



DATE: October 12, 2017

SUBJECT: The North Korean Nuclear Problem | UNA-NCA

MAIN POINTS:

- There is nothing new “under the sun” with regards to arms control and non-proliferation.
- The difference with past decades is that Trump has adopted a new agenda, a “muddle approach” filled with a lack of clarity and uncertainty; language is important.
- North Korea is not likely to relinquish its nuclear program because of its proximity to its goal, and its leader seems to have learned from the Saddam and Gaddafi cases. The likeliness of a nuclear freeze is “as close to never as you can get.”
- The US must persuade NK that there are incentives for them to enter discussions. The US must make the concession of publically giving up the desire for a nuclear-free peninsula. “Both sides have to give a little, but have little to give.”

EVENT OVERVIEW

Date: Wednesday, September 20, 2017

Time: 4:00 p.m. - 5:30 p.m.

Location: Russell Senate Office Building, Room 325 Kennedy Caucus Room, 2 Constitution Ave NE, Washington, DC 20002

Attendees:

- **Host, Robert Craft**, Co-Chair, International Law Committee
- **Host, Renee Doplick**, Co-Chair, International Law Committee

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- **Speaker, Thomas Graham Jr.**, US Special Ambassador, Executive Chairman of the Board of Directors, Lightbridge Corp.
 - **Speaker, Missy Ryan**, Reporter, Washington Post
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SUMMARY

Renee Doplick began the panel discussion by asking the two speakers for some background and context with regards to North Korea's nuclear endeavours; how long NK's nuclear program has been active, what the past US approaches have been, and what future options are feasible.

Ambassador Graham answered first, asserting that this is *one of those* issues for which there really isn't a solution. He suggested that the US must learn to be patient and steady, to protect its interests and keep the pressure on NK. He emphasized that there is no quick fix. Next, he presented a brief timeline; pressure began during the first Bush administration during which the US thought that NK may have built small reactors. Later, NK became big time policy during the Clinton administration, as the UNSC was essentially planning war with NK in 1994. Next, during the second Bush administration, the situation took a turn for the worse, whereby NK withdrew from the Non-Proliferation Treaty and began processing spent fuel for plutonium. Bush was not able to make progress. Obama, Ambassador Graham said, practiced strategic patience, with not much success, and no renegotiations. He emphasized that it is important to keep perspective, as we have been here before. What is different, is that the American leader has adopted a new agenda. Ambassador Graham noted that NK is interested in survival, money and security assurances from the US, as well as to be recognized as a nuclear weapons state and a Great Power, but that KJU seems impatient and reckless.

Mrs. Doplick followed by asking the speakers how dangerous the NK issue currently is.

Missy Ryan answered, saying that the Trump administration and the US military are taking threats very seriously. She emphasized that this is not a new problem, it has continued through four presidential administrations. The difference now, she said, is that advances in missile and nuclear program is putting NK in striking distance of reaching the US mainland. This has impacted how tightly NK leaders want to hold on to their nuclear program in the face of international pressure. She noted that due to their proximity to the North Koreans achieving their goals, they are less likely to cease the program. She also presented the example of Saddam in Iraq and Gaddafi in Libya, as lessons learned by the North Korean leadership as to their fate.

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if they were to relinquish their offensive program.

Mrs. Doplick continued by asking if the public discussion is only concerned with a nuclear threat; “what about conventional forces?”, she asked.

Ambassador Graham answered that these forces have been there for a long time, and that NK has the capacity to, in fact, turn Seoul into a “sea of fire,” if the opposed allies don’t get to them first. Although, he said, due to the sanctions and the passage of time, North Korea’s conventional forces are not quite as efficient as they once were, but are still quite significant.

Mrs. Ryan quickly agreed, saying that military advancement has been something that has been a preeminent goal, and above all else for the NK state.

Renee Doplick next asked what the US approaches to NK have been, and where this issue sits in the priority list of foreign affairs.

