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| Earl Carr, Jr.: | First and foremost, I would like to thank the Foreign Policy Association in particular ... Noah, your leadership has been exceptional ... along with the Korean Institute for Unification. I would also like to acknowledge the very hard work of Adam, and Cole, and a number of the staff, who have done so much to bring this event together. I'd also like to acknowledge a special guest, my mother Emily, who is here in the room, as well as my sister Carolyn, who is here with some of her students. |
|  | Today my role is to really facilitate a great and rich discussion. Each member of the panel will speak for roughly about five minutes, and then I'll open up with a few questions, and then we'll open up the rest of the questions for the audience. I just wanted to introduce briefly Robert Einhorn, who is a senior fellow in the Arms Control and Non-Proliferation Initiative and the Center for 21st Century Security and Intelligence, both housed within the Foreign Policy Program at Brookings. Welcome. |
|  | I'd also like to introduce Joel Wit, who is concurrently a senior fellow at the US Korea Institute at SAIS and a senior research fellow at Columbia University Weatherhead Institute for East Asian Studies. A small anecdote: In 2003 I was a freshly minted research associate at the Council on Foreign Relations, and we were doing a report on the North Korean nuclear challenge. I just happened to notice that Joel was actually part of that panel, part of the members on that task force. Late last night, about 12 midnight, I actually went to my bookshelf to see if I could actually find that report, and I actually was able to find it. So, Joel, your historical contributions are still being recognized and acknowledged today. |
| Joel Wit: | And it's still relevant, right? |
| Earl Carr, Jr.: | It's still relevant. That's right. |
| Joel Wit: | Evergreen. |
| Earl Carr, Jr.: | Our third panelist is Mr. Ankit Panda. Ankit is an editor at The Diplomat, where he authors the daily analysis and commentaries. One of the unique things which you may not know about Ankit is that he actually writes coding for fun, and he was previously an actor who also performed in both English and French, if I'm correct. So, just something that you may not know about Ankit. |
|  | With that, I will let the panelists ... We'll start with Ankit first, and then we'll go on. |
| Ankit Panda: | All right. Thanks a lot for that introduction, Earl, and thank you to the Foreign Policy Association and KINU. Ambassador Kim, good to see you again. I think this will be familiar for you, because you heard me speak last week on a very similar topic. |
|  | Today is October 19th, and actually I like that date. It gives me a good place to start, because last year, 2016, on October 19th, Hillary Clinton and Donald Trump were headed into the third presidential debate, and North Korea actually carried out its 24th and final ballistic missile launch for the year. So, 2016 seemed like an exceptional year around this time last year, more missile launches than we'd seen. It was the first year we saw two nuclear tests out of North Korea, one that they claimed was a thermonuclear device and the other they claimed was a standardized device for their ballistic missiles. |
|  | I think 2017 has demonstrated that this threat from North Korea has grown to a new level of severity. When I say that, I don't want to suggest that any of this is surprising. I think, for observers of North Korea's ballistic missile programs for some time, the developments we've seen this year were effectively seen as an inevitable progress for their program. They've been very clear about their aspirations to strike the US homeland. We've seen propaganda footage coming out of North Korea showing Washington, DC, San Francisco, San Diego in flames. |
|  | In 2017 they've put a little bit more credibility behind that propaganda, and that has implications for US policy options. It certainly has implications for coercive denuclearization. One of those is coercive and the other is voluntary, where North Korea is willing to come to the table. So, I'll just very briefly talk about what we've seen this year. |
|  | The United States intelligence community uses a numbering system to keep track of North Korea's significant strategic weapons systems. It's known as the KN system. If you read news reports, CMN, you might see KN followed by a certain number that refers to a specific North Korean system. At the end of 2016, we were at KN-14. It was a ICBM that we'd first seen in 2015 that had never been flight tested. |
|  | The KN system started in the mid-'90s. So, just to give you an idea of how long it took for North Korea to get from KN-01 to KN-14, it took a while. This year as of August we have arrived at KN-21. So, they've gone from KN-14 to 21 in 2017 in just a matter of months. A lot of these new missile systems that we've seen this year are quite concerning. |
