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38 North Press Briefing:
The Proposed Trump-Kim Jong Un Summit

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Speakers:

Joel Wit

Senior Fellow at the US-Korea Institute
at Johns Hopkins SAIS, Founder of 38North

Suzanne DiMaggio

Director, The US-Iran Initiative
and Senior Fellow at New America

PROCEEDINGS

MR. WIT: -- Obviously there's a lot of stuff in the news. Unfortunately, Aaron Miller couldn't make it because he broke his thumb. So, I'm going to have to try to fill in a little bit for him. He sent me some points to make.

I mean, the reason we wanted Aaron is because he helped plan five Middle Eastern summits. So he has a lot of experience. Anyway, we'll try to soldier on for now.

So, today we have, I think all of you know, Suzanne, and myself, and we're going to talk about the summit, talk about some of the things we had in our article that was published in Politico I guess it's two weeks ago.

MS. DIMAGGIO: It's only been one week

MR. WIT: Oh, It's only been one week?

(Laughter.)

MS. DIMAGGIO: My God! It feels like a year.

MR. WIT: It feels like a long time ago. Plus, it appeared on a Saturday night, for about an hour,

and then it disappeared.

MS. DIMAGGIO: (Laughs.)

MR. WIT: So anyway, for those of you who missed it, who weren't looking at Politico minute by minute, we'll talk a little bit about that and talk a little bit about what's been in the news in the past week or so.

So I think the way we'll proceed is Suzanne will talk first, and then I'll follow, and then we can have a discussion and any questions.

MS. DIMAGGIO: Great. So, thank you, Joel, for organizing this. Justin, thank you for your keen assistance in pulling this together, and thank all of you for coming here. I think, when we wrote our article, I think it was published nine days ago, of course a lot of things were moving fast. But I think the main points we made still hold. And I'm just going to go over a few of them.

But first I do want to say that I think, for some of us who have long supported diplomatic talks to address the North Korean crisis, the news of a summit between Donald Trump and Kim Jong Un, I think brought about what I would call a "be careful what you wish for" moment. Are these two leaders, both of whom I would call untested leaders on the global stage, are they ready for such high stakes diplomacy? And I think that was one of the big questions we have to grapple with.

And usually, when we have these sort of encounters, presidential summits, especially between adversaries, they usually take place after a fair degree of groundwork for negotiations, or some concrete set of deliverables have been agreed to. Otherwise, you run the risk of the more powerful party being seen as giving away unearned concessions to the other side, or you run the risk of [it] becoming more of a spectacle than an actual substance, which I think is a big risk here.

And, more seriously, I guess one of my concerns is that what would happen if the summit isn't a success? What if it's a failure? I think that would likely damage the prospects for future diplomacy, possibly in an irreversible way, and it could make unviable – what I would call unviable – military options suddenly appear unavoidable. So I think that's the worst case scenario and we really need to work to avoid that.

So, despite all these concerns, I must give President Trump credit in taking a bold step towards diplomacy. I think it's a welcome turn of events, given the daily cycle of escalation and hot rhetoric we have been witnessing between Washington and Pyongyang over the past months, including a lot of talk about war, military options.

So, if the summit comes to fruition, I think it could result in a historic breakthrough. And my own point of view is we must, now, do everything we can to ensure it's a success.

So, of course, for any chance of success, the Trump administration now is faced with the task of having to carefully manage the very short period of time between now and the summit. A fixed date has yet to be determined. But I think the general timeframe is late May. Of course that could change, but let's move forward on the presumption that that's going to happen.

So, the administration now has to quickly carry out a great deal of preparatory work. And we already see some early moves in the right direction. Since the summit was first proposed, there is a de-escalation in tensions, a cooling down in the fiery rhetoric. I think the personal insults that were being traded have stopped, at least for now. We'll have to see if that's a temporary thing.

The other move in the right direction is we haven't seen a missile test by the North Koreans since November 29th. So we're almost at the four-month mark. And, of course, the other positive step is that in many months of mixed messaging by this administration, contradictory statements by various administration officials, I think there has been some progress on trying to communicate a coherent US policy, an emphasis on diplomacy while keeping pressure in place.

Previously, I think the contradictory statements heightened this perception and also the risk of miscalculation, so this is obviously a step in the right direction.