Missy Ryan argued that Trump’s approach has been a “muddle approach”; going from Trump saying he might meet with leaders, to issuing threats, and making statements that appear to be at odds with Tillerson and Mattis. She added that a lack of clarity compounds the issue, and that from her perspective, American leadership is currently most concerned with this NK issue and Russia.

Mrs. Doplick added that, initially, there were less incentives, less aid, less “carrots”, followed by Obama’s strategic patience, and a current occurrence of a “peaceful pressure campaign”. She asked: “What do you hear as to whether these pressures are being effective?”

Missy Ryan began by saying that Mattis has stated that these pressures are working. The shows of force around the Korean peninsula, she added, proves that the administration has reiterated the commitment to the defense of SK and Japan. She emphasized that all options are on the table, and that military action is always an option. She mentioned, however, that there is currently an uncertainty of what US, NK, and SK triggers are, and that based on the style and contradictory statements from Trump, things are unclear.

Ambassador Graham next discussed the bottom lines; the “4 NO’s”: no regime change, no creating chaos, no attack on NK, and 1 other (Graham had forgotten). He mentioned that he was sure that there are certain things NK might be willing to discuss, but that the US and its allies

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must create an atmosphere that persuades NK into seeing that there is something in it for them.

Renee Doplick asked how the US can we improve clarity, improve diplomatic channels in addition to a pressure campaign, and how the US can move things forward to where NK would consider coming to the negotiation table. She also asked Mrs. Ryan if she could address the role of media; “does it have a responsibility to dial it back a little?”

Ambassador Graham spoke first, arguing that some kind of exchange, for example, a moratorium on NK testing in exchange for ceased military activity in the south, may be something that may be worth talking about. He added that there are not many good options, because both sides have so little to give.

Ryan argued that Trump needs to articulate a clear policy, what American objectives are, and what the parameters are. Regarding news media, she said, it is an interesting time to be reporter, as there is much antagonism between the White House and the media. She added that her duty is to report accurately, but that this is difficult when reporters are not provided facts as they previously were.

The Ambassador agreed, saying that a clear policy would be helpful, and that language use is important. He mentioned that an argument has been made that what the President stated in New York was classic deterrence policy, but that he used words that made it sound much more dramatic; “wiping them out completely”, which gives the impression that the White House is in a different place than the Secretary Of State and the Secretary Of Defense. This makes US policy unclear.

Mrs. Doplick next asked what the likeliness of NK coming to the negotiating table was.

Ryan said she thinks it's possible. She argued that NK has demonstrated in the past a willingness to make serious concessions when it feels it is in its benefit. However, she believes that because NK is now in striking distance, it is less likely.

Mrs. Renee Doplick asked the speakers if there is a possibility of a nuclear freeze on the Korean peninsula, and “what are we looking at with Japan and SK given these circumstances, does this complicated the situation?”

Ambassador Graham replied, “That’s one of the big questions... Never say never, but it’s as

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close to never as you can get.” He emphasized that it was very very unlikely, as this is what NK has wanted for many years, as their key to survival. He added, “If there’s an 8th nuclear weapons state, and its NK, there’s going to be a 9th, and it’s going to be Japan.” He added, however, that it would be such a wrench, from the positions of Japan and SK as champions of NPTs, in eliminating nuclear weapons from earth, and that it will still take a lot more for them to take that step.

Renee Doplick followed by asking the speakers what would the world accepting NK as a nuclear state mean for other countries of region, including India, Pakistan, and Afghanistan.

Missy Ryan began by saying that Pakistan is instructive and potentially provides an example; it is a constant if troubled ally, yet, she said, we live with a nuclear Pakistan. “Here we can see a potential scenario that may be possible with North Korea.” She followed by saying that a real realist foreign policy may come to accept North Korea as part of that club, which could lead to a reduction in danger, to re-establishing diplomatic relations, and to an arrangement whereby the South and other actors in the region would have a dialogue with NK that would remove some of the antagonism is currently seen.

