

THE STIMSON CENTER
38 NORTH PRESS CALL

VERBATIM TRANSCRIPT

Pompeo in Pyongyang: A Tale of Two Outcomes

Call summary: Secretary of State Mike Pompeo's trip to Pyongyang was supposed to advance the discussion of North Korea's denuclearization. While he said that they made "a great deal of progress" on the major issues, as soon as he left North Korea put out a statement saying that the talks were "regrettable" and accused the US of being "one-sided" and "robber-like", along with saying their commitment to denuclearization "may falter". Does this mean that talks between the US and North Korea are finished? Join Ambassador Robert Gallucci, along with Stimson Senior Fellow and Founder of 38 North Joel Wit as they discuss how to get diplomacy back on track.

Ambassador Robert Gallucci, Distinguished Professor of Practice at the Walsh School of Foreign Service at Georgetown University

Joel Wit, Senior Fellow at the Stimson Center and Founder of 38 North.

Monday, July 9
11:00 AM – 12:00 PM EDT

* * * * *

PROCEEDINGS

MR. ARNOLD: Hello everyone and welcome to our 38 North Press call: "Pompeo in Pyongyang: A Tale of Two Outcomes." Before we begin, I'd like to address a housekeeping matter. I've noticed a number of articles have erroneously reported us as still part of the US-Korea Institute and used the wrong titles for our experts. I recognize and sympathize with deadlines. I'd just like to clear up a couple things. We're now a part of the Stimson Center and our experts' titles have changed.

Joel Wit is now Senior Fellow with the Stimson Center and founder of 38 North. Jenny Town is Research Analyst at the Stimson Center and Managing Editor of 38 North. If you're really scraping the bottom of the barrel and need me for expert commentary, I am still the Comms Specialist here. And, if you need any help with this, please don't hesitate to reach out to me.

With that out of the way, let's get this started.

As you saw last week, Secretary Pompeo visited Pyongyang to work on denuclearization matters. The US side characterized the outcome as very good and making substantial progress on a number of key issues. As soon as the Secretary was "wheels up" however, the North Koreans put out a statement saying

that the talks were regrettable, that the US was behaving like a gangster and “robber like,” and their commitment to denuclearization may falter.

What can be done to bring us back on track for diplomacy? Joining us today are Joel Wit, Senior Fellow with the Stimson Center and founder of 38 North, and Ambassador Robert Gallucci, the architect of the '94 Agreed Framework and distinguished professor in the practice of diplomacy at the Walsh School of Foreign Service, Georgetown University. Joel, would you like to get us started?

MR. WIT: Yes. Thanks, Justin. So, just let me talk for about 10 minutes about my view of what's going on. This morning I was listening to a popular morning show on cable and the line was that the North Korea deal was unraveling. And I guess that's true if you expected immediate and unconditional capitulation from North Korea. But that's not something most of us would expect, people who have dealt with North Korea. And the point I'd like to make is that this is a negotiation, and Pompeo's visit, I think, was a useful beginning to set out the parameters and to start working on the details of a deal.

So, what does that mean? Let's focus on two specific issues. The first is process. What's the process for working out a deal?

The North Koreans talked about a phased, step-by-step, simultaneous approach, which seems to me the right way to move forward and, indeed, Secretary Pompeo, in Tokyo, basically said the same thing, that this is going to be a process, step-by-step, and working in parallel, simultaneously. That's the only thing that's going to work. It's not going to be the Libya model.

Secondly, on substance, once again, I didn't see anything surprising in what's come out from Secretary Pompeo or from the North Koreans. You have the denuclearization track, and we've gotten a little bit more on that from at least the North Korean statement, about the physical verification of the missile engine test facility. And I guess that's included in the denuclearization track. That's something that people are going to start talking about.

And then the second track was “ending hostile policy,” US hostile policy. That's well laid out in the Singapore agreement. And that means establishing a new US-North Korean bilateral relationship, creating a lasting, stable, peace regime. So that doesn't surprise me either. That was a central feature in the North Korean statement, and in that statement you saw they raised things like multilateral exchanges for improved relations, a declaration to end the Korean War, which is the first step in moving down the road to a peace regime. So all of that, to me, seems like a pretty good start.