|  | In the Q&A I'll maybe get to a few of the other systems, but I want to focus on two of these systems that have the largest implications for US strategy and really underline why a course of denuclearization is a worse option than it has ever been. I don't think it was a particularly good option before because of the well-known threat that North Korea has been able to present to South Korea with its conventional, biological, and chemical capabilities, but now we are in a slightly different place. |
|  | One of these systems is the Hwasong-12. It was the missile that they tested on August 29th and September 14th, the one that they flew over Japan twice. This missile is the first that North Korea has been able to credibly demonstrate is capable of ranging the US territory of Guam, where Pacific Command's permanent bomber presence for the Asia Pacific is based. So, the September launch flew to a range in excess of what North Korea would need to target Guam, and that has implications for North Korea's eventual nuclear war fighting plans. |
|  | We can talk a bit about their nuclear strategy during the Q&A as well. But, effectively, all you really need to know is that it relies on a nuclear first strike against US military assets and South Korea and potentially Japanese assets in Northeast Asia. |
|  | The ICBM, on the other hand, we saw tested for the first time on July 4th this year. July 4th, incidentally, was also the same day North Korea broke its ballistic missile testing moratorium in 2006, so that date does carry some importance for them apart from being the US Independence Day. They tested that missile again on July 28th, and that missile introduces the old Cold War threat of decoupling to Northeast Asia and makes US alliance management a more different task than it has ever been. |
|  | Decoupling, very briefly, is the credibility problem that now the US has to make it clear to Seoul and Tokyo that, if push came to shove, if a conflict did break out in the Korean Peninsula, that the United States would be willing to potentially expose New York, Los Angeles to nuclear retaliation from North Korea and credibly defend its allies. That's not a difficult task. That's why we've seen extended deterrence language in recent high level statements between Japanese officials and US officials, South Korean officials and US officials, and that's something we'll see going forward. |
|  | I'll stop there, and we can come back to any of those issues in the Q&A. Thanks. |
| Earl Carr, Jr.: | All right. Bob ... |
| Robert Einhorn: | Earl, thank you, and thanks to the Foreign Policy Association for hosting this event. Given the high stakes ... Ankit has mentioned what North Korea is up to ... it's very important that we have a realistic appreciation of what is achievable in this area of trying to stop the North Korean programs. |
|  | The approach that the Trump administration is pursuing is to try to apply irresistible pressure against North Korea in the hope of getting it to decide that it's in its best interest to abandon its nuclear and missile programs completely and very soon. This would be a great outcome. Unfortunately, I don't think it's achievable. Why? For two main reasons. |
|  | One, and this was alluded to in the previous panel: I think there's a ceiling to how much pressure China is prepared to place on North Korea. Beijing is deeply disturbed with North Korea's behavior. Chinese leaders have disdain for Kim Jong-un and the North Korean leadership. As mentioned in the earlier panel, China indeed has taken some serious steps in recent weeks to enforce sanctions and to apply additional pressures against the North, but it's clear that China is going to stop short of placing pressure on the North that could destabilize the regime and ultimately lead to its collapse. |
|  | The second reason, also alluded to in the earlier panel, is that even if pressures would be applied much more strenuously, Kim Jong-un is not going to give up his nuclear capability. He sees these nuclear weapons as essential to deterring the United States, which he sees as the paramount threat, and also essential to the survival of the regime, of the Kim dynasty. |
|  | President Trump may feel that his belligerent statements: the "fire and fury," "totally destroying North Korea," taunting Kim Jong-un as "Little Rocket Man" ... He may think that these statements will intimidate Kim Jong-un and compel him to abandon his nuclear capability. Actually, I think these statements are counterproductive. They convince Kim Jong-un that the United States is permanently hostile to North Korea and that the North must hold onto its nuclear deterrent indefinitely. So, in my view, trying to press North Korea until it abandons its programs completely and in near term, is just a bridge too far. |
|  | The use of military force has also been mentioned as a possible way of resolving this issue of attacking North Korea's nuclear and missile sites, but there are problems with that approach. One, we don't know the location of all of these nuclear and missile facilities. More fundamentally, US military leaders: Secretary of Defense Mattis, Chairman of the Joint Chiefs, Dunford, they understand very well that initiating the use of military force would involved risks beyond imagination, and they've spoken about that. |