Ambassador Graham mentioned that there is a lot that can and should be done. He proposed negotiating measures to make accidents or reckless acts less likely. He said: “We can’t prevent harm unless we are prepared to give up at least publically, and practically, the desire for a nuclear weapons-free peninsula. North Korea will not enter discussions if we are still trying to get them to give up their nuclear weapons.”

Mrs. Doplick asked a final question: “Particularly as we face a digital age, what about the long term? If we do have states looking at this as a call for nuclear proliferation, how do we threaten the global regime so we can combat that?”

Ryan stressed the importance of respect for international law and the strengthening of international organizations. “Trump’s actions in the climate accord and his attitude towards the UN and other parts of international architecture really does disservice to that.”

Q&A

Q: John Burton with Korea Times. I have two questions, one for the Ambassador. The consensus seems to be towards a containment policy towards North Korea, which would imply at some

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point that an arms control agreement would have to be signed with North Korea, à la Soviet Union. Do you think that that is that possible?

My other question is for Ms. Ryan, and that is: You've had criticism lately, for example, from the editor of 38North, and from the editor of the Bulletin for Atomic Scientists, criticising US media coverages being sensational, so I would like you to comment on that.

A (Graham): The situation is different of course, because the Cold War is over. We were dealing with a country that had the capacity to destroy the US at least 10 time over. And of course, we had the same capability. So we were dealing with a situation where, really, the flick of a switch in the wrong direction at the wrong time would destroy the entire world. So this was a much bigger threat than North Korea presents to us today. It was a very dangerous threat. There were at least 6 occasions where we were minutes away from total destruction of the US and the Soviet Union. Nevertheless, it is a dangerous situation, someday not too far off, North Korea will have the capability to destroy several American cities. And that's unacceptable. We have to find a way to reduce that threat. The Soviet Union had a vast arms control bureaucracy, like we did. But the North Koreans do not have that. They have a few people that are used to working with the Americans, who do have experience with arms control, but only a few. So on one hand, it's going to be more difficult, but on the other hand it is maybe a little bit less technically complicated but not politically complicated. I do think that the same techniques, approaches, concepts, and same deterrence based philosophies will have to be resuscitated but at the end of the day it's going to take a lot of time if we are to work through this safely.

A (Ryan): To the question about sensationalism, first of all, I would take those comments seriously and I should think that there is something to it. I don't know if I would use the word sensational, but there is a tendency to enhance or focus on the most – it's not just this issue obviously – dramatic element of situations. While the topic and policy is not new, that all options are on the table, which both Obama and Bush said, Trump is saying it differently but the policy itself is the same.

For the second point, there is a lot made from the perception of disarray among the Trump administration, and I think that all would say: look we want peaceful settlement, but of course we will take military action to defend ourselves as necessary. And I think that sometimes people tend to enhance the contrast between Trump statements and those of people like Mattis and Tillerson. But speaking for myself, all we can, and what I try to do as a reporter, is try to report and provide as much context as possible. It's hard for it not to come across as a dramatic situation when it is a dramatic situation. I think that sometimes the context is lost, I don't want to blame the reader, but the context is hard to hold on to the fact that some of this has been said

before.

A (Graham): In a sense, there's nothing new under the sun with regards to arms control and non-proliferation. Just a little personal story, when I joined the arms control agency in 1970, the first assignment I was given was to work on missile defense. Well, the issues I was working then are exactly the same as people re working on today. Nothing much has changed. Much of what we're saying, although Kim Jong-un adds an element of difference, and Trump too, basically the issues are the same. The initiative and desires are the same, the subjects are the same. It is entirely possible that 25 years from now we will be having a similar discussion.