There are a couple of points here, though, that I do want to raise. The first one is I'm a little concerned about this process for moving forward in the negotiation. I know that Secretary Pompeo has talked about establishing some working groups and they'll start meeting. But I think we may need a much more robust process, with a full-time, more senior than these working groups, negotiator, who would supervise the working groups and try to move the process forward.

But, in addition to that, Secretary Pompeo needs to be involved frequently, if not constantly, and so the model that comes to mind, for me, is the role Secretary Kerry played in the Iran negotiating process. We need to be seriously considering that. Otherwise, flying into Pyongyang, having two days of meetings, and having some staff-level working group just isn't going to cut it.

The last point I want to make, and this has been a media narrative which I really disagree with, and that is that the Singapore declaration did not mean that North Korea would stop everything it was doing in the nuclear and missile areas right away. It did not mean that, nor would I find that to be a reasonable expectation.

And the reason I say that is, in part, based on my past experience. For example, in negotiating US-Soviet and US-Russian arms control agreements, we were negotiating for arms reduction but both sides continued to build weapons until the agreement was completed. So, I would not expect that to be any different in this situation, which makes it even more important to move forward with negotiating an agreement as quickly as possible.

Why don't I stop there? And I'll turn it over to Justin and then Ambassador Gallucci.

MR. ARNOLD: All right. Ambassador Gallucci, your thoughts?

AMB. GALLUCCI: Thank you, Justin. Not surprisingly, I tend to agree with Joel on the basic points. Secretary of State Pompeo didn't fail in Pyongyang any more than President Trump succeeded in Singapore. I mean, the problem here is what's advertised and whether one is disappointed with the results.

I don't think anybody who has been watching the North Korea negotiations over the last couple of decades accepts anything like a "big bang theory" of how this all gets resolved. It just isn't going to happen that way. And it's unfortunate, I think, that, "to call a spade a spade here," when the President essentially does his version of "Mission Accomplished" and says "We don't have a threat from the North anymore; you can sleep tonight," that's really flat-out misleading.

And I don't think it's helpful. It leads to, in fact, expectations which anybody who's serious about this process, and watching it, would say "You shouldn't have those expectations." As Joel just said a minute ago, this is a process, and in a process, preparation matters, and we have not had the careful preparation that on-going negotiations, sustained engagement, would produce.

I know that nobody wants to repeat past experience of negotiating with North Korea. Some of us don't think it's all as horrendous as it's been made out to be. But, be that as it may, there are things we can learn from the past experience, and one of the things is that the process takes time.

Certainly, the North – the North Koreans – need to understand what our end game is. So, what Secretary Pompeo is reported to have said was a useful thing, at one level, to say, that we really do mean denuclearization and we have to get serious about what that means. But they also have to see that the end game that they have, and the end game that we have can match up in some useful way, that there's a win-win outcome, that there is a possibility of denuclearization and there's a possibility of normalization.

I would add as a footnote here that to continue to use CVID, if indeed the Secretary did, certainly the North Koreans indicated that the Secretary was still stuck on those words, "comprehensive, verified, irreversible, dismantlement or disarmament," that phrase is loaded with things that are out and out impossible, like "irreversible," as though you can uninvent physics.

So, I think we should be talking about denuclearization rather than a phrase which really didn't work terribly well 10 years ago.

I would like to make just a couple more points, and one of them Joel made and I want to underline, and that is that we need a process that involves a senior professional, overseeing an on-going and sustained engagement with the North, who can coordinate the various pieces here. Working groups might work. I'm not an advocate of them myself. I think having this role together leads to a much better – leads to the possibility of tradeoffs, within the various areas. In other words, while they might want, the North might want, sanctions relief, might want exercises altered, might want other things with respect to the engagement and ultimate peace regime and the end of the armistice, we have things we want. The details of the freeze, for example, on nuclear weapons and ballistic missiles. We want to see changes in what the North does.

So, if there's one negotiation, these things can be put together in a way in which the tradeoffs are clearer.