|  | Another approach that's been mentioned is regime change, try to topple this regime as a way of getting rid of the North's nuclear and missile capabilities. Success of this approach is also very unlikely. Kim Jong-un has successfully ensured the loyalty of North Korea's elite through a combination of rewards and brutal intimidation, and China will go to great lengths to ensure that its neighbor, that the Kim regime will remain in charge, will stay afloat. |
|  | So, I think efforts to get North Korea to give up its programs completely and in the near term are bound to fail. When they do, I think it would be desirable to pursue a more modest, but I think more achievable, approach, and that's a phased approach to denuclearization, starting with an interim freeze on North Korea's nuclear and missile programs. What an interim freeze would do is suspend all nuclear tests and all flight tests of long range missiles, and it would suspend the production of fissile materials, the production of highly enriched uranium and plutonium that could be used to manufacture nuclear weapons. |
|  | Now, such as freeze, if effective, would put a cap on the size of North Korea's nuclear arsenal, et would impede further advance in the miniaturization of North Korea's nuclear warheads, and it would limit the reliability and the accuracy of North Korea's missile. But, after all, it's only a freeze, and the problem is that it would allow North Korea to keep the nuclear weapons and the nuclear materials it has already produced. An interim deal in my view should require North Korea to commit to continue negotiations toward the goal of complete denuclearization, but it wouldn't have a deadline, because I can't see the North Koreans agreeing to a specific time frame to achieve that goal. |
|  | An interim freeze would have certain limitations, and it would be heavily criticized. The critics would say that this freeze without a definite time frame for complete denuclearization would constitute de facto acceptance, recognition, of a North Korean weapons capability, and there's some validity to that charge. Critics would also claim that any verification arrangements worked out would be inadequate. I have my own ideas on what would be involved, but they would be hardly foolproof in a country the size of North Korea with a regime that's been so adept at hiding things in the country. |
|  | The interim freeze would be criticized, because the North wouldn't do it for free. The North would insist on some form of compensation, whether it's in terms of scaling back current sanctions ... They would call for removing US forces from South Korea, call for a permanent peace treaty to replace the armistice. There'll be a variety of things they would call for, including perhaps even financial assistance. Critics would charge that whatever would be provided to the North to compensate them would be unjustified. |
|  | Even if it would be possible to satisfy these critics, it's far from clear that the North would actually be interested in an interim freeze. I'm sure there would be those in North Korea who would claim, "This will get us on a slippery slope, inevitably, toward the complete denuclearization, which we cannot afford to do." |
|  | I doubt, at this stage at least, President Trump or his senior advisors would accept an interim freeze. Their view is that we need to have the early and complete denuclearization of the North. It's too serious a threat and we don't know if we can deter them. Even if somehow President Trump could be persuaded to go for a freeze, I think it would be hard to get an agreement on terms that would be politically palatable in the United States. If Trump decided not to go for a freeze, and if it proved impossible to get a good agreement, I think inevitably we would be forced to fall back on a long-term strategy of deterrence and containment. |
|  | We'd continue to pressure the North, try to reduce its hard currency earnings, try to impede its access to technologies and materials they use in their nuclear missile programs. We'd press China very hard to stop facilitating North Korea's illicit programs. Most important, we'd work very closely with our South Korean and Japanese allies to bolster alliance deterrence and defense capabilities. The problem with this approach is that essentially it would concede, without any agreement, without any negotiations, that the North Koreans could continue to advance their nuclear and missile programs and that we would expect them to continue to build out these programs. |
|  | So, in my view I believe that we should make an effort to achieve this interim freeze. I have no illusion that it's going to be easy to do that, but I think it's worth trying, because having tried an approach that I think would have broad international support, including with China and the current government in South Korea, but having failed, because North Korea was not prepared to accept a reasonable approach, I think we would put ourselves in a much stronger position to gain the international support necessary to sustain a policy of deterrence and containment over the long haul. Thank you. |