Q: Ed Elmendorf from the UN Association. I'd like you to explore a little bit about the possibility of drawing new and different kinds of lessons from past experience, engaging in negotiations in the last 25 years for the North Korea situation. I think particularly about what happened in the Berlin Negotiations of the 1970s, which led to the recognition of East Germany, as a state, by the US when it had been a non-entity before, and it became a member of the UN, and that softened things quite a bit. I think also of the Iran nuclear deal, which was preceded by many years of private talks at the non-government level. The Iran project you probably know about. Would something like that be feasible in the case of North Korea, particularly when we have this public non-dialogue and rhetoric which makes formal negotiations so difficult.

A (Graham): One thing that enables there to be such a rich non-governmental dialogue on Iran is because Iran is a country where people are highly educated and there were lawyer meetings. There were people and experts that they could provide to these NGO meetings to understand the situation, and they understood the issues. I'm not even sure that North Korea even has lawyers, and I doubt if they even have the kind of human resources that would permit a very rich non-governmental dialogue. It would be limited, needless to say.

Q: (Anonymous): In context of slightly deeper history where it could be argued that economic sanctions against Japan triggered, or tipped the decision to enter the war against us. Chinese intervention at the end of the Korean War, and the fact that Korea's experience with total destruction already came at that point. I wonder how you would balance the use of severe economic sanctions placed on Chinese institutes to make the point that we're willing to accept serious economic harm, and imposing the greater economic harm, to avoid the far greater destruction that China seems to fear, the chaos of a post-conflict North Korea. Its seems to me that so far that card has not been played. So I wonder if you think that entails too many risks. And also, whether you have ever negotiated an arms control agreement where

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economic sanctions were a severe driving force to come to that agreement.

A (Graham): Sanctions are really not a part of an arms control negotiation. In the Iran case, sanctions were there, introduced by the SC and individual states, and the Obama administration negotiating with the P5+1 to impose these extremely severe sanctions that broke Iranian economy and forced them to the table. North Korea does not have an economy that can be broken. One thing that would truly break and might severely damage North Korea would be a complete shut down of oil and gas imports. China is not willing and will never be willing to do that because they fear it will create chaos. I just don't think it's possible.

A (Ryan): I disagree. The reason why that hasn't worked out with North Korea, is that the leadership has shown it is willing to set severe pain on their population, and the economy, and continue to divert what resources do exist, and I think that's the key difference with Iran. I think it's an interesting idea, what leverage does the US have over China to apply pressure, and I think that it doesn't have that leverage in any clear capacity. I think it's unlikely to occur in the interdependence of the American and Chinese economy.

Q: Laura Henderson, an independent consultant. Ambassador Graham, I was wondering, given your expertise on non-proliferation, have you thought of personally reaching out to the White House or to the leaders in the Senate and House Foreign Affairs Committees, to give them any of your rich insights. Because, as a citizen, and someone who has worked in international development, I would say that we're in a very scary period, and yesterday was a day of very incendiary language, talking about destroying the country, and calling the person "rocket man" and such, I think we are in a period when we need people such as yourself to be reaching out to those who do have power, and may make some decisions that may or may not be well informed. So, I'm wondering what role you might play going forward.

A (Graham): Would I and have I? Congress aside, I'll tell you a brief story. There was a man named Warren Zimmerman, American ambassador, very experienced, and he was the last US Ambassador to a unified Yugoslavia under the first Bush. And then, when the Clinton administration took office, and Yugoslavia fell apart, and broke into a series of civil wars, how many telephone calls do you think the White House made to Zimmerman asking for advice? People who are in do not want to hear from people who are out. It's the way it is. It shouldn't be that way, I thought it was ridiculous that we didn't reach out to Zimmerman, but "oh no, we can't do that, he was in the other administration." Congress is a little different. I have spoken to a few members, given the opportunity, I would certainly do that. There are many members, so it's

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not a monolith like the executive branch. There are one or two I talk with regularly, but no.

Report by: Chloe Pulfer, Research Intern