tests, we thought we'd start off with a review of what's going on and why it's important. So, to do that, we have a real rocket scientist, Mike Elleman, who works at IISS in Washington. And then, after that, what we'd like to do is just take a step back and think about where we're going, the US, South Korea, Japan, where we're going in terms of dealing with North Korea.

And, of course, we've had the first few months of the Trump administration. Everyone's familiar with most of what it's been doing. And the issue is, now, "Where do we go from here?" And, of course, I think you all know Bob Gallucci. And he'll talk a little bit about that.

So, why don't we start off – Mike, why don't you start off? Mike will tell us what he thinks is most important about the recent missile tests.

MR. ELLEMAN: Thank you, Joel. I want to kind of center on three points this morning and just talk briefly about them and then leave plenty of time for questions and, hopefully, answers.

The most significant thing that we've seen, or trend we've seen, over the past four over the past four or five years has been the increased number of tests that North Korea has conducted, and I think everyone here is aware of that. Since Kim Jong Un came to power, I think they've now tested 78, or roughly around that number, of test launches, which comes out to about 13 to 15 a year, depending on how you count the – or use the – bracket the years. Sorry.

Under the previous two regimes, his father and grandfather, they averaged about one to 1-1/2 tests per year. In other words, there were, I think, 15 tests under Kim Il Sung and 16 under Kim Jong Il.

Why is this important? Well, conducting multiple tests of one system over and over is consistent with the development of new systems. And, with the exception of the Taepodong One and the Unha launcher, which were actually test fired under the Kim Jong Il regime, this is the first time we've seen them actually develop new systems. Before, it was always Scud or Nodong. Now we're seeing Musudan, the Pukkuksong-1 and 1, we have this new Hwasong-12, and who knows what will come around the corner tomorrow.

I think we've also seen some derivatives of the Scud, including the Scud Extended Range and the one that they tested over this past weekend, which in principle has a maneuverable warhead.

So, it's clear to me that Kim Jong Un has embarked upon a new strategy, and that is to develop new capabilities that extend way beyond the thousand kilometer reach that they had with the Nodong.

So, they're looking to strike targets beyond Japan, beyond South Korea.

The second interesting and what I think is important development is that they have moved on from the legacy engines of the Scud and the Nodong. These are kind of low-performance engines. They rely on low-performance propellants. There's a limit to what you can do with them.

If you wanted to try to make an intercontinental missile using these technologies, it'll end up being quite large. Probably on the order of a hundred tons. It won't be road mobile. It'll have to be statically based.

If you want to get an appreciation of how large it would be and how cumbersome it would be to try to transport, imagine the Unha launcher. If it was reconfigured, it would be – and turned into an ICBM – it would be about that large. So, it's a very vulnerable type of weapon.

In order to make intermediate and long-range missiles, they would have to move on to the use of more, or higher energy, propellants, better performing engines, and this is exactly what we've seen them manage to do. The Musudan relies on a very complicated or complex and powerful engine, that's derived from the old Soviet submarine-launched missile, the R-27, or as NATO called it, the SSN-6.

Fortunately for us, the Musudan program has not been all that successful. I think, of the six to eight launches, one has succeeded and there might have been a partial success with one. It's unclear what the problems are, but what is striking to me is that with the failures of the Musudan, which would have been a stepping stone to the development of an ICBM, we suddenly see a new engine appear. They've ground tested it twice and we saw it used two weeks ago on the Hwasong-12 intermediate range system.

This was the missile that was launched on a very high trajectory. It reached 2,000-plus kilometers. It's indicative of a missile that could travel 4,000 to 4,500 kilometers if it took a standard trajectory.

This, to me, is a big deal. One, we're not quite sure where the engine came from. It's highly unlikely that it was indigenously designed, developed and produced. My working hypothesis at this point, given the performance of the engine, its appearance, it likely is derived from an old Russian engine called the RD-250.

Where they sourced it, it's unclear. It could have come from Ukraine because there's a number of these engines used in space launch vehicles, developed in Ukraine. It could have come from Russia, where it was originally designed and produced.

What is important here is it comes from a different manufacturer than all the other engines that we've seen, and missiles we've seen, used in North Korea. The Mikeyev and Isayev design bureaus are the ones that have – their equipment has been supplied to the Koreans. They're responsible for the Scud, the Nodong, the Scud ER, and the R-27, aka Musudan.

Suddenly we have something coming from another design bureau or enterprise or another, shall we say, procurement network. And I think this is very important because we now no longer have any confidence in our judgments as to what equipment North Korea may or may not have. So, we could be in for surprises in the future. It's very difficult to bound their capabilities and what might occur in the future, because we don't know if they have access to new and improved engines.

The second big development on the propulsion side is we've seen the North Koreans begin to master the solid propellant technologies. We see this in the two Pukkuksong missiles the submarine-launched and the land-based one. To date, they're making – the engines are relatively small and simpler to make because they're very short. I could get into the reasons why that's important. But, you know, they weigh on the order of four or five tons each.

If they wanted to try to make a larger engine, for an ICBM, they'd have to move to about 25 tons or more. The technological leap from four to five tons to 25 or more tons is rather significant. It took most other countries years to do it. It took China, I think, 10 to 12 years. It took France seven or eight years. So, I don't think we'll see a solid propellant-based ICBM anytime soon. I think it's more likely it will be based on these liquid propellants, and most likely whatever engine, whether it's the RD-250 or not, that was used in the HS-12 test.

I'd like to just conclude, because I think that Joel and Bob are much more equipped to deal with the questions of how to stop all this than I am, but I wanted to conclude with when we see North Korea test missiles we fall into this trap where we object to every one of them, kind of on an equal basis. And I think this is a little bit misguided. I think we need to be more selective with our outrage and our punitive measures, whatever they might be.

The test firing of the intermediate-range missile, the HS-12, to me is a big deal. It's much more significant than the launch of the Unha satellite launcher, which everyone keeps calling an ICBM – it is not an ICBM. But this HS-12 is the first step towards developing an ICBM capable of striking the United States. So, I think we need to keep those things in mind when we want to apply sanctions, or outrage, or diplomatic capital to respond to North Korea's testing.

So, I'll conclude there and pass it back to Joel.

MR. WIT: Thanks, Mike. I have questions but I'll let someone out there try to ask a question first. Anyone? Jay? I'll get to you. Oh, and please identify yourselves, please, when you...

QUESTION: You're concerned that this latest engine might have been transferred from Russia or the Ukraine. I'm just curious, historically, is this something that the state would know about? Because you said it's happened before. I'm just curious if you think, if this did come from Russia or Ukraine, this is something that was kind of smuggled in, or it would have been a state decision. Thank you.

MR. ELLEMAN: I would be very surprised if it was a state-based decision. I suspect this transfer occurred a long time ago. You know, Ukraine was under a lot of financial pressure. They did transfer the KH-55 cruise missile to, I think, Iran and China. So it is possible – I don't have any evidence to say it came from Ukraine, but it is possible that, through one of its illicit channels, they procured them from Ukraine.

They could have gotten them from sources in Russia as well. You know, this is an engine that has been widely used on a number of satellite launch vehicles. It was also used in I think it was the SS-9 -- R-36 is the Russian name --

MR. WIT: SS-9 ICBM.

MR. ELLEMAN: Yeah, yeah.

MR. WIT: Russian ICBM.

MR. ELLEMAN: So – but it's – again, I don't have – it's a working hypothesis on my part right now, that this is the RD-250 engine. It looks almost exactly the same, and it's...

QUESTION: RD – what did you call it?

MR. ELLEMAN: RD-250. But it's been modified by the North Koreans and...

MR. WIT: Modified in what way?

MR. ELLEMAN: The RD-250 usually has a single pump supplying two main combustion chambers, with two nozzles. It looks like what the North Koreans have done is separated the two kind of main engines, and it now operates with one. This would have necessitated making changes to the turbo pump. It's not a simple thing to do.

And then, they've added some steering – you know, four small steering engines to it. And we've seen that in the ground tests.

MR. WIT: I'm sorry, I'm going to jump in and start asking questions. Why would they modify it?

QUESTION: This was the HS-12 test? This was the one that we saw in that test?

MR. ELLEMAN: That's what I currently believe, and the analysis supports it. But I don't have firm evidence of a transfer or otherwise. It's hard to tell at this point.

MR. WIT: No, I know. Yes, just for clarification, I mean, there are only a couple of places where the engine could come from, right?

MR. ELLEMAN: Yes.

MR. WIT: So, I mean, it's not as if it came from Mars or some other planet.

MR. ELLEMAN: (Laughs.)

MR. WIT: There are only two places it could have come from, Ukraine or Russia.

MR. ELLEMAN: Well, I mean, it is possible that China may have supplied something, but I have – you know, there's an extensive database on engines that have been produced by China and Russia, and the only engine that matches the particular one we've seen is the RD-250.

MR. WIT: That's the Russian...

MR. ELLEMAN: The Russian built one.

MR. WIT: ... originally Russian, but Ukrainian.

MR. ELLEMAN: Yes.

MR. WIT: Ukraine used to be part of Russia, so --

MR. ELLEMAN: Yeah. Well, it's an old Soviet engine.

MR. WIT: Right.

MR. ELLEMAN: To put it more precisely.

MR. WIT: What were the design bureaus again?

MR. ELLEMAN: Well, this engine, the RD-250, was designed by what was called Glushko. It is now called NPO and Energomosh, and they're the supplier of most of the engines that Russia uses for satellite launches, even today. It is a very separate organization from the Mikayev design bureau, which designed missiles. They were responsible for the submarine-launched missiles that the Soviet Union produced, and now Russia.

And Mikayev always relied on the Isayev engine design bureau for its propulsion systems. It never worked with Glushko or Energomosh. So it appears there's a separate procurement channel that the North Koreans had established in the past.

Mind you, I think all of these transfers occurred many years ago, probably in the late nineties, possibly in the early 2000s.

QUESTION: Could I just ask, when you're talking about transfers – sorry, David Brunnstrom from Reuters. When you're talking about technology transfers, you're thinking, what, blueprints or actual physical rocket motors?

MR. ELLEMAN: The actual engines, yes. Not just the blueprints; it's the actual hardware.

QUESTION: So they would need that in order to...

MR. ELLEMAN: Yeah, it's very unlikely that the North Koreans could have assembled – created this and assembled – it, just based on blueprints.

QUESTION: And it happened in the late nineties and the early 2000s. Why has it taken them so long to have gotten to this stage?

MR. ELLEMAN: For the same reason it's taken them so long to really begin missile development programs. I think it wasn't a priority during the Kim Jong Il era. I think it's taken on a new priority with the new leader.

MR. WIT: But, I mean, isn't it also the case that in any missile development program it's not as if someone transfers you the engines and the next year you're going to be testing it on missiles. I mean, it takes a certain amount of time to get to that point.

MR. ELLEMAN: That is true as well, and you also must recall that from 1998 to 2006 North Korea adhered to a flight test ban.

MR. WIT: Right.

MR. ELLEMAN: So they wouldn't have been able to...

Now, they may have been doing ground tests and they just didn't publicize them like they do now, during the 2000s and up 'til Kim Jong II's death.

MR. WIT: There was a flight test ban put in place by the Clinton administration that held for those years.

QUESTION: Just to follow up, in terms of the time it takes to develop, what would be the issues there? Is it in terms of the materials that you need? If you have the physical engine and you want to copy it, what would be the problem and why would it take such a long time to do it, if you were working on it?

MR. ELLEMAN: Yeah. I'm very skeptical of stories that say that they have a few reference engines and then they can produce clones of them on their own. If you look historically, that's just not the case of what happens. You end up designing something new.

But, engine development itself usually requires three or four years. What I think North Korea is doing is, you know, it took time to modify this engine, to operate the way they want it to, in this missile. It probably took a couple years to design the missile itself. And now we've seen it tested. So, going forward, they're going to have to show that this missile, the HS-12, its performance can be duplicated and that it's reliable over the course of a dozen flight tests. And usually that takes two or three years.

MR. WIT: Yeah, I guess there have been some people who have suggested that North Korea now can manufacturer – I don't know if they can – they've suggested they can manufacture all their missiles indigenously. But certainly these newer ones, do you think they're totally self sufficient now, or...

MR. ELLEMAN: They're self sufficient in the sense that if they have X number of engines they can build X number of missiles.

MR. WIT: X number "they've acquired."

MR. ELLEMAN: Yes. Yes.

MR. WIT: They're not, sort of, building these engines from scratch.

MR. ELLEMAN: No.

MR. WIT: They have, like, 50 sets of engines, from whoever they got them from, that they're going to use. But over time, I assume that they learned how to build these things themselves.

MR. ELLEMAN: Well, one could try to do that. It's unclear to me whether they've even established a production line for the Scud and Nodong engines. It may be that they have, but every Scud

or Nodong engine that I have seen, that's been shipped by North Korea to another state, looks and performs precisely like the original Russian engine.

The history of, quote, "reverse engineering" suggests that that's just inconsistent with the history. If you look at Russia's attempts to recreate the old German V-2, it looked and performed differently. The Chinese tried to do it with several of the early Russian rockets, I think the R-2 and the R-5. They came up with something slightly different.

It's true with India, with their initial satellite launcher. It's different from the old American Scout, which they tried to copy. I could go on and on with examples, and I'd just suggest that anyone that's driven a Chinese "Cherry," which is supposed to be a copy of the Toyota RAV4, will understand that if you try to copy something the resultant product is not a clone; it is something different. It looks and performs differently.

MR. WIT: Maybe, let me – you go, ask your question, and then we'll...

MR. GALLUCCI: Yeah. This is very brief. This is on the order of "stop me before I kill again."

(Light laughter.)

MR. GALLUCCI: I was planning on saying, in my comments, that whatever you may think about sanctions, don't think that there's some magic set of sanctions that can stop the ballistic missile or nuclear weapons program. In other words, to the best of my knowledge with respect to their nuclear weapons program, they are not "in need" right now, and if they were, they wouldn't be in a sanctionable sector, searching for what they needed.

I was also going to assert that about their ballistic missile program. But I need you to help me here.

MR. ELLEMAN: Again, I think most of the equipment they've been – these engines that they've been using – were imported a long time ago. So, sanctions would not impact that. I'm dubious that any set of sanctions would actually halt missile development in North Korea. It could slow it, increase the cost.

I think the one vulnerability they might have is the fuel that's actually used for the Musudan and this HS-12. It's a hydrazine-based fuel. There's only three countries in the world that mass produce it. That's China, Russia, and the United States. France used to but stopped because it's a difficult chemical to work with. And they import their hydrazine-based fuels from Russia, to support their satellite launch programs.

I suspect that North Korea still has to import that fuel, and that would be a considerable vulnerability for them. And that's the only thing I could think of. They probably still have to import electronic components, things of that nature. So, there are vulnerabilities in their supply line. If we can get into that supply chain, you know, you could do sanctions or you could do disruption. And I think those would be the areas that you could target.

MR. GALLUCCI: But you're assuming they haven't already stockpiled that stuff.

MR. ELLEMAN: It's possible that they – but, you know, it takes many tons of hydrazine for a

single launch. I mean – I don't know the number off the top of my head, but it's probably on the order of 10 to 15 tons of hydrazine is used for each launch of an HS-12 or the Musudan. So, you're talking large quantities.

Now, they may have already acquired a hundred tons, but then they would have to do maintenance on it.

MR. GALLUCCI: Yeah, they have to have it stored, right? Exactly.

MR. ELLEMAN: Stored properly, and then you have to maintain it too. Yeah.

MR. GALLUCCI: That's complicated?

MR. ELLEMAN: No, but it would stress their industries, because it's a very difficult compound to work with.

MR. WIT: Sorry. Oh, I'm sorry. You had your finger up before. You are definitely next. (Laughs.)

QUESTION: Okay. Nick Wadhams with Bloomberg. I just had two quick questions. One is, I mean, what percentage of GDP, of North Korea GDP, if – I know those numbers are pretty fuzzy – do you think they dedicate to their nuclear and ballistic missile programs? And then the other is can you just give us an update on where things stand with the administration's narrative that China is being helpful? Is there evidence to suggest that the administration can maintain that narrative, or does the evidence show that China is actually not being helpful in, sort of, sustaining the pressure?

MR. WIT: Nick, maybe we could hold that off and Bob can deal with that part.

QUESTION: Sure, okay.

MR. WIT: Because I think that's more in his ballpark. And I'm going to make a wild guess here, but you probably don't know that percentage that he's asking about, and I don't think anyone does.

MR. ELLEMAN: I was going to defer to you.

MR. WIT: Oh, you were going to defer to me.

(Laughter.)

MR. WIT: Well, I don't know that percentage! So, I'm sorry. Sorry, Nick. But we'll get to the second question when Bob talks. Yes.

QUESTION: Hi. Haruyuki Aikawa from Mainichi newspapers. I want to ask about the other key technology of ballistic missiles, reentry technologies. Could you please advise us on your views on the present North Korea technological capability? Thank you.

MR. ELLEMAN: You're exactly right. And this is one of the challenges of why North Korea can't just go and convert its satellite launcher into an intercontinental ballistic missile. One, they'd have

to make changes to it. But two, they would have to prove out reentry technologies.

Now, they've probably gotten a pretty good step towards mastering the technology, with this most recent test. Its reentry velocity, I think, would have been on the order of four to five kilometers a second. Meaning the HS-12. An ICBM, the reentry velocities are on the order of seven kilometers a second. So, they're approaching it slowly.

I would assume they collected telemetry data on the reentry vehicle. It did come in at a different angle than you would see on a regular ICBM flight on a standard trajectory. But those are all things you can work around.

Nonetheless, if you look back at the history of the Soviet program, they thought they had a very good handle on reentry technology and it turns out the first ICBM test they did they realized, post-test, it was very obvious what the mistake was, but their reentry vehicle disintegrated upon reentry. So, you have to prove it at least once and preferably a couple of times. But I don't think there's anything, other than the tests, impeding the development of the reentry vehicle. It just has to be – you just have to go and conduct the tests. Which is no simple matter. But it's...

MR. WIT: Yeah, the other thing I think is important in this context is that it also depends on the country that's developing the missile and the level of confidence they want that it will actually work. So, the Soviet Union and the United States, of course, wanted a very high level of confidence that their missiles would work, that their nuclear weapons would work properly.

I suspect the North Koreans may be operating differently, in that they are happy with "good enough." You know?

MR. ELLEMAN: Yes.

MR. WIT: They may not want that 99 percent confidence level that the United States and the Soviet Union wanted. And a lot of this is, of course, not just they'll be confident the missile will work but, you know, when they roll out their first ICBM, when someone spots this thing sort of wandering around North Korea, you can imagine the reaction to that.

And people aren't going to say "Well gee, it's not going to work." They may think that, but we can't assume it won't work. So I think there's sort of another level of thinking going on, with the North Koreans, on these weapons.

MR. ELLEMAN: Yeah, I just wanted to point one other thing out, that's exactly what you're saying. With reentry technologies, what the Soviet Union and the United States really focused on initially is they wanted systems that would perform precisely the same each time, and accuracy was very important to both countries. You know, how accurate could they actually deliver the nuclear weapon.

MR. WIT: Right, accuracy too.

MR. ELLEMAN: And, for that, you need a reentry body that, however it is – it's technically called "oblations," where you just kind of peel off layers – it carries the heat away – it needs to do that in a very symmetrical fashion, otherwise the warhead will drift off target.

I don't think North Korea will really care about that, so they, in principle, could use something as simple as a hard wood. This is what the Chinese did with their very first reentry vehicles. They actually used a type of wood, because it oblates. And it's actually a very good insulator. But you have real drift problems because it doesn't oblate uniformly and symmetrically.

MR. WIT: Okay. Well, we're going to run over 10 o'clock, of course, because we started later, so I'll still let people ask a few more questions. Yeah, I think this gentleman is first and then...

QUESTION: Yes, hi. Lonnie Everson with TV Asahi. I was wondering if you could speak to the test the US conducted on Tuesday, the intercept test, and what that means for North Korea's program, going forward.

MR. ELLEMAN: Yes. I'll make two points. One, it was really nice to see that it was successful. I think now it's "batting .500" over the series of tests. And I'll say the same thing about the results of a single test for the missile test – it would be the same thing I'd say about a single test with the North Koreans.

Whatever happens in an individual test is – it's not unimportant but it's a datapoint, a single datapoint. What you have to look at is the trend. Are they repeating the successes or are they repeatedly failing? So, to put a lot of weight on the results of a single test, I think, it's not indicative of the state of development.

So, I would be really interested to see what happens in the next two or three tests, as they make the target more and more complex and more realistic. So, I think I'll leave it at that.

MR. WIT: Okay. Yes.

QUESTION: Thank you. Jason Jong (?), Yonhap News Agency. You said this HS-12 is the first step toward developing an ICBM, and the North Koreans are also slowly mastering the reentry technology. And, considering all these developments, how close do you think they are to developing an ICBM, if they keep working on this at this pace?

MR. ELLEMAN: The answer – and I don't mean to be evasive – but the answer to that question depends on what the requirements are from the North Koreans' perspective, as Joel mentioned. How good is good enough? Is an ICBM that will perform with the expectation that half of them will succeed, is that good enough? Or does it have to be 75 percent, or does it have to be what the United States, Soviet Union, France, China require, which is 95 percent or better?

That will dictate the number of tests they must perform and, under a variety of conditions, et cetera. And that, in turn, impacts the, I guess the, timeline for when they can declare it or make it "combat ready," if you will.

If they want to have – and I'm picking this number somewhat randomly – if they want to have 75 percent confidence in an ICBM, I think they have to do enough tests that would stretch over the course of at least three years. So, I don't foresee an operationally viable ICBM before 2020, maybe 2021.

For emergency use, they could shorten that timeframe, but at the risk that one or a large fraction of their missile force would fail.

MR. WIT: Okay. Any other questions on this particular topic or – okay. And, if you think of some, we can come back to it later, after Bob gives his presentation. So, Bob.

MR. GALLUCCI: Thank you, Joel. I'd like to talk about the crisis, the current situation between the United States, particularly, maybe the international community, and the DPRK, that has been framed as fitting the description of a crisis. Why is that? Why are we where we are, and is it right that this is a crisis?

This discussion about the ICBM is a big portion of that, it seems to me. Interestingly, we have been watching the development of a medium-range ballistic missile for some time, and the Nodong has “made its way around the world.” (Light laugh.) It's been exported. And this missile has given the North Koreans, along with Scuds, the capability to strike the Republic of Korea, and Japan, certain targets in Japan in any event.

Nevertheless, we have – and the international community has – taken the emergence of an ICBM capability, intercontinental range, that could reach the continental United States, as a critical and new development. And we are calling this a crisis, rather than the vulnerability of our allies, South Korea and Japan.

That may be, because the treaties we have, the United States has, with those two countries effectively require us to extend that nuclear umbrella over our allies, and whatever concerns there may be about the United States' willingness to do that, those concerns would be heightened in a situation where the United States, itself, was vulnerable.

So, it may be quite rational for us and everyone else to see the ICBM emergence as something new which threatens, anew, South Korea and Japan, as well as the United States, because of the character of extended deterrence and the psychological credibility it requires for it to be effective, effective on the one hand in deterring the North Koreans, and effective on the other hand in assuring our allies that we are there for their security.

All that being said, the issue, I think, seems to have taken a certain pointed character and maybe entered crisis phase with the new year, with 2017, with the New Year's announcement of Kim Jong Un that the emergence of an ICBM capability was in the offing, was near, was not too far away. And I don't know whether you could extract from what the DPRK's leader said, whether what he thought the initial operating capability date would be, but certainly the test of an ICBM-range missile, he suggested, was in the offing, and some were even suggesting seemed like it was going to be this year, perhaps.

At the same time, we have the presidential tweet, which I believe was something like “not gonna happen,” which led everybody, I think, to wonder “How come...it's not gonna happen?”

(Light laughter.)

MR. GALLUCCI: “What does he know that we don't know? Is it something about the inability of the North to actually produce an ICBM that they could test, of that range?” Maybe that there was such an effectiveness to our cyber activities that have been talked about since then, that we were going to prevent the emergence of this capability. Or, more ominously, that we would stop it in some way. And, to use the current jargon, “left of launch.” Right? Before it's launched.

Which I think, if you put all that together, I think it does seem to spell crisis. And what I would like to suggest to you is taken at face value it's very hard to know when this crisis ripens. You know? In other words, is it plausible, just to push this to the extreme, before I go make some other comments, is it plausible this crisis ripens tomorrow morning? Just as I have described it so far.

Is it plausible, in other words, that a missile that looks a lot like the missile that some people have said would be the ICBM – it may have been a mockup – but that that is rolling out and somehow we sense it, maybe see it, but we sense this missile, a solid-fuel missile, is about to be tested? I'm not talking about with a warhead aimed at the United States, but just a test of the ICBM.

If the Director of National Intelligence tells the President of the United States this, what is the President of the United States going to do? (Pause.) If he doesn't want the test to take place, which he doesn't.

So what I'm suggesting to you is this has a certain – in looking for what makes for a crisis, there are at least two qualities. One is something very important and catastrophic would happen. And two, that it's near term, potentially. Hence, crisis.

I would say we've got it. I don't know that this is going to happen tomorrow morning. That is not what anybody who knows anything about missiles is saying. But, there's always wiggle room in that, because there's a lot we don't know about the way the North Koreans think about these issues, politically. And that might be just a political launch – if you'll pardon that expression, put that in “air quotes” if you like – a political launch rather than something that is the beginning of a sequence, aimed at the development of a new capability.

Anyway, what I'm – I'm starting this way because I think it's important for everybody to understand there is at least a potential urgency to this situation. And here's what sharpens that urgency, if I can.

It's the leadership issue. If we looked at the leaders of the two principals in this part of the confrontation between the DPRK and the international community, in this confrontation, it is between Kim Jong Un and the President of the United States. I think it is arguably, objectively, true that in both cases the leadership is – has demonstrated a certain impulsive quality, not “judicious,” not cautious. And certainly there is inexperience.

Now, I'm trying to stay away from hyperbolic language here. It's very hard to say that Kim Jong Un is “deeply experienced” and not impulsive. Or, I would say, it's hard to say that President Trump hasn't done things already, as President, that strike most of the human race as impulsive. Right? And it's hard to say he's deeply experienced, since he hasn't been in office for very long.

So, someone might want to extend this argument. I don't need to, for my purposes. I'd say the leadership is impulsive, has demonstrated impulsive character, and is inexperienced. That's the first point.

The second is that policy is unclear, for both countries. I don't know if anybody in this room – and I recognize everybody in this room, I think, follows North Korea – does anybody feel confident that they know “North Korean grand strategy,” a phrase that we are comfortable with in the United States, about

our military, political-military, strategy, over a scope? I certainly have been looking at North Korea for a long time and I don't have any confidence.

I don't know what the "North Korean grand strategy" is. But, for the first time in a very long time, I would say the same about US policy – (light laugh) – with respect to North Korea. And I say this wanting desperately to understand what we are doing, and I know that – I just went through a series of statements by Secretary of State Tillerson, by the President of the United States, by the Vice President of the United States, and by Secretary Mattis, and I know that when I put all this together I can't figure out, one, whether they think that the process of negotiation with the North Koreans has failed us miserably over 20 years, and ought not be repeated, or is the only way out of the current situation and should be pursued. Those are different, and I'm not sure where they are on this.

I'm not sure whether they take the position that negotiations are a reward for the North Koreans, which we should not grant them until they demonstrate a new commitment to the same objectives we have, or whether we would go and speak to them without preconditions. I don't know.

I don't know this administration's feeling about the correct way to deal with this problem. I know – I think I know – that they understand that we have not – we as a nation, the United States, and maybe the international community – has not effectively dealt with the threat that the North can pose to Northeast Asia and the international community. Everybody can see that that threat still exists, after decades of efforts to do something about it. So, it's not unreasonable to say what we've done in the past failed to solve the problem. And it's not because of bad will or stupidity; this is a difficult problem and difficult case.

But what they plan to do isn't clear, or even the assumptions on which their policy would be based, I would say, are not very clear.

That said, continuing on the theme of leadership and theme of crisis, there is one statement that was made, which I am going to read to you, and I believe I have copied it down, in my pen and ink way, correctly. And it was from Secretary Mattis.

Now, understand, that the question is "What would the United States do in a circumstance in which there was about to be a launch of an ICBM, and we had an opportunity to do something about it?" In other words, that space between sensing it and striking was enough so that we could actually – the window was large enough so that we could actually do something. Which might not, in fact, be true in the real world, but might be. Would we act, to strike that missile?

There are two concepts, often used interchangeably, which are not. One is "preventive war" and one the other is "preemptive war." And a preemptive strike is genuinely recognized in international law and "just war theory," and politically, as justifiable. In other words, if an enemy is about to strike you, you can strike him or her first, preemptively, and not be morally or legally thought ill of, as a result of that. You don't have to wait until you are struck, if the other one, other country, was about to strike you.

"Preventive war" is something else. Preventive war is no one is about to strike you; you just look down the road and you can see your potential enemy having a capability, eventually, which you'd rather they not have, so you decide to "kill that baby in the crib." Right? To strike preventively. This was much discussed in the Second Gulf War time, when the administration argued it was a "preemptive" engagement and many of us argued it was "preventive," not "preemptive," and therefore not judicious.

It's the same situation now, I would say. It's not the same; a similar situation. To strike an ICBM to prevent the series of tests and therefore the development of an intercontinental range missile, would be a preventive engagement, not a preemptive strike. The question is "Where does the administration think we are?"

Secretary Mattis, on the 28th of May, "They," meaning North Korea, "They have been very clear in their rhetoric. We don't have to wait until they have an ICBM with a nuclear weapon on it, to say that now it's manifest completely." So that, to me, is an important statement by the Secretary of Defense.

So, I see the situation in terms of the degree of ripeness of the crisis, and the leadership being what it is, and the policy being as unclear as it is, on both sides, to be troubling and a matter of some concern. We have -- the backdrop here is a history in which we have been struck by what the North Koreans have done, physically -- I mean, from -- going back decades, but most recently, the sinking of a ship, the shelling of an island, activity in the DMZ, and very real outrageous statements, aggressive statements, about their nuclear weapons capability and their intent with respect to the use against the United States of America.

About their nuclear weapons, you've heard about their ballistic missiles, let me say a word about their nuclear weapons. Five tests. We don't -- the United States of America and the international community -- have ranges, in terms of the size of the detonations that the North has accomplished in their tests. It is plausible that they have learned how to produce a nuclear weapon that will produce a yield that is several times the size of the Nagasaki blast.

Now, understand what that means. That means -- to say that means -- is not to say that the North Koreans have "thermonuclear weapons," that they have a true multi-stage thermonuclear weapon. That is not what I am saying. I'm saying that, in the language of nuclear weapons, that they may have accomplished the boosting of a weapon, that is to say, to get an additional yield out of a simple fission device, through the use of some fusion fuel, not a true thermonuclear weapon, but a boosted fission weapon, so that a yield that is more like 50 or 60 kilotons rather than 15 to 20 kilotons, is possible.

Why does this matter? It matters because we are now talking about the vulnerability of cities, and with that kind of a yield it is reasonable to think about really extraordinary losses to a city. Not, in other words, tens of thousands of citizens, but hundreds of thousands to more than a million, with a single detonation.

So, one way to think about this, when you think about ballistic missile defense, very often we refer to "leakage" in that defense, and how many -- if there's a barrage -- how much leakage is acceptable, in your ballistic missile defense. Well, when we are dealing with ballistic missiles armed with nuclear weapons of significant yield -- and when you are up to the over 50 kiloton yield you're into significant yield -- it's not megatons, it isn't real thermonuclear weapons, but it's still, arguably, "city busting," then any leakage is catastrophic. So, this all goes into the shape of the crisis I'm trying to shape for you.

I actually have no information on the mating of the weapon they have developed, with the ballistic missile that they are developing. That is a very important issue. It's not only size, weight, volume; it's also survivability, it's a whole bunch of things that go into making that package work. And I would like to tell you that I could tell you something about it, but I can't. And I don't know where they are, in that connection.

So, this crisis, in my view, this could ripen instantaneously or not, literally, for years, recognizing what Secretary Mattis said, which is “It’s upon us. We don’t really have to wait.” Right? We are now at preemptive time, when I think most of us would say at best it’s preventive time, a non-trivial distinction.

What to do about this? I’ll take only a couple of minutes on this, because there’s very little here that I’m aware of. We have played the China card. I am persuaded, personally, from my own interactions, that the Chinese are indeed seized of the issue. Beijing is aware that this is not going the way they would like it to go. I mean, for Beijing, the idea that we are this close to an American military action, very close to their border, is not good news. Right? This cannot be what the Chinese want.

Now, does that translate into a new enthusiasm for either permitting international sanctions to work or, in fact, turning up the heat on the DPRK? I do not know. And I’m not adding anything here to that discussion, except to note it hasn’t worked so far. (Light laugh.) Right? I don’t see evidence of that working so far. But I can’t say that it won’t; I just don’t know.

Sanctions. If sanctions are to continue to be what they have been, I would say they are pleasing, certainly to Americans – you might have noticed, Americans love sanctions, “We are doing something! But it isn’t so risky that it’s going to cause a war, so therefore it’s sort of perfect.” The fact that it’s ineffective makes it “not quite perfect.” And by that I mean if the expectation was that sanctions would produce one of two outcomes, either, one, it would materially impact the capability of the North Koreans, for example stopping something critical in that supply chain I talked about, or somehow stopping nuclear weapons tests, that would be significant. I don’t see any evidence of that.

Second, if the pain of the sanctions was significant enough that the DPRK leadership said, “This becomes a stability issue for us. We have to do something about sanctions relief.” Then the, if you will – forgive this – “the Iran model” might obtain, and it might, quote, “drive the North to the table in the right frame of mind.” I don’t see any evidence of that... either. So, I’m not holding out hope that sanctions are going to do this. I’m not opposed to sanctions; I’m just – I don’t see it.

Ballistic missile defense. I thought you were, Mike, kind about ballistic missile defense. For me, my problem is I don’t want Americans particularly to invest – and I don’t mean this in dollars – they should invest in dollars – but politically and emotionally, invest in ballistic missile defense as “the answer,” any more than I would like, by the way, our allies, in the ROK and Japan, to invest in the multi-layered defense in Northeast Asia, of PAC, THAAD, and the standard missile, the Aegis.

I’m prepared to believe they can shoot down, or they would succeed in shooting down, some missiles, under some circumstances. But not if we are in a world of nuclear weapons. This is not a system to which you’d say “We don’t have to worry now; we have a multi-layered defense.” I just don’t believe that.

I am also, as Mike is, pleased that our most recent ICBM test – let me put it this way: didn’t fail. My problem about “succeeded” is that people read more into that. Right? That was one missile, for which they prepared, and prepared, and prepared. They had all the information on how that missile was going to arrive, and they hit it. Right.

The North is not going to do that for us. Okay? So, we are some distance from a near leak-proof way of dealing with an ICBM threat, from anybody.

Now here's a big asterisk. We have never had ballistic missile defense! Never! We lived through 60, 70, years with the Soviets and then the Russians, having, at one point, 30,000 nuclear weapons. 30,000 nuclear weapons! And we could never defend. We could never – have never – been able to defend the United States of America. We relied on deterrence.

It's the same with the Chinese. We worried about the Chinese. That's where the 1960s ABM system initially came from. We worried about the Chinese. Will they be as rational and deterrable?

Well, now we're worried about the North Koreans. Are they as rational and deterrable? But we have never been able to defend ourselves, defend by denial, stop it. Right? We still can't.

So, as you're thinking about this crisis, think about the threat that we and others have lived under, our allies and us. No defense. Relying on deterrence. And then think about the unwillingness to say "We actually don't need to worry about this; we have a deterrent." And do we ever have a deterrent against North Korea? Of course we do! The question is, deterrence is psychological. Will you invest in it emotionally and politically?

So, we're getting down to "left of launch." Is the military option a good option? All I want you to think about here is what Secretary Mattis said in the rest of his remarks, where he gave that chilling little comment, which was "That Korean war will be horrendous, in terms of loss of human life." Korean life first, North and South. But also others. Right?

So, I would have no enthusiasm for "left of launch," meaning kinetic stuff "left of launch," and would have to ask whether you really care about the development, over years, three to five years, enough to cause the war now. It's a serious question.

Then there's negotiations, and if we get to negotiations we can talk about what they might involve. To me, the only thing that you can start with is "Can we get talks about talks, without preconditions, or are we still going to walk around, as we did for so long, in the Obama administration, having a standard that the North Koreans had to meet, before we would meet with them?" This does not strike me as a terrific idea.

And then, if all that fails, what's left is containment. I know it's been called "strategic patience," but I'm much more familiar with an old-fashioned term like "containment." Right? That's what it is. I mean, those are two really good words that should never be put together, "strategic" and "patience." I mean, there's no reason for that. It's containment.

And then, you either accept containment, you accept that capability, you accept that your reliance is on deterrence, and then you "work like hell" at your ballistic missile defense, but don't delude yourself while you're at it.

So, with that, y'all have a nice day.

(Laughter.)

MR. WIT: Okay. Any questions?

(Pause.)

MR. WIT: Mat?

QUESTION: Mat Pennington from AP. Mike mentioned before that the HS-12 was a big technological leap, in terms of North Korea's missile development. And you talked about the importance of using your, sort of, diplomatic capital wisely. So, could I ask whoever wants to respond to this, what do you think should be done on the diplomatic front, in response to that HS-12 test? Because there seems to be some debate in the Security Council whether they're going to have a new resolution, and sanctions. It seems like China is not very interested in it. But maybe the US and its allies are.

So, I mean, do you just want to send a message on this, even though it's not an ICBM test or a nuclear test?

MR. GALLUCCI: I mean, my own view here is that the phrase "send a message..."

"Send a message" seems to connote – it doesn't denote but it seems to connote – something more powerful, right? That you're going to send a message that this was unacceptable, "We're not going to put up with this."

But if you go to send a message and it's more of the same, which hasn't worked, then you are sending a message but it's exactly the opposite of the one you thought you wanted to send. Right? The message is "We're not going to do anything here, but we're going to make believe we are."

What I'm troubled by is the "make believe" part. I'm not troubled by sanctions against North Korea. They are eminently sanctionable in a kind of legal, political, ethical sense. That's fine. I just don't want us to be deluding ourselves into thinking that's a policy that is going to produce the outcomes that we need for our security and the security of our allies.

So, when you say "What should we do about this?" I don't see – I just gave the options as I know them – I don't see one, right now, that looks workable. We may rediscover that – we keep rediscovering the Chinese, as the answer to the problem. We've rediscovered them enough most recently. Right? We've had them here. We've talked to them. We've sent them back home. They are seized of the issue. If they do something, that would be wonderful, that changes the nature of this.

But otherwise, I don't see what that does, and I don't – unless someone explains to me – and I mean this literally – I am prepared to accept the explanation, I've got my pen, I'll take notes – on what sanctions we might now impose, that would send the proper message, that we don't want to see more of these – this is not punishment time; this is to deter the DPRK from doing more of the same. That would be the objective, I would think. And is there a set of sanctions that somebody has in mind that will do that, taking account of what role China has played with respect to international sanctions in the past? I'm done.

MR. ELLEMAN: Yeah, I would just state, and be completely blunt, I think what I really meant with the statement I made was that we should start ignoring the launch of Scud and Nodong-type missiles. I know that's difficult if the press is unwilling to do it. But, as a policy issue, to me it's "So what?" I mean, it's important but it's an established capability. I would focus on whatever response you can come up with, develop that, use it first and foremost for nuclear tests, and then for longer-range

systems or systems that demonstrate new capabilities that are of concern to not just the United States but the region.

MR. WIT: I think the point here that, sort of, Mike is making is that if we're starting to think seriously about how to stop the most dangerous developments and, in that context, starting to think seriously about diplomacy, we have to get rid of the notion that every test is the same. You know? They're all violations of UN sanctions, of course. But every missile test is not the same. Some are much more threatening than others.

So, Scud tests, Nodong tests, yes, they violate UN sanctions. And I think for a lot of these tests we don't really do much, we don't send a message, as Bob is saying; we condemn them, we say "This is unacceptable," but not much happens then. So, we're sending the opposite message to the North Koreans. And, believe me, they are getting that opposite message.

So what I think Mike is arguing for – and this is counter what US government officials have been saying for a long time, is that there are things – these aren't all the same. Nodongs are not the same as an HS-12 test. Unha space launches are not the same as an ICBM test. There are differences here, and the issue is whether you can use those differences and think about them technically, in a way where you can head off the most dangerous developments that are the most threatening to you.

MR. ELLEMAN: And, if I could just go slightly off topic for one short comment, it may be too late to draw those distinctions in terms of North Korea, because I'm not sure what else we can do. But you have the country of Iran. You know? We want to sanction the hell out of them for any ballistic missile test they do. Perhaps we should take a step back and "Why are we sanctioning them and what capability are we trying to sanction?" You know, the number of tests they're doing, comparatively, three, four, five per year, to the 15 per year the North Koreans are doing.

So, I think you need to keep things in context, and maybe the lesson is learned, from the North Korea experience, perhaps we should think about it when we think of sanctioning or reacting to Iranian missile tests.

MR. WIT: Any other questions? Yes, please.

QUESTION: Alicia Rose with NHK. You mentioned on Tuesday's intercept test, you were stressing, that it's just one test. So, I was wondering, how long do you expect that it will take the US to develop, as you called it, a "near leak proof missile defense capability?"

And also, on the unpredictability of US strategy, what are the benefits to having such an unpredictability, versus the benefits of laying out US policy in a clearer way?

MR. WIT: Could you handle the first one and then Bob can answer the second one?

MR. ELLEMAN: Yeah. I don't think we'll ever conduct enough tests – (laughs) – to prove – to approach "leak proof," even in the case of the North Koreans. I think it's going to take new technology. In my view, we should be investing in new technologies or emerging technologies, such as directed energy weapons, lasers, rather than these GBIs, you know, the ground based interceptors. I mean, this test supposedly cost, what, \$255 million? I suspect it's more than that. It takes a year to analyze all the data. So, I just don't have much confidence in the national missile defense, as it's being constructed

now.

I have a lot of confidence in the regional missile defenses, but they too are not leak proof. They are meant to protect against conventionally-armed missiles, not nuclear weapons.

MR. GALLUCCI: So, on the question of lack of clarity in policy – and I’m going to roll something else into that – the impulsiveness, the difficulty of predicting what the opponent may do – has been characterized as a concern and a worry. It has also been characterized as a wise policy, conducted by those who are attempting to confuse their potential enemy.

Okay, so here is the way I look at it. For the United States of America, being unclear about our policy is not an asset. For the United States of America, appearing to possibly engage in what some would call irrational behavior, and to be impulsive, is not an asset. I believe we should be on the high ground. We should be on the high ground of being predictable, having stated pretty clear what sorts of things we find most provocative and dangerous, when we might act, even with the use of force. We should be clear about that so that potential adversaries, as well as allies, know... where... we stand. And we should never be bluffing, when we’re doing that.

We should be telling the truth about how we expect we’ll respond. It doesn’t require that we say specifically, for any particular act, what we would, specifically, do in response. But our policy should not be a mystery.

Now, for other countries, particularly small countries, engaging with larger countries, they may attempt, on occasion, to posture and threaten, even in an apparently irrational way, in order to gain some leverage, because deterrence is a psychological endeavor. We never know when deterrence is working; we only know when it fails. Right? “I am right now deterrent an elephant attack, with this pen. Right? And no elephants are attacking me. Is the pen working?” Don’t know. Strongly suspect, not much of a connection. But if an elephant comes through that door now, I will know that my deterrent failed.

It’s the same thing with deterrence and nuclear weapons. For decades and decades, we were certain we were deterring the other side, and they were certain they were deterring us. Right? And that means that we think had we not had the nuclear weapons, war would have broken out, they would have attacked us. I don’t know whether they would have. We certainly know when deterrence fails, as I said, because then the attack occurs.

It leads to, as someone said many years ago, before you all were born, when Khrushchev took off his shoe at the United Nations and pounded it on the podium, he got everybody’s attention. He was the leader of the Soviet Union and he was behaving in a somewhat non-credible way. And, as some of my colleagues said at the time, “That’s worth some missiles.” Right? That was indicating that we shouldn’t assume anything about what deters this man.

The same may be true of the North Korean leader. I do not know. What I do know is that we should not have confidence that Kim Jong Un has the same developed, sophisticated, view of deterrence theory that Americans have by the time they usually reach the positions of leadership. And I think, if you asked General Mattis or General McMaster about deterrence, they could speak on the deterrence theory at length, for a long time.

I would be surprised if the President of the United States could do that, because that’s not what he

did all his life. I would also be surprised if the North Korean leader could do that. So, we really don't know much about their concept of deterrence. And in our case, right now, we don't know exactly how a decision would be made about the use of these weapons.

MR. WIT: Is there a question? Yes, please.

QUESTION: Yonhap News Agency. As you know, the Korean President, Moon Jae-in, will be coming to D.C. later this month, for talks with Trump. Ambassador Gallucci, what do you think would be the best outcome of the talks, in terms of dealing with North Korea? What do you want to see from the talks?

MR. GALLUCCI: I don't want to be flip here, but I will say that what I want to see is, in a way, the opposite of what just happened in Europe. America has benefited profoundly and deeply, enduringly, from its treaty alliances, and the NATO alliance, I think, suffered a serious hit – (light laugh) – last week.

What I would like to see be the outcome of the meetings between the new President of the ROK and the President of the United States is that our bilateral alliance be endorsed, sustained, that both parties say what's true, which is that we both gain a great deal in terms of security and political stability in the region, as a result of that alliance, and that we both value it.

If there's too much time spent on who should pay for THAAD, I think that would be a shame. If there's too much time spent on other, much less important, issues, that would be a shame. And I hope both leaders, wherever domestic politics may fall, in South Korea and the United States, both leaders look at the larger picture, at the most important picture, and that is regional stability and security in Northeast Asia, and the security of both of our countries.

MR. WIT: Other questions? One more? Yeah, please.

QUESTION: My name is Tatsuya Mizumoto from Jiji Press. Thank you very much for time.

Ambassador Gallucci, so you said – so, everything is unclear. So, can I ask about Trump's policy in this way? What is the red line for the United States to do military action against the DPRK? And then, what is the red line for the DPRK to do some military action against the allies, Japan or South Korea?

MR. GALLUCCI: So, first of all, you're not hearing the phrase "red line" used quite the way it used to be used, and I think President Obama did some damage to the phrase. Wholly apart from whether you think the United States of America should have intervened, at that time, when the President drew a red line over the use of chemical weapons.

Broadly, it was understood, I think, in the international community, that he drew a red line and then he retreated from that. Again, without judgment about whether the retreat was the wise thing to do or not, I know the President – in an interview he said he was certain he did the right thing. Okay.

But, the purpose of drawing a red line, as I have always understood it, it's always meant that you want to, with clarity, inform the other side that that is a point at which you will use force, and from the United States' perspective it's always important to say "even unilaterally, if necessary," to address the behavior of crossing whatever the red line is.

I don't know – people are shrinking, I think, now – around the administration and even in the last administration, from drawing any more red lines, because one of the worst things you can do is draw the red line and then have someone cross the red line, and then not do it, the “it” being some forceful response. So, what I'm saying here is I, myself, am shrinking from thinking of what the red line is.

What I was trying to say before, however, is that, as you all think about, and as citizens think about, provocations from the North and testing an intercontinental-range ballistic missile, whose purpose is to deliver a nuclear weapon to American soil, and that's new, that's a provocation. Right? The next new missile in Russia may do the same thing but will not be regarded as new, because they have the same many – (laughs) – thousands, that can do it already. North Korea, it's new. And there's a belligerency that goes with it.

So, the question is “Is the development of that capability, just the development, is that an action which legitimately, properly, prudently, should, would, lead the leadership of the United States to use force to prevent?” That I understand to be your question. And I don't know what the answer is, as a prediction. Right?

I, myself, am absolutely confident in saying that if the opportunity arose to take such action – and we are talking about a test of a missile – I would want the President and his administration to have taken the necessary steps beforehand, to prepare the United States of America and its allies for a possible conventional war in Northeast Asia. I wouldn't want the assumption that this was a “free lunch,” that we could simply use force as though we were using cruise missiles in the Middle East. This would not be like that, in my view, or not – we wouldn't know that it would be like that, with any confidence.

I mean, a long time ago, “in another universe,” when the United States of America was dealing with North Korea, and we were contemplating sanctions, and the North had – UN sanctions – and the North had warned us that – it was kind of a history lesson, you could say – that the United Nations was not, from a DPRK perspective, a neutral entity; it was the belligerent in the Korean War – (light laugh) – the flag under which the US fought, in the Korean War, and that since that engagement, that war, had been terminated with an armistice rather than a treaty of peace, the United Nations engaging in sanctions resolutions was an act of war, and they would take it as such.

So, at that time, that was news, and the administration got very serious about doing what was necessary to prepare allies, members of Congress, to some degree the American public, but also we have lots to do in the region, to prepare for a possible engagement, and much more to do now, as North Korean capabilities are much greater than they were in 1994.

So, all I'm saying here is that I would like the administration to think about this in those terms, to be very cautious and judicious about what they decide to do. I'm not now making a judgment, myself, about where any red lines ought to be drawn.

MR. WIT: Okay. Just one more question, and then if you want to follow up on that, but then that's it. Okay. Please.

QUESTION: So, can I ask this in this way? So, what is the big difference between the Obama policy and the Trump policy, to North Korea?

MR. WIT: Yeah, because a lot of people have said they're both the same, right?

QUESTION: Yeah, right. So...

MR. WIT: Everyone like – I won't mention names – but people are saying they're both the same.

MR. GALLUCCI: That's not fair to President Trump.

MR. WIT: (Laughs.)

MR. GALLUCCI: That's a phrase I never thought I'd utter.

MR. WIT: Yeah, you never thought – (laughs) –

MR. GALLUCCI: But that's not fair to President Trump. I mean, the fact that – I mean, the policy is unclear.

A fair response to that, if that's a criticism, is to say "What has it been, 120 days, or how long has he been in office?" Right? The policy, to be evolving, to be shaping, to be coming into full force, that's still not unreasonable for a new administration, for an issue this important.

I'm just making the point that it is unclear, at this point, what they're about. So, to ask that the President have a policy as fully developed, if that's how you want to characterize President Obama's policy on North Korea, I think it was developed, it wasn't a failure but it wasn't a success. I mean, it was closer to a failure than a success because the threat is still there.

But eventually, if you asked the three of us to describe the eight years of President Obama's presidency and what policy was pursued, I think we could do that. Right?

Right now, I would say, it's very hard to see which direction, even, this administration is going. But I'd also give him some time.

MR. WIT: Yeah and, you know, to say it's the same – (light laugh) – I agree with that. But it's also – it is the same, in that there are only so many tools in your toolkit, and yes, so sure, you're seeing some of the same tools. You're seeing sanctions, you're seeing, maybe, some openness –

MR. ELLEMAN: China.

MR. WIT: -- China – you're seeing, maybe, some openness to diplomacy, you're seeing aircraft carriers. Yeah, so in that sense, it's the same. But I think, at this point, it's pretty ridiculous to say they're both the same policies. Anyway, that's my two cents.

So, I think we're going to end it here. Thank you very much, everyone. Thank you to our speakers, and stay tuned, we'll have another one of these next month. Take care.

END

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.

Feedback and questions can be directed to thirtyeightnorth@gmail.com.

38NORTH.ORG