| Earl Carr, Jr.: | Thank you. Joel ... |
| Joel Wit: | Thanks. Thanks, Earl. Thanks for inviting me. Most of us up here spend a lot of time talking to the media, and they're always interested in lists: 10 different reasons why this, or five different reasons why this. So, I have a list for you of three different things that you need to pay attention to. I think the first thing is, be skeptical about the emerging argument for military action. You see pieces of this in the press and also privately: The administration is quietly making a case for military action in the short term. They say the choice is between war or accepting and deterring North Korea's nuclear weapons. |
|  | I agree with everything that Bob has said; but, from this perspective, accepting and deterring is unacceptable, because Kim Jong-un is irrational, and North Korea is not building weapons to defend itself. It's building weapons because it wants to force the US off the peninsula and reunify Korea under its own terms, and therefore can't be deterred. So, the logic is, "More now is better than later," because later on North Korea will have more weapons. |
|  | Don't agree with this logic, but people are making a case that puts together all of these different assumptions, and they're false assumptions. We don't know if Kim Jong-un is irrational, and I would say he isn't irrational. We have a few years of experience watching him and seeing what he's doing. For those of us who have observed North Korea for a long time, what he's doing makes perfect sense if you're a North Korean. Secondly, the idea of aggressive reunification, it's possible, but it assumes that the US is just going to roll over and play dead, and that's not going to happen. So, there are a lot of holes in this case that I think people need to be thinking about. |
|  | Secondly, we say we will accept talks on our terms, so that sounds like we want to have diplomacy going on. Indeed, we do have some diplomacy going on. I don't want to be unfair to Secretary Tillerson, who's labored mightily to have some talks with North Korea, and there are quiet talks. The problem here is that, like many past administrations, this administration has conditions for talking to North Korea and conditions to talking to them in a sustained and serious way. The problem there is, of course, whenever you want to talk to someone and you impose preconditions on talking to them, they're going to think you're not serious, and that's exactly the point. |
|  | The North Koreans have been signaling, actually, since last November, when Bob and I were in a meeting with a bunch of North Korean officials in Geneva after President Trump was elected, they're open to having renewed dialogue with the United States. That probably has gone down a lot over the past seven months, given everything that's happened, and particularly given the threats that have been exchanged at the United Nations. The fact here is, though, in order to even figure out whether the solution Bob has outlined ... I agree with everything he said on that, too ... the only way to figure it out is to sit down and talk to the North Koreans. You can't figure it out through reading their official media. It's just not going to happen. You may need to sit with them for days and hours trying to figure it all out. |
|  | The third point, and Bob just touched on this, is we aren't going to get something for nothing, even the initial steps in what Bob has described. The initial step, which we've talked about with the North Koreans, is a moratorium on nuclear tests and missile tests, which would be quite useful at this point. You need to give something to get that. The key issue has been, although that may change as the sanctions pressure mounts on North Korea, has been joint US-South Korean military exercises and particularly two exercises that are held in late winter and late summer that the North Koreans see as very threatening. Publicly they say, "Well, you've got to cancel these exercises." Privately, I think they would accept altering the size of the exercises. |
|  | The problem is, at least in the environment in Washington until recently, everyone saw that as appeasement. "We don't want to do that, because we're giving the North Koreans something that's going to undermine our ability to defend South Korea." But the point is, if you talk to almost every military man who has experience on the Korean Peninsula, they will tell you, "Sure, you can alter the exercises. We can have a different exercise plan and still maintain the security of our allies." |
|  | So, the issue is, then, is it worth doing that in order to stop the forward momentum of the North Korean programs and to try to move onto some of the solutions Bob has talked about? I'm not sure if it's still the case that we can come up with that kind of solution, given the way the situation has deteriorated over the past few months, but I still think it's worth a shot. |
| Earl Carr, Jr.: | Great. Thank you for exceptional comments and analysis. |