A second point here is that – and I think people are recognizing it now, since there is no “big bang theory” – the only thing that really makes sense, whether you like the North Korean language or the American language, it's essentially a quid pro quo or step-by-step, action for action, simultaneity. However you want to put it, everybody here is engaged in a process in which there really isn't trust. So, you have to proceed carefully and you have to give, and get, at the same time.

I would make another point here, that we shouldn't be reluctant to say that there was something good about Singapore, that the North Koreans would say – and I think I'm quoting from the translation – “We will cherish our good faith in President Trump.” Okay! If Singapore did create a reservoir of good feeling, and the President did it by his presence, that's a good thing, and something that may be useful to sustain us, as some bad things happen.

But that's all that was. It's something that is a good springboard to go into a process in which there's a declaration of nuclear and ballistic missile facilities, equipment, and material, and then a process agreed upon for destruction, dismantlement, and removal, all in a verified way. That's what we're aiming towards and we, I'm sure, are not going to forget that. We also have to look at the other side of the equation and what it is we're prepared to do, under what timeframe, and connected how, to the things that we want.

And I say all this and note that nobody, I don't think, has mentioned human rights, which I think is an issue essential to a process of normalization, and the process of normalization is, in turn, essential to credible security assurances, which we all think the North really is after.

I will stop there and listen for questions.

MR. ARNOLD: All right. We will move on to the question and answer session of this. On the phone you can press star-five and it will put you in the question queue. You can ask a question in the chat if you would like. Or you can just message me on my 38 North one, up here.

My question is, while we're waiting for questions to fill up the queue, President Trump just tweeted out “I have confidence that Kim Jong Un will honor the contract we signed and, even more importantly, our handshake. We agreed to the denuclearization of North Korea. China, on the other hand, may be exerting negative pressure on a deal because of our posture on Chinese trade. Hope not.”

What does it say to the North Koreans if Trump makes these tweets and they, the two sides, remain far apart, on what denuclearization even means?

MR. WIT: Can I – I’ll jump in. Look, I think what’s not good about these tweets is that President Trump is clearly “telegraphing” to the North Koreans that there is distance between China and the United States, that there’s “running room” between the two of us. And the North Koreans are going to use that to their advantage. That’s just predictable. They’re going to constantly play off the US against China, and so that doesn’t strengthen our position; it weakens our position with the North Koreans.

MR. ARNOLD: Ambassador, do you have anything to add to that?

AMB. GALLUCCI: Yeah, I have an unusual and creative thought, and that is that it may be, it just may be, that the President’s tweeting on the subject of war and peace with North Korea isn’t the most useful thing in the world.

MR. WIT: (Laughs.)

MR. ARNOLD: All right.

MR. WIT: Okay. (Laughs.)

MR. ARNOLD: We’ll go to Carol Morello, and you have the voice, Carol?

(Pause.)

MR. ARNOLD: Well, okay, we’ll go to our next question. Jesse Johnson, Japan Times. “The North Korean Foreign Ministry statement referred to ‘dismantling the test ground of high-thrust engine to make a physical verification of the suspension of ICBM production. A nod to Trump’s focus on weapons that can hit the US. What kind of possibility is there that the Trump administration might take the North Koreans up on that offer, and what would the ramifications of that be, especially for the US ally, Japan?”

MR. WIT: Do you want to go first, Bob, or do you want me to?

AMB. GALLUCCI: No, why doesn’t the process be you go first and I’ll go second.

MR. WIT: Okay. Well, you know, I think we should take them up on that offer, the minute we hang up from the phone. And I’m sure we are taking them up on that offer. But I know why you’re asking that question, because you’re from a Japanese newspaper. I mean, you’ve got to start somewhere, and so I would see that as an initial step in dealing with the missile threat. And it doesn’t mean that the process would stop at ICBMs; it could keep going further down the food chain to, maybe, some regional missiles that can reach Japan.

But you can’t have all or nothing; you’ve got to start somewhere, and that’s not a bad place to start.

AMB. GALLUCCI: So, I agree with Joel. I would add that it is a little confusing to me to talk about missile tests and missile production at the same time. It may well be that missile production – (light

laugh) – could continue without that facility, test facility, operating. So, I wouldn't like to smoosh these things together.