And then, of course, arguments favoring military action have been mute. At least for now there seems to be an effort to make room for diplomacy. But that could change if things do not go the right way.

There are many challenges ahead. I think the administration clearly needs to do a better job of working with allies. I think the President's tweet on South Korea which seemed to imply a veiled threat of maybe pulling our soldiers from the Peninsula, at this very critical moment when they're involved in their own high-stakes diplomacy, I think this was really music to Kim Jong Un's ears. And right now I think there should be clear indication that we are seen to be in close coordination with our allies and partners, especially South Korea.

And I know that we have seen representatives from the US, South Korea and Japan, who met in San Francisco.

Another challenge is how will this administration forge a robust diplomatic strategy that will require a whole of government, must be an inter-agency process. This won't be easy. The hollowing out of the State Department is obviously a challenge. The fact that we have a change in the lead diplomat, Rex Tillerson soon will be stepping down, and administration officials with expertise about North Korea and experience dealing with North Korea more specifically, are practically non-existent at this point, which I think puts us at a real disadvantage.

Another challenge is what I would call how to soundproof this process from President Trump's rhetoric and tweeting. I know in the past his rhetoric has derailed efforts to get talks started, especially since the Oslo meeting in May that I was involved with. I think we should expect many bumps in the road ahead. So, how to soundproof the process, I think placing the process in the hands of a senior US official – I would assume at this stage it would be Pompeo, I think would be one way to do that, so the President isn't even involved, necessarily, on a day-to-day basis, in these details.

So, a key goal of pre-summit preparations should be to set the groundwork for what I would call sustained, productive, talks, while at the same time continuing to test the North Koreans' seriousness. I think the North Koreans have played their cards quite well. Kim Jong Un, at this point, seems to be at least setting the agenda and the pace, while the Trump administration is reacting and trying to catch up. So, I think the administration needs to move quickly to change this dynamic.

In the article that Joel referred to, we strongly recommended, ASAP, a face-to-face bilateral meeting, at a senior level. Towards that design, we said this should be between Rex Tillerson and the North Korean Foreign Minister Ri Yong-ho. But life comes at you fast and here we are. So, we would now probably change that to Secretary – well, he's not confirmed yet – but Mr. Pompeo.

In either case, whether it's Mr. Tillerson or Mr. Pompeo, both would face a steep learning curve in preparing for such a meeting. Ri Yong-ho is a very seasoned diplomat, a leading expert in North Korea on the United States, also has been a lead negotiator during the Six Party Talks. So, he has been doing this for quite some time. And also his team has been doing this for quite some time.

So I think the meeting would be an opportunity for the senior official to convey to the North Koreans on behalf of President Trump that regime change is not US policy, also an opportunity to clarify the US policy of maximum pressure, while emphasizing that engagement is the preferred way forward.

And then other priorities in an initial meeting should be solidifying the continuation of the suspended nuclear and missile testing while the talks are underway, and establishing a reliable channel for direct communications, going forward.

I also think securing the release of the three imprisoned Americans, as a humanitarian gesture, should be a priority. In my own opinion, I think this probably should have been secured before President Trump actually agreed to the summit, but here we are.

And I think, finally, and perhaps most importantly, the issue of an initial meeting would be to codify North Korea's stance on denuclearization. As we mentioned in the article, we strongly disagree with those analysts that are suggesting we should drop this as a goal of negotiations. That doesn't make sense to us, especially when the North Koreans themselves have conveyed that denuclearization would be on the agenda. As the Foreign Minister of South Korea said just yesterday on "Face the Nation," they have received – what did she call it? – not "promises" but maybe "assurances," directly from Kim Jong Un, that this would be an agenda point.

So, of course, I think the United States needs to clarify that and get some reassurance that that indeed will be the case.

The other thing I would emphasize is the new Korean dialogue which is actually happening now, and this summit between North and South Korea is actually expected to take place before the Trump-Kim summit. So, we need to make sure whatever we do is on a complementary track to that summit and preparations for that. Then again, the importance to coordinate closely with our South Korean allies. I really wish we had an Ambassador in Seoul, but we do not at the moment.

I think this coordination is very important because will try to split us, and I think coordination is the way to prevent that.