|  | Bob, I want to start with you. If I could play devil's advocate for a second, you said one of your proposals is how to get North Korea to this phased approach, but you didn't talk about how do we get North Korea to this approach. At this point we don't have any incentive to get North Korea to this point. Can you talk a little bit about ... I mean, A, one could point to the sanctions that are being currently put in place. To the Trump administration's credit, these are by far the most significant sanctions that have ever been put in place. I was speaking to an advisor to the UN ambassador. She said something like 90% of all North Korea's exports have sanctions on them. So, talk a little bit about how we get to this point. |
| Robert Einhorn: | Well, I think you get to an interim freeze the way President Trump is trig to get to an early and complete denuclearization: you put maximum pressure on North Korea. I think what is happening is very positive. China is getting serious about sanctions. The US has stopped pulling its punches. It's been prepared to sanction Chinese entities if China is not cooperating with the US and pressuring North Korea. |
|  | I think you have to do all of that. You have to get countries that are hosting North Korean laborers who send remittances back to North Korea to send those workers home. You have to get countries that are buying North Korean military equipment to stop buying that equipment. You have to dry up their sources of hard currency and enforce these Security Council sanctions scrupulously. |
|  | That's all in preparation, and that gives them incentive. The incentive is to stop the pain. One of the things I'm sure the North would ask would be to scale back some of these sanctions. I think if we could get very serious constraints on North Korean capabilities, it would be worth scaling back some of these sanctions. |
| Earl Carr, Jr.: | Thank you. Joel ... |
| Joel Wit: | Could I add just a quick point? I agree with all that. We should be increasing pressure on North Korea. I think the danger is, and this has been happening for a long time, that many people see sanctions as the solution to the problem. It's not the solution. It's not going to solve the problem. The North Koreans aren't going to roll over and play dead. They may come back to the negotiating table, but they may not. So, increasing pressure is a good idea ... We should be doing it ... as long as we don't kid ourselves that somehow it obviates the need for other steps in our policy, like diplomacy, and that's been a problem for a long time now. |
| Earl Carr, Jr.: | Okay, great. Ankit, I wanted to follow up with a question. You talked about the KN-01 and how the system has gotten to ... This KN-01 is KN-14. Talk to us a little bit about the speed. How was North Korea able to accelerate so fast. You said KN-01 to KN-21? |
| Ankit Panda: | 14 to 21 this year. |
| Earl Carr, Jr.: | 14 to 21. How was North Korea able to develop with that amount of speed? |
| Ankit Panda: | I mean, I want to be clear. We saw these systems unveiled this year. That doesn't necessarily mean they were developed in a matter of months. For example, the Musudan, which is the intermediate range missile that they tested eight times last year, didn't have a very good success rate. It flew successfully just one time. They've had that missile since the early '90s, and they've been working with that technology for some time. They did take away some important lessons from developing that. For example, the advanced propellants that they worked with on that missile are now at the heart of their ICBM and their intermediate range ballistic missile. |
|  | If I may, I just want to say something on sanctions and their ballistic missile program. There is this perception that I sometimes run into that maximum pressure and sanctions will have a direct effect on choking off the ballistic missile program, potentially lead to a reduced testing rate. We might not see North Korean ballistic missile tests almost bi-weekly, as we've seen this year. Increasingly, it appears to be a highly autarchic supply chain when it comes to their ballistic missile program. |
|  | We saw some reporting in August, for example, that they were importing ballistic missile engine assemblies from the former Soviet Union and potentially Ukraine or Russia. That doesn't appear to be true anymore. They have those designs, but now they've been manufacturing those independently. At least that's what the United States intelligence community has assessed. When it comes to fissile material, which use to be the major constraint on the size of their ultimate nuclear arsenal, that too appears to be increasingly less of a concern. |
|  | I remember Joel's team in 2015 had released a report on North Korea's nuclear future, and it had a worst-case scenario projection for 2020 that they would have enough fissile material for a hundred bombs. Well, the Defense Intelligence Agency and the National Geospatial Intelligence Agency assessed this summer that they already have enough fissile material 60 bombs, and they're producing fissile material at a rate of 12 per year. This likely means that they have separative work units enriching uranium in sites that we just don't know about, and it means that their uranium enrichment program is proceeding at a fairly quick rate. |