Second, of course, I would accept any invitation to come and verify something. That would be fine.

And third, again, to pile onto what Joel said, I recognize that in both Seoul and in Tokyo there's just a little bit of concern that the United States will be satisfied once it is no longer targetable by the North Koreans with an ICBM, and we will live happily, as we did before 2017, with simply our allies, the Republic of Korea, and Japan, being vulnerable to the North Koreans.

I would like to think that is not what's on American minds, the President and the Secretary of State, Secretary of Defense, that instead, as Joel said, that you've got to start somewhere. But the United States will maintain, will continue, its concern about North Korean nuclear weapons, whether they're going to be delivered by IRBMs, MRBMs, ICBMs, airplanes or artillery.

MR. ARNOLD: Carol Morello, the Washington Post, asks "Hi, can you give us a sense of how much China has eased up restrictions along the North Korean border? And is the policy of exerting maximum economic pressure on North Korea largely obsolete?"

MR. WIT: You know, I'm not sure I can add a lot to that, Carol, beyond what's been in the press, but I think, also, it may be that they've not only dumped restrictions but they may have told the North Koreans that they could start increasing investments in North Korea, in ways that wouldn't violate the sanctions. And I'm not exactly sure what that would mean.

But, I'm sure there's a lot of that back and forth going on between China and North Korea, which is why maintaining the maximum pressure policy is becoming harder and harder.

AMB. GALLUCCI: If I might, I also am not an expert on the subject of exactly the impact of sanctions now, as compared to, say, before Singapore. But I would note that the President, outside the White House, when he was visited by Mr. Kim, observed that he didn't even want to talk about maximum pressure anymore. So there was kind of – that was almost a declaratory policy change, right there, from the President of the United States.

So, I would say there's been some sanctions relief, as has been reported, in terms of what the Chinese are doing, and also in terms of American declaratory policy. Whether it actually happens "officially," with respect to either US bilateral sanctions or UN sanctions, I think that will probably await true negotiations.

But I think, if we're trying to understand, those of us who are watching this, whether the pressure is off Pyongyang, I'd say it's hard to see it as not at least having been relieved to some degree.

MR. ARNOLD: Remember, you can press star-five to go into the phone queue, or ask a question in the chat. Gyoseok Jang asks, "I wonder how you assess the statement from the North Korean Department of Foreign Affairs. Does this mean they have no intention to denuclearize, or is this a tactic for negotiation? And what would be the proper response for the United States? I'd like to hear from your own experiences."

MR. WIT: Yes. Okay, well I can't read my 10 minutes once again, but that's basically what it was all about. I think the statement was not, certainly not, as negative as portrayed in the media. I think there's a lot there in terms of the process for moving forward, the phased approach. In terms of the substance, there were some first steps, or was one first step, on denuclearization. There was discussion of the second track, which the North Koreans are interested in, which is improving relations with the United States and building a peace regime.

So, I see it as a useful statement. But, as Bob knows very well and I know very well, this is just the beginning. It's the beginning of the process, and so you're not going to get North Korea, all of a sudden, agreeing to everything that we want, and we don't have to agree to anything they want. It's a negotiation.

AMB. GALLUCCI: Let me observe here that many years ago, when we negotiated with the North Koreans, in the nineties, we started in the spring of 1993 and we didn't have the Agreed Framework completed until the fall of 1994. And, all through that, we managed to have a lot of meetings in which there were no official statements following, to which the press could comment on and people could measure the degree of progress we were making from the previous day or week, or month even.

So, I would say that there is a degree here of focus, certainly, because the two negotiators for the American side have been the President of the United States and the Secretary of State. So, of course, you have kind of a tension, to what's being said. And that means, in turn, that you get this lengthy statement from the DPRK that is quite in contrast with the short statement made by the American side after the meeting, and the press would say "Well, they didn't think it went so well, so maybe this really isn't such a good situation."

It's understandable, but it's a function of the way we are proceeding. And both Joel and I have been saying there should be a process, and the process shouldn't look like the one we have now. (Light laugh.) It should look more like the one we have had in the past, which produces a more considered and careful set of outcomes.