There are other ideas we listed in the article, which we can go through, maybe through the course of the Q&A. But I think there are certainly, once the process has started, a number of key issues that should be addressed earlier rather than later, that show promise.

Just briefly, I would say one is getting to a point of a common set of principles on how to move the

discussion forward and, of course, this is well tread ground. We have been through this before with the North Koreans. There are seven principles that have been agreed to in past discussions and I think we can borrow heavily from that.

I think second is to pursue with the North Koreans their own – their parallel goals of economic development and a robust nuclear program. What do they plan to do, now that they have declared the completion of their nuclear force? Are they, indeed, going to turn their attention to economic development? I think that's a line of discussion we should be pursuing with them early on.

Third, throughout the informal talks with the North Koreans, consistently over these past two years they said that they would be open to discussing in official talks matters relating to nonproliferation, specifically offering assurances that they will not transfer or sell nuclear weapons, nuclear material, as well as chemical and biological weapons. So, I think that is a set of issues that are ripe for discussion.

And then, I think I will stop there, but I guess our key point was that the administration, in order to make this date of May for the summit, now needs to scramble, to get prepared for what's shaping up to be probably the most important diplomatic encounter of Trump's presidency. So, I think it's an opportunity to develop and commit to a diplomatic strategy to match the uncertainties ahead. We need to fully task this diplomacy and work and must exhaust every option that we have, on this track.

So, I will stop there.

MR. WIT: Thanks, Suzanne. Let me – this is a little awkward because I have to present Aaron's stuff and I'm not a Middle East expert. But I think some of it is very relevant here. You know, you hear a lot from people about the summit and mainly Korea experts. And I think what's interesting is Aaron has experienced playing in five Middle Eastern summits, over a decade. And I think there are a lot of interesting lessons from those. So, I'm going to talk a little bit about that and then I'm going to come back to the North Korea issue, because I have some, just a few, additional things to say, beyond what Suzanne said.

So, the first point I thought was very interesting in what Aaron said was that he participated in five summits. There was a lot of talk beforehand, a lot of negotiation, a lot of meetings, and yet four out of five were failures. So, of course, if you're just meeting with the President and Kim Jong Un, that may increase the chance of failure. But even having a process leading up to a summit, you still can fail.

Secondly, Aaron says "Form follows function," so that means "What is the summit designed to achieve?" And, of course, we talked a little bit about that in our article and "What are the objectives of a summit?"

And he says there is usually good room for one of two things. Either launching a process or closing one out with an accord. So, in this case, there is not going to be an accord, but I think a much more doable objective is actually launching a process.

Secondly, Aaron says "Create an investment track." And I think by that he means that you need to create a process that serves all sides' needs. In which no party will be blamed for sabotaging it.

So, in the case of the Middle Eastern summits, and particularly the Madrid Summit, they created

sufficient incentives to move forward, and there weren't a lot of disincentives to move forward. And, an important point, I think, is that that summit in particular was successful, and that's the only decade when there wasn't a major Middle Eastern war. So, a summit can really set the tone for many years after it's taken place.

Another one that's really relevant to today is, he said, "Even in the Middle Eastern case, there's no way you can script a leaders' summit." You know, you can prepare, you can have meetings, you can have understandings with whoever is in charge, but "at the end of the day," when they get in the room, leaders are likely to do what leaders do, which is make decisions and make calculations, sometimes on their own. And it's not clear to the staff beforehand what those might have been, in their own minds.

Fourth, to have a plan B. Well, of course, that's very relevant to this summit. He points out that at Camp David they didn't have a plan B, and as a result that created a lot of conflict between the Israelis and the Palestinians. And so that's exactly what we need here, is a plan B. If things don't go according to what we think they should go, what's the fallback? And it sounds like common sense, but in talking to Aaron, he said they never really thought about it. They never really discussed it, in planning the summit.

Then the last thing is don't shut parties out. And in the case of the Middle East, it was mobilizing key Arab states. Here it's obviously our allies, number one. But also China. I think the administration needs to make a concerted effort to bring China into the process, and maybe that includes senior-level meetings with Chinese officials or even trying to convene some sort of multilateral meeting before the summit, that includes the Chinese too. You know, I've heard informally they may be open to that.

The last issue I wanted to address, which is in the news a lot and already a few people have asked me about this, is "What about this Helsinki meeting?" You know, the people involved are all very capable, very professional, people. Remember that these meetings are set up months ahead of time, so when this meeting was set up I'm willing to bet my house that no one knew there was going to be a summit.

And secondly, to me it would be very strange if the governments involved used this kind of meeting to help prepare for a summit. I think the most you might hear from the North Korean official there, who was not senior level, is some sort of reaffirmation about what they told the South Koreans. But I think that would be the most.

And I know everyone is looking around and saying "Well gee, where are these summit preparations happening then?" Well, there was an interesting article the other day about the intelligence channel between the United States and North Korea. I know that channel has existed since 2009, which is eight years, nine years, ago. There have been on-going contacts between the United States intelligence people and the North Korean intelligence community since 2009. And I think they started then in preparation for President Clinton's visit to North Korea that summit, to retrieve the two American journalists.

And if you go back and do a little bit of research, you'll see reports in 2012 of visits by senior-level CIA officials to North Korea, to discuss other issues.

And then, of course, in 2014, James Clapper, who was the Director of National Intelligence, visited North Korea as well. I suspect that was set up through intelligence contacts.

The last point to make is I noticed in that article there was a lot of talk about the North Korean

official who the Americans were in contact with, Kim Yong-chol, who was head of the General Reconnaissance Bureau during the time that the Cheonan was sunk, and also recently visited South Korea. Well, in fact, he has been the main contact in this channel for much of the time that I've described to you.

A last point: It's good to have these kinds of contacts, but it's not ideal. And I want to not be undiplomatic here, but it's one thing to be an intelligence analyst; it's another thing to be a diplomat and a policymaker. It's like if I was the captain of an aircraft carrier and you asked me to be a diplomat I'd probably have trouble figuring it out, if I had never been a diplomat before.

And so that's the problem. That's a drawback here. So I think using an intelligence channel for these preparations, while it's good that there is a channel, it has serious drawbacks.

And the last point which Suzanne has made, and I want to "second," is that there is no substitute for face-to-face experience, in dealing with North Koreans. I could sit in my office day after day, reading KCNA and every other official North Korean publication and think that I'm learning a lot. And you are. But it's different when you meet them face-to-face. You'll hear a lot of that stuff from the official media but you'll hear a lot of other stuff too.

And it's also important because, as Suzanne has said, the North Koreans who are preparing the summit have decades of experience, in terms of face-to-face contact and negotiations with Americans – decades of experience.

I first met the Foreign Minister, the current Foreign Minister, in 1995, when he came to New York to negotiate the lightwater reactor supply agreement with the Korean Peninsula Energy Development Organization.

And the others such as, now Vice Minister Che Song-he, she has a couple of decades of experience too. So these people really know the United States, they understand the United States, they, of course, have met many Americans over these decades, and know how to talk to Americans and understand Americans too. And, on top of that, they are professionals. They have their own national interests in mind all the time, and I'm sure they're the ones behind the planning for this summit.

So, it's a cautionary note that you can't just send some intelligence analysts off to meet with North Koreans and think that that's going to work well.

So, let me – I'm going to stop here and invite questions, comments. There's always that initial hesitation when no one raises their hand. So, thank you.

QUESTION: Nick Wadhams with Bloomberg. I just have two questions. One I'm sure you guys get a lot but the first one is whether you took the offer from North Korea to give up its nuclear program as conveyed through the South Koreans at face value or if that sort of goes against everything you've ever concluded in your conversations with the North Koreans, if that offer strikes you as genuine or if there is just an ulterior motive behind that.

And the other, is there anyone you can think of in the US government currently who is working on these issues who has actually met a North Korean personally?

(Light laughter.)

MS. DIMAGGIO: Thank you. So, on your first question, whether or not I took denuclearization at face value, of course not. I think it's an issue that we have to constantly test the North Koreans, and test their seriousness.

But, on the other hand, if you think about why the North Koreans are entering into talks now, in terms of the timing, we may get a different answer. Of course, the maximum pressure campaign of the Trump administration's sanctions have been a factor in this decision. But I would not say it's been too big. And by that I mean, in other words, pressure and sanctions alone would not have gotten us to the point that we are today.

I think there are two other factors that are far more important. The second is the diplomacy conducted by the South Koreans and President Moon, particularly offering the North Koreans an off ramp. The Olympics, the Olympic pause, and getting diplomacy on track. The South Koreans did a great deal of heavy diplomatic lifting and I'd say finessing to get us to this point.

But I would say the third factor is the most important, and that is the North Koreans' progress on their nuclear and missile program over this past year, hydrogen bomb tests and three ICBM tests, the last one which had a projected range that could hit any target in the United States. I think the fact that Kim Jong Un could say, at the end of 2017, what he said he would say at the beginning of 2017, he said, "By the end of this year we will complete our nuclear force."

Now, we can debate whether or not he really has that capability. Does he have a reentry capability to actually hit us with a nuclear weapon? But I think that's beside the point. I think they feel a great sense of confidence that they've made these accomplishments. Also, they understand that it has greatly enhanced their negotiating position. So, I think they have a keen understanding that that negotiating position is as strong now as it's going to be. So, I think that is why they're entering into talks now.

So, in terms of your question, I think they also understand that even when they say "denuclearization," they mean a process to get there. And what we need to find out is, if they're serious, how long are they talking about? A year? Five years? Ten years? I think that's what we need to be pursuing.

And in terms of your second question, which was – well, I forget what it was now.

QUESTION: If anyone in the government has met a North Korean.

MS. DIMAGGIO: Oh. I only know of one person, and that is Allison Hooker, who is at the National Security Council. She accompanied Ivanka Trump to the Pyeongchang Olympics, but she has been serving, I think, in several administrations and has actually met North Koreans face-to-face.

MR. WIT: Let me just quickly add a couple points. First, on the denuclearization point, in fact, although no one is really paying attention, they've said this periodically since at least 2013, in very high-level government statements, one in the summer of 2013, one in the summer of 2016. They don't just do those for fun. I mean, they're not a diversion.

And privately they've been talking about it too. So, for example, in 2013, the fall of 2013, at a meeting I was at, a senior North Korean official outlined a phased process of denuclearization. And not just denuclearization, of course, but what they would want in return. And that goes to the point which Suzanne has made and I think many of us have made, that it's not something that's going to happen overnight; it's a longterm process; it's a goal of the negotiation, just as the end of the "US hostile policy" will be a goal, a longterm goal, for the North Koreans, in any negotiation.

So, when you look at it that way, then it's possible, although we don't know if we're going to "get to the end of the rainbow" there.

The idea that we should drop that goal, I think, is really ridiculous. You know? Why would we drop that goal, enter into a negotiation, and then let the North Koreans, essentially, keep their weapons, without any pressure from us because we've dropped the goal? It doesn't make any sense at all.

MR. WIT: David?

QUESTION: Thank you. You mentioned that, in relation to Helsinki, a place that could be, perhaps, expected <inaudible> that the North Koreans have told the South Koreans. But isn't that actually quite important, to hear that directly? At the moment, we're relying on what the South Koreans are saying

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MR. WIT: Right.

QUESTION: -- then we have no motive to paint it in a certain way.

MR. WIT: I think it's important for all of you, but I suspect there are channels in which the United States government is hearing things like that. And I think, certainly, as — I can't see if there are any Korean reporters here — but Korean reporters know that every time there's an important North-South meeting, it's arranged by the National Intelligence Service. So, they have active channels of communications. Even in the most conservative Korean governments there have been active channels of communications. And I'm sure that's what they're hearing in that channel and sharing with the United States.

So yes, if you want to hear a Korean official say that publicly, we're in this kind of private track 1.5 meeting, sure. I suspect you will hear it publicly once the date and place has been worked out for a summit.

MS. DIMAGGIO: Let me just add something to that. I think, as we move forward, I don't think we should expect the North Koreans to be saying much about the summit itself and the process. I think this is typical, for them to be quite reserve on this, not speaking publicly about it. And I don't see that changing.

QUESTION: Just a followup, Joel. You mentioned a meeting in which North Korea issued an outline of denuclearization phased process and what they wanted in return. Can you explain a little bit about what they want to see in that, in front of their team?

MR. WIT: Sure. It's not a problem. A lot of people say "What do they mean by 'hostile policy?'" And I guess, for people who actually sit down and talk to them, like Suzanne and myself, it's very obvious,

very clear, what they mean.

So, if you ask a North Korean, “Well, what do they want in return in that process?” you need to look at political steps, economic steps, and security-related steps. So, for example, if you’re talking about political steps, you would need to see movement towards normalization of relations between the United States and the North Koreans.

If you’re talking about economic steps, that’s very obvious. You know, start lifting sanctions.

If you’re talking about security steps, that’s very obvious too. Moving towards a peace treaty.

More recently, we’ve heard, and I think Suzanne has heard too, more details on what they mean about that process of moving towards a peace treaty. Which is a longterm process.

So you can – if you look at the record of these private meetings, I think they reflected a stream of thought, not the dominant stream of thought but stream of thought, among officials, some officials, in North Korea, that may now be part of their gameplan.

(Pause.)

QUESTION: Tim Shorrock from “The Nation.” I think it was about a week ago that Pompeo, when he was put on CBS to explain what was going to happen, mentioned we have made, the US has made, no compromise whatsoever. And obviously sending Trump is a big compromise. But, what about the military exercises? I mean, I have been reading in the South Korean press that those reports that the strategic bombers and aircraft carriers and submarines will not participate in these exercises. So, while the US may be saying publicly “We’re not backing down on this issue, and Kim Jong Un said he would understand the military exercises,” do you expect to be, or have you heard that there’s going to be, some kind of downgrading of the exercises?

While, obviously, they’re probably going to continue in some form.

MS. DIMAGGIO: I actually think there is going to be an announcement in the coming day or so about it. Maybe today actually. But my understanding is that the exercises will resume on or around the beginning of April. And I think you’re right, Tim, they will be toned down in both size and the scope. I don’t think the United States will describe it as a concession. I would describe it more as setting the right atmosphere for talks, and I think, if you look at it that way, it makes a great deal of sense.

MR. WIT: Thank you. Don’t you get a feeling that someone is – there’s a choreographer here, you know, who is planning all the dance steps?

MS. DIMAGGIO: I think it’s a South Korean.

(Light laughter.)

MR. WIT: And, you know, you have Kim Jong Un saying “Well gee, I don’t really care about exercises.” Wink, wink. And then you have Pompeo saying “Gee, we haven’t compromised.” Wink, wink. So, obviously, there is something going on here, beneath the surface, I think through, certainly, the

South Korean contacts, in the intelligence channels, with the North Koreans.

QUESTION: Could I ask a followup on Pompeo? It seems to me, looking at his pretty important speech about a month ago at the American Enterprise Institute, where he talked in great detail about North Korea and what the US suspects it may do, but it seemed to me that he was kind of responding to the North Koreans saying they're not going to test anymore. I mean, that was sort of the undercurrent to what he was saying, I think.

But, it seems to me that the CIA has been playing a pretty prominent role, regardless of the recent appointment. I mean, they had – about a year ago or so – there was an event at Georgetown, where two senior people from the CIA mission center spoke, and I thought that was quite unusual, for anybody from the mission center to speak, by name especially. So, do you think that they have been playing this kind of prominent role?

MS. DIMAGGIO: I think you can speak to this.

MR. WIT: You know, it's not just in this administration. If you look at the Obama administration, for example, CIA people were working at the NSC on North Korea policy, and at the State Department. There was a gentleman who you probably know, Tim, Sid Seibor (sp?), who was there for quite a while.

Typically what happens, I believe, inside the US government, is they all – you know, when something happens with North Korea, everyone looks around at each other and says “Who knows something about North Korea?” And most people just sort of sit there and go “I don't know anything.” And they turn to the CIA, the intelligence community, as the sort of repository of knowledge about North Korea.

So, this is a very typical thing, I think, inside the US government.

MS. DIMAGGIO: But I think, since the Trump administration came into office, under Trump, that they have set up this new North Korea mission center at the CIA. So obviously, putting not only more financial resources into it, but more manpower and woman power into it. And the fact that Mr. Pompeo was heading the CIA throughout this process makes good sense.

And I think, if you look at the timing of the demise of Mr. Tillerson and the naming of Mr. Pompeo, it's clear as we've moved closer to actual talks that our President feels much more comfortable with Mr. Pompeo conducting or being involved in those discussions at a high level. I think that was a critical factor to the timing of the outing, the ouster of Mr. Tillerson. So that's the other thing to keep in mind, from the North Koreans' point of view – I haven't had a chance to talk to them directly about this – but I would assume that they're quite happy with this switch. I think they did have some doubts about Mr. Tillerson's role as our chief diplomat, particularly concerns about the relationship with President Trump.

And now, even though Mr. Pompeo is clearly more hawkish, at least in his words, I think they see someone who actually has a close relationship with the President, access to the President, maybe even someone the President might listen to. And I think they probably understand that that's important.

MR. WIT: Yes, please.

QUESTION: Thank you. I am Yuji Niwa. I'm from Kyodo News, a correspondent. I'd like to ask about your experience to deal with North Korea. How do you expect North Korea will release the three US citizens detained in North Korea, before the summit?

MS. DIMAGGIO: Well, as you know, Foreign Minister Ri Yong Ho was just in Stockholm, and the Swedes do serve as the US protective power in North Korea. So, at least theoretically, they're the diplomats responsible for "keeping an eye on" our detainees.

So, I think they're constantly playing the role of trying to get Americans being detained out. But I certainly think, since the announcement of the summit, that that initiative has been intensified. I don't want to make a prediction, but I wouldn't be surprised if they were released before the summit actually took place. Again, this would be – I don't think the North Koreans would ever describe it as a "concession," but again, maybe use the words "setting the atmosphere" for talks.

MR. WIT: Yes.

QUESTION: For the detainees – Hee Jong Yang from Radio Free Asia. I have a question about the meeting in Sweden, the implication of the meeting in Sweden. Why would they, after the announcement of the summit, why would they contact directly with the US, actually hold a meeting in Sweden?

Also, I understand that the North Koreans have never mentioned about a summit, directly to the US. What would be the reason for that?

MR. WIT: What was the first question?

QUESTION: The first question is why the North Koreans and the US meet, or communicate directly, through a UN channel or other –

MR. WIT: Why don't they? Why don't they?

QUESTION: Right.

MR. WIT: Why don't they...

QUESTION: Why don't they communicate directly and hold a meeting in Sweden, by using the protective power?

MR. WIT: How do you know they haven't communicated directly?

QUESTION: I'm sorry?

MR. WIT: How do you know they – I'm just trying to make a point. We don't know whether they have communicated directly or not. How do you know they haven't?

QUESTION: You mentioned that there is an intelligence channel. I understand that. And there is a UN channel as well. But, for the matter of the detainees, why do they not communicate directly

regarding the matter of Americans detained in North Korea, now that the summit has officially been, kind of, announced?

MR. WIT: So, the same question. How do you know they haven't communicated? Do you have good information that they haven't?

QUESTION: If I may paraphrase, what are the implications of a meeting between the Swedish diplomat and Ri Yong Ho?

MS. DIMAGGIO: Well I think, first and foremost, the Swedes have a presence, physical presence, in Pyongyang. So, when I travel to Pyongyang, I don't go to the US Embassy, because there isn't one. There is a Swedish Embassy, so I check in with them.

So I think the Swedes take that role quite seriously, and if we go back to the case of Mr. Warmbier, I mean during the course of the year the Swedes were denied access to see him, consular access, consular visits, and I think that was very upsetting for them. They tried very hard to get access.

I think, since that point, they have become, tried to become, much more active, in this issue. So it actually makes great sense, to me, that they have been "carrying the ball" on this issue for quite some time, and for the Foreign Minister to come to Stockholm, I'm sure that this is one of the top issues on the agenda, and if we do see an actual release, I think you'll have the Swedes to thank, to great extent.

So, the Swedes also have been playing a very positive and constructive role facilitating official dialogue, I think, and messaging, but also unofficial dialogue. So I think all – both – sides, the US and North Korea, feel quite comfortable engaging with the Swedes.

MR. WIT: Wasn't the Swedish Foreign – the Swedish Foreign [or Prime] Minister was here a few weeks ago and met President Trump.

MS. DIMAGGIO: And I think he mentioned in the press conference he particularly thanked them. So, this is an important point. I'm glad you brought it up. Because I think, as we move forward with this process and the challenges we've all mentioned, I really hope that the Trump administration – and it seems like they're doing that – are looking to other governments who are our friends, to play a positive role in helping us "move the ball forward."

You know, the Swedes are certainly in that category. And I think the Norwegians also. And the Finns are playing a role now. I think that's a very positive step.

QUESTION: My name is Kanichi, from NHK. There is a lot of interest in where this summit will – where it is going to take place, between Kim Jong Un and President Trump. So, what is your idea on where it will take place?

MR. DIMAGGIO: Mar-a-Lago.

(Laughter.)

QUESTION: That's a good idea.

MS. DIMAGGIO: No, I don't recommend that. I really have no idea. I don't even think it's been determined. I do think somewhere on the Peninsula makes sense. You know, there are also some rumors that Ri Yong Ho's visit to Stockholm was a step towards, maybe, holding it in Europe. But I have no particular special view on that. Do you, Joel?

MR. WIT: No, not really. Sorry.

Other questions? Comments? Oh, please. She has a question.

QUESTION: Alicia Rose from NHK. Since you mentioned that you were looking at the summit more as a longterm process, I wanted to ask what you think a successful summit would look like and what role it would play in kick starting the rest of the negotiations, at a working level.

And then also, you said that you need a plan B. So, what would be your idea for what a plan B looks like?

MR. WIT: I mean, I think Suzanne touched on some of the things that would be deliverables from a summit. Things that wouldn't be deliverable would be a commitment to denuclearize "right away." That's not going to happen.

Things that would be deliverable would be, first, a set of principles that would govern US-North Korean relations in the future. And there are lots of past declarations that can be mined for these principles. There was a declaration in 1993, a declaration in 2000, October of 2000, and many others. 2005, I kept forgetting that, 2005, the Six Party Talks.

And the declarations would be sort of general principles, like respecting each other's sovereignty, you know, things along those lines.

There would be more specific deliverables. For example, I would expect a summit to codify the North Korean commitment to a moratorium on nuclear and missile testing, as long as negotiations last.

There's an important point here, which I think they will have to deal with, in a summit context, and that is that in the past the lack of precise language on a moratorium on missile testing was a real problem, because that was the reason why the "2012 Leap Day Deal" between the United States and North Korea collapsed, because the North Koreans said it doesn't include space launch vehicles. The Americans said it did. And, of course, the North Koreans just went ahead and tested anyway. So, they're going to have to nail down that kind of detail on that.

Beyond that, I think they need to also include something specific, and Suzanne can talk to this more, given her Iran experience, something specific that says "We're going to keep talking. We're going to have a continuous channel of communication. We're going to keep talking, to try to work out this problem."

In the past, in the US-North Korean context, any time something bad happens, talks stop. You can't do it that way.

And the last thing, of course, is they need to start launching the negotiating process, which includes negotiators, not President Trump and Kim Jong Un – negotiators. It probably will have to be not just bilateral but multilateral. Maybe the Six Party Talks makes a comeback.

And, if I was them, I would also include a provision for senior-level officials, like foreign ministers, to monitor the progress and periodically be involved, to make sure that the process is moving forward.

So those are just some ideas on what the outcome should be.

MS. DIMAGGIO: Yeah, I think we've wrote about it. I don't think these are out of the realm of possibility. I think they're very practical ideas that could be achieved and actually in pre-summit preparations they could be determined and agreed upon before Presidents Trump and Kim Jong Un meet, and they just make it official.

QUESTION: A comment on the plan B?

MR. WIT: Oh, plan B. I think plan B would be, "Gee, you can't..." – it may be that – for example, President Trump may have greater expectations for a summit than can be achieved. I think they'd probably know that ahead of time, though, because in the course of preparations you would learn what might be possible. And there's always the chance that Kim Jong Un could issue on the spot guidance at a summit that would take things a little further.

But plan B would be if we can't get all the substance we want, let's at least get a process started of talking, where we can try to work on that.

(Pause.)

MR. WIT: Other questions, comments? (Pause.) We're finished. We're getting, like, this sign? Okay. Thanks a lot, everyone. We hope this was helpful.

END