|  | They've already demonstrated a thermonuclear design. So, that means, while sanctions will have pain, I think, on the elite in Pyongyang, and pressure on the regime, and could potentially still influence North Korea's decision to return to the negotiating table, the actual missile program and its nuclear program, I think, remain quite insulated. Because it is the insurance program for the regime survival itself, I think that they'll keep marching on as long as they can with this highly autarchic supply chain. |
| Earl Carr, Jr.: | Thank you. Last question before we go to the panel. Bilahari Kausikan, who was previously the former permanent secretary of Singapore's Ministry of Foreign Affairs, wrote a very provocative op-ed in the Washington Post on October 10th. The title of it was To Deter North Korea, Japan and South Korea Should Go Nuclear. Can you talk a little bit about the implications of that for Korean unification? |
| Joel Wit: | Sorry. You're asking me? |
| Earl Carr, Jr.: | Or any of the panel. |
| Joel Wit: | Okay. That's a good question. For some time now, I think it's been pretty obvious, as this program has gathered momentum, and as Ankit was saying, "This is not new." For people who are following this issue, it's been very clear for five years, six years, seven years, eight years that the nuclear program was growing, and growing, and growing. Right away that means that South Korea's future objective of reunification was really becoming more and more impractical. |
|  | A nuclear North Korea is not going to agree on a peaceful process of reunification with South Korea, unless it's on their terms. So, if South Korea gets nuclear weapons, it's not going to make it any more likely. I mean, it's going to be a standoff. If Japan gets nuclear weapons, then obviously you're in a very unstable situation, where South Korea and North Korea are not just going to be looking at each other, but they're going to be looking at Japan because of the mixed history between all those countries. I hate to say it, but in a nuclear Northeast Asia, reunification just isn't going to be in the cards. |
| Earl Carr, Jr.: | Yes? Bob. |
| Robert Einhorn: | Like I say, it's not just the implication of South Korea getting nuclear weapons for reunification. I think it has very bad implications for that. I think, if South Korea were to decide to have its own nuclear weapons program, this would lead to an arms race in Northeast Asia. If South Korea gets nuclear weapons, Japan undoubtedly will get nuclear weapons, and then you're off to the races. |
|  | There are proponents in South Korea, and there are more and more of them now, who say they there needs to be a balance. Now there's an imbalance. "North Korea has nuclear weapons. We don't. We're relying on the US extended deterrent, but that may be getting unreliable. If we had nuclear weapons to balance the North's nuclear weapons, that would set up a bargain. We'd be more likely to get rid of nuclear weapons on the Korean peninsula." |
|  | I think the opposite is true. I think if South Korea were to get nuclear weapons, this would freeze the situation. Both sides would continue to make progress in advancing their technological capabilities. There would be instability. China would not like this development with South Korea and Japan having nuclear weapons. It would put great strains on the US-ROK security alliance, on the US-Japan security alliance. |
|  | Look, South Koreans are understandably very anxious about this growing capability in the North. They're concerned about whether the United States will remain a reliable security partner into the future. Many South Koreans have long had this concern about abandonment: "Are we going to be left all alone?" They're looking for ways of bringing their destiny under their own control. One way is to have nuclear weapons, but think it would be a bad mistake. I think the solution is for the US to work closely with the South Koreans on ways of bolstering the credibility of the extended deterrent, and there are all kinds of ways that can be done. We can go into that later. |
| Earl Carr, Jr.: | Thank you. |
| Ankit Panda: | Just very briefly, I read that op-ed and I wasn't convinced by the core argument. I noticed that it had an important omission, which was any mention of the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty. If South Korea and Japan were to break out, that would be pretty much the end of the global non-proliferation regime. Extended deterrence, we're talking about in terms of alliance reassurance, but it's important to recognize that it's not an altruistic enterprise that the United States has put in place. Extended deterrence is one of the best non-proliferation tools the United States has. |
|  | That old Cold War problem that I talked about, decoupling ... I mean, part of the reason US extended deterrence in Europe was so difficult was partly to prevent a German nuclear capability, and those impulses very much are going to come into play increasingly in Northeast Asia as growing domestic constituencies in South Korea, and eventually Japan, will start calling for an indigenous nuclear capability, which is why the alliance management task is just going to grow more difficult in the era of the North Korean ICBM. |