MR. WIT: Can I just add one other point? I mean, we don't – just because we have these statements doesn't mean we know everything that happened in these meetings. And, very typically, in the negotiations, and particularly in the early stages, both sides are going over their positions, they're discussing all the different issues, they're starting to lay the groundwork for maybe moving forward, and that kind of discussion can go on for a couple of different sessions.

So, the fact that there are some concrete steps that appear to be about to be taken and have already been taken, I think is very important.

MR. ARNOLD: Okay. Tom O'Connor with Newsweek asks, "Joel, you had mentioned that having Secretary of State Pompeo's role in the North Korean negotiating process is similar to that of John Kerry's in the Iran deal. Clearly, the Trump administration has disavowed and abandoned that agreement. Was that just a political move against the previous administration, or are there concrete differences in this deal that would make it acceptable to the current administration?"

MR. WIT: Actually, I didn't say that, but – I'm sorry, Justin, finish what you were going to say.

MR. ARNOLD: Well, I was just going to also throw in “Will the abandonment of the Iran deal make the North Koreans more suspicious about US intentions and [make it] harder to denuclearize?”

MR. WIT: Well, the first point, I didn’t say that Secretary Pompeo is doing what Secretary Kerry did in the Iran deal. Secretary Kerry spent weeks, months, in Geneva, working on the deal, with the negotiators from all the different sides. That hasn’t happened yet. And what I’m – maybe I shouldn’t use those “magic words,” “the Iran deal” – but at least the process whereby that was reached might not be a bad model, if Secretary Pompeo wants to spend a lot of his capital and a lot of his time reaching a deal.

Right now, flying into Pyongyang two days at a time, leaving, coming back a month later, having a working group working on specific issues at the DMZ, that’s not going to do it. We’re not going to get there – certainly we’re not going to get there quickly with that kind of process. So, they need to think of a process that’s going to move us forward more quickly.

Secondly, on whether the North Koreans – you know, this has added doubts in their minds about whether the US will faithfully move forward with agreements. Well, Bob and I have been in meetings where it’s pretty clear that they already have a lot of doubts about whether the United States would implement any agreement. And, from their perspective – maybe not ours – that’s what the history tells them.

So, I don’t know how many more doubts the Trump administration’s policy on the Iran deal will add, and it’s too hard to tell at the moment. But certainly the North Koreans are moving forward, and it hasn’t – it doesn’t seem to have made them hesitate.

MR. ARNOLD: Do you have anything to add, Ambassador?

AMB. GALLUCCI: No. Well, I don’t think, in a general sense, references to the Iran deal are going to help us much here. I understood why Joel made the point he did that there wasn’t a kind of involvement of the Secretary in a process, that produced a very detailed deal, which is the Iran deal. But, generally speaking, I think the North Korea deal is complicated enough, without making too many references to Iran, and we need to deal with the Iran case as a separate one, for its own reasons.

MR. ARNOLD: To follow up on that, Luke Vargas with Talk Media News asks, “To what extent could a possible reinvigoration of the US-Russian New START Treaty process at the forthcoming Helsinki Summit change the North Korean negotiating calculus, or will it have any effect on that?”

MR. WIT: Sorry, I don’t see any relationship between the two except that, to the degree that Russian-US relations improve, maybe that’ll help, in terms of getting Russia’s support for what we’re trying to do on the Korean Peninsula. But, I think they are pretty supportive already. So, it’s hard to see whether that’s going to make any difference at all.

MR. ARNOLD: Ambassador, do you have anything to add?

AMB. GALLUCCI: No, I don’t. Thank you.

MR. ARNOLD: Okay. Jesse Johnson asks, “Is the North Korean Foreign Ministry statement merely a page from a well-worn playbook or is there a deeper meaning in there, especially in regards to its

‘kids glove’ treatment of Trump? And what can we expect if another Trump-Kim summit is held in the coming months?”

MR. WIT: You know, I think that’s a very good question. Most of the media outlets have focused on the “gangster” comment, although it wasn’t really “gangster;” it was “brigand-ish,” which is a favorite North Korean term. But, buried in there was what you are saying, which is there was no criticism of President Trump, there was continued cultivation of the good relationship that came out of Singapore, and so I think that was very – that’s very important.

And then, of course, as I said earlier, there are substantive comments in there as well. So overall, the focus on this “gangster” comment, ignoring 90 percent of the rest of the statement, I think really did a disservice to what it actually said.

MR. ARNOLD: Ambassador, would you like to add anything?

AMB. GALLUCCI: I would. And it is, once again, to pile onto what Joel said, that the statement was, I think, to my ear, in a way, much more gentle and careful than I have heard from the North Koreans on any number of occasions over more than two decades. So, I didn’t find it devastating in any way.

Yes, it did contrast with the statement put out by the American side, but I don’t think in any catastrophic way. I think we don’t know, as we’ve all observed, exactly what happened, but I think we can be sure that Secretary Pompeo went in wanting to be clear about progress on denuclearization, and focused on that, probably, if not to the total exclusion of what it is we were going to do for the North Koreans, but to more exclusion than the North Koreans had hoped for. And that’s reflected in their statement. Their disappointment is reflected.

But it is not an overly polemic, awful, statement, of the kind we’re really quite used to getting out of Pyongyang. So, it doesn’t “bother” me, as a statement, at this point, or get in the way of proceeding with future engagement.

MR. ARNOLD: Rebecca Kheel with The Hill asks “Hi. My question: What, specifically, should be the next step to continue the process, particularly to bridge the gap in the definition of denuclearization, in light of Pompeo’s continued references to CVID, and North Korea’s statements specifically rejecting CVID?”

MR. WIT: Well look, the next steps in the process – and I’m not going to get into the exact what our negotiating position would be – but the next step in the process, I think, is not just to have these working groups meet, but for the administration to move quickly to appoint a special negotiator who would oversee the working groups and work closely with Secretary Pompeo and President Trump. And they should do that as quickly as possible and arrange meetings for that negotiator as quickly as possible. We need to ramp up our negotiating effort here, and I think that would be really important in propelling this forward.

AMB. GALLUCCI: Let me add here that what I think should be obvious, and that is that we have to have more to say than what we want. I think it’s a really good idea that the administration has looked to some outside groups and what they have described as “the complex problem of denuclearization” and how it might take years rather than months. I think it’s good for the administration to be informed on

denuclearization and to put that front and center as our objective, but this is not going to work if that's all we know. If we haven't figured out what security assurances are going to likely mean, that we mean negative and not positive, I'm assuming. If we haven't figured out what our timetable for de jure sanctions relief will look like, what the action-for-action is we anticipate, if we haven't figured out what kind of steps might be taken that would lead to the abandonment of the armistice in favor of a true treaty of peace.

In other words, the reason why I haven't come out in favor of the working groups is because I think all these things are most usefully put together by one person, heading a negotiation, and I think that's the way you're most likely to make the most rapid progress. It may not be the way it goes down and maybe working groups is the way we'll go. But, "at the end of the day," what both Joel and I are saying is we're looking for a more professional process, led by a senior person, not the Secretary of State, whose interests, I hope, will continue in this issue, but the on-going work, led by a senior person who can integrate the various activities, what we want and what they want.

MR. ARNOLD: Okay. Jonathan Landay, you have – I just gave you voice, so if you have a question, please ask. We'll just give him a second. Sometimes it takes a minute.

(Pause.)

MR. ARNOLD: Jonathan, are you there, from Thompson-Reuters?

Q Yeah, I'm here. I'm having problems with the website.

(Pause.)

MR. ARNOLD: So, he's asking "Why is rapid action by the US needed?"

MR. WIT: As opposed to "not rapid action?"

(Laughter.)

MR. WIT: That's an interesting question. "Why is it needed?" Because we should be building on what we accomplished at Singapore and move out as quickly as possible, to keep the momentum. And I assume everyone agrees that denuclearization, that cutting back North Korea's missile activities, are in our national security interests.

And the other point is, which was made earlier, that the North Koreans haven't stopped a lot of the activities; they've stopped some of them, the missile testing and the nuclear testing, that we were very concerned about. But I'm sure they're still building nuclear weapons. And they're probably doing development in the laboratories, of weapons -- missiles, and nuclear weapons.

So, we need to move forward as quickly as possible, to safeguard our own national security!

MR. ARNOLD: Would you like to add anything, Ambassador?

(Pause. No response.)

MR. ARNOLD: Okay. April Kim asks “What impact do you see personnel changes having on the US-DPRK negotiating process? Susan Thornton will be leaving her role at the end of the month. Harry Harris is taking the helm as US Ambassador to South Korea. Things like that.”

MR. WIT: Look, the key players here, the key people, are President Trump, Secretary Pompeo, whoever’s working for him on these issues, and John Bolton, who’s sort of “waiting in the wings,” to create mischief, I’m sure. Those are the key players.

You have to get that right before you have any prospect of moving forward rapidly. And this returns to an earlier point. What is our setup for moving these negotiations forward quickly? The one we have now isn’t going to do it. The others you’ve mentioned, the assistant secretary, the ambassador in South Korea, you know, an assistant secretary can either, A, be the special negotiator, as in the Chris Hill model or, B, not be the negotiator and just sort of have overall responsibility for Asia like, for example, Winston Lord did when Bob was the negotiator.

The ambassador is useful, it’s important, particularly if they have a close relationship with the South Korean President. But remember, there are all sorts of other channels between Washington and Seoul where, I’m sure, there’s a lot of communication going on. So, the personnel, the positions that I’ve mentioned, those are the key ones.

MR. ARNOLD: Ambassador, are you with us?

AMB. GALLUCCI: I am with you.

MR. ARNOLD: Okay. The question was – I don’t know if you had heard it – but “What impact do you see personnel changes having on the US-DPRK negotiation process? Susan Thornton leaving her role at the end of the month, Harry Harris taking the helm, as US ambassador, things like that.”

AMB. GALLUCCI: Ah-h-h... (light laugh) – I generally don’t think it’s helpful. I don’t think it has to be catastrophic. But I think what I would say is, in a general way, without commenting on individual people and their good performance. I would just say that we need to have a stable, sustained, engagement with the North Koreans, and the more of that we have the better.

I maybe was a tad “flip” referring to the President’s tweets, but I really don’t think they’re helpful. As this process proceeds, it’s better left to a senior, experienced and professional [person] to lead these talks.

MR. ARNOLD: Gareth Porter asks “How do you view the leak to NBC and the Washington Post of the DIA assessment described as “charging North Korea with deceiving the Trump administration by hiding nuclear facilities?” Do you believe this was a leak by someone trying to sabotage the negotiation?

MR. WIT: It’s sort of reminding me of the scene in “Casablanca” where the French policeman says “I’m shocked -- shocked -- that there’s gambling going on here!” I mean, to me it’s not very surprising that this is an intelligence assessment, and I don’t find any of this surprising at all. Why it was leaked, well, I think that’s not an unreasonable idea, that it may have been a deliberate leak, to try to “upset the apple cart.”

But I don't find it surprising at all. Anything that's appeared in the leaks, whether it's that, whether it's that North Korea has another uranium enrichment facility, whether they're continuing to work on their weapons, none of that is surprising. You could pay me \$20 billion a year, like – well, I don't know what the intelligence community budget is – but I'd take a lot less than that, to tell you that's my conclusion.

AMB. GALLUCCI: I concur, that we should not have been shocked to find out that the North Koreans are continuing to pursue nuclear weapons and ballistic missile programs. And I don't think, and I don't have any reason to think, that the administration was – to use, again, Joel's word -- "shocked" to find that the North Koreans are doing this. And I think the one thing here that leads, I think – I assume – led the questioner to frame it the way they did, is that there's somehow a naivete on the part of the President or the Secretary of Defense and Secretary of State, that everything is "fine," now that they've had an agreed statement coming out of Singapore.

If we think that was a possible conclusion of the administration, it's only because we did get that "mission accomplished" statement from the President. I don't think they are naïve about dealing with the North Koreans, and we haven't been deceived, I do not think.

MR. ARNOLD: That was the last question in the queue. So, if there are no more questions, I think we'll end it right here. I want to thank Both Joel and Ambassador Gallucci for joining us. We will have a transcript and audio out a little later today. Thank you so much for joining us on this, and I will see you next time.

END