| Earl Carr, Jr.: | Thank you. That was exceptional. We're going to open it up to the floor. Kindly wait for the microphone. Please stand. State your name and your affiliation. We'll go ahead and take a question. Yes? Over here. Gentleman in the blue jacket. |
| Ron Randall: | Well, I'm Ron Randall. We just returned from a tourist trip to South Korea and the DMZ. My question is, how effective is the American deterrence in stopping a response of artillery on the city of Seoul if we were to make a pin-prick, or very focused, attack on nuclear activities? We were told by refugees that the military people around Kim Jong-un don't like him, but are scared to death of him and that there is a potential space between them. I would imagine a senior Korean military person would be really scared of the American response to an attack on Seoul. So, my question is, how effective is our deterrence? |
| Earl Carr, Jr.: | Thank you. |
| Joel Wit: | I've heard a lot over the years in South Korea. People say, "Well, we can strike at North Korea, and they won't strike back because of the consequences." Of course, the US could use overwhelming force against North Korea, but I think that just sorely misunderstands the North Korean mentality. For them, not striking back means almost like they're committing suicide. It's a show of weakness. |
| Ron Randall: | I'm talking about deterring their- |
| Joel Wit: | Right. Well, you're talking about them attacking Seoul, right? Well, if there is a US military action against, say, a missile on a launch pad or some nuclear facility, although that wouldn't make much sense, the North Koreans are going to respond. I think it's a really serious miscalculation to think that they'll be afraid and they won't respond. |
|  | There are options out there the are being considered in the context of what I described to you, where we think we can shoot down one of their missiles once it's tested. We would shoot it down over the Pacific. People think in that case the North Koreans wouldn't launch a military response on the peninsula. I don't know. I think it's gambling. I think they could have very low level responses that don't include an artillery attack on Seoul, but still would be a response. |
| Earl Carr, Jr.: | Bob or Ankit, did you want to respond, or you're good? |
| Robert Einhorn: | [inaudible 00:40:21] |
| Earl Carr, Jr.: | Okay, next question. Lady with the red-and-green scarf up here. Thank you. |
| Linda Sennett: | My name's Linda [Sennett 00:40:30]. I have a simplistic question: What does North Korea want? Do we actually have any idea of, whatever they do want, how they intend to get it? |
| Earl Carr, Jr.: | Hmm. Good question. Bob? |
| Robert Einhorn: | This is the big question, and we don't know the answer. They may not know the answer yet. I mean, there are two different hypotheses. One is that all of these capabilities: the nuclear, the missile tests, the verbal belligerence, is designed to deter us, that they genuinely fear that the US is determined to undermine the regime, topple the regime, and this will provide deterrence. In other words, this hypothesis is that the motive is defensive. |
|  | Another is that, no, it's not just defensive. Listen to their doctrine. Their goal remains the reunification of the peninsula on their terms, if necessary by force. Is that why they're acquiring these capabilities? Their ability to threaten the US homeland with a nuclear-armed ICBM ... What if their intention is to commit aggression against South Korea and then threaten us with a nuclear attack to try to deter us from coming to the defense of our ally? Is that what they're trying to do? |
|  | In the middle of those two hypotheses is the notion that, well, maybe it started off defensive; but, as they accrue additional capabilities, maybe their ambitions increase. Maybe they've become more self-confident that they can pursue provocations with impunity. We just don't know that. We have to assume, I think, that this is a dangerous regime, and we have to do everything we can to deter provocations. |
|  | I think it's foolish, by the way, to speak irresponsibly that we would consider initiating use of military force against the North. People like Mattis are very careful not to talk about initiating a military attack, but what he does say is that, if they commit aggression our ally or against the United States, there will be a devastating response. I think that's credible and I think Kim Jong-un, who ... I agree. He is rational and calculating, and he understands the consequences. I think deterrence exists today. |
|  | What I'm concerned about is miscalculation. I'm concerned that one day we will fly B-1 bombers north of the 38th parallel; some American pilot will stray into North Korean airspace. Imagine a SAM, surface-to-air missile, site along North Korea's eastern coast. You could see an air-to-surface missile operator saying, "Well, let's see. Should I fire at that bomber or not?" |
|  | You may have read in the papers. Recently a former Soviet military officer died. He was the guy who was alerted by sensors that there might be a US missile attack under way. Rather than immediately ordering the launch and retaliation, he said, "Does this make sense? Does this really make sense?" He took it upon himself to say, "This must be a false alarm. I am not going to order a retaliatory strike," and that was that. |
|  | The incentives for a North Korean captain or lieutenant in that situation go completely the opposite way, because the penalties for failing to act resolutely could be extreme, and not just for his professional career. |
| Joel Wit: | Just one very quick point. Bob and I have spent years talking to North Koreans when we were in government, when we were out of government, and that's exactly what you need to do. You're asking the right question: "What do they want?" Most people don't even bother to ask. They don't bother to talk to them. They just read what the official North Korean media says, which is just not the right way to go about it. You need to sit. You need to talk. It could take a long time, but you eventually will figure it out, good or bad. I think that's what's really needed. |
| Earl Carr, Jr.: | Yeah. Thank you. |
| Ankit Panda: | Just one thing real quickly on this note. Bob raised the idea of them potentially using their new missile capabilities to engage in new kinds of negotiation with the United States. Everybody remembers this Guam threat that was all over the headlines this August, which was widely misunderstood. It was actually an overture to negotiations and potential talks, but it was effectively North Korea experimenting with a form of compellance. They threatened to carry out this action against Guam if the United States did not cease those bomber flights. |
|  | I think we'll see more of that as North Korea grows increasingly confident behind a credible nuclear capability that's capable of reaching the US homeland, capable of ranging Guam. I think they're going to start experimenting with bolder acts like that. There will come a day when the United States might have to fold its cards sometimes. I think the Guam threat does remain on the table. They never said that they would carry it out. So, when some people said, "Oh, look, they didn't do it. They walked back," I think that's a deadly misreading of how North Korea is thinking about the situation. I just wanted to put that out there as well. |
| Earl Carr, Jr.: | Right. North Korea has also said that they will not engage the United States in diplomacy until they've perfected the intercontinental ballistic- |
| Ankit Panda: | Whatever that means. |
| Earl Carr, Jr.: | Whatever that means. I'll take someone ... over here to the far left. Adria. |
| Adria A.: | Hi. Adria Armbrister. I'm a SAIS grad and a Columbia grad, so thank you for representing here. I have a question. I was born in the mid-'70s. That's all I'm going to say about my age. At that time bomb shelter and those types of things were still pretty common in the landscape. I'm wondering, thinking about the exponential growth of capabilities of North Korea, when do countries: the US, South Korea, Japan, being to prepare themselves for it? It seems as though we're still in a phase of not taking it seriously, although we are discussing it. So, that's my question for all of you. |
| Earl Carr, Jr.: | Thank you. Who would like to take that one? |
| Ankit Panda: | Japan has very much started preparing. Actually, this has been a really, really terrible year for Japan. Just all of their worst fears about North Korea have started to come true in a way that's maybe not palpable for those of us here. I mean, the two ballistic missile overflights. Some reportings said that that wasn't the first time. That was the first time that North Korea flew something that was designed to deliver a thermonuclear warhead over Japan. When they flew the satellites over Japan, those were comparable, but those weren't actual ballistic missiles that they would use in a conflict. |
|  | Japan has started ballistic missile evacuation drills. They started conducting those earlier this year. Some of you might have seen the video footage from Hokkaido as the missiles flew over, of air raid sirens going on around the country. Japanese officials have been talk seriously about investing in further missile defense capabilities, really ever since 1998, when North Korea launched the Taepo Dong 1 over Japan, they've been preparing for this eventuality, investing in missile defense. It's not enough. I think the Japanese will continue to take this quite seriously. |
|  | I think we've heard a bit about how the South Koreans are preparing. They have the K-3 suite of military response capabilities, autonomous response capabilities: the Korean Air and Missile Defense System, the Korean Massive Punishment and Retaliation, and the Kill Chain. South Korea is very much making investments in realizing these. There are procedures in place in Seoul to protect the civilian population in case of an artillery strike. Those have been in place for a while. So, certainly, these countries have been preparing for some time. |
| Earl Carr, Jr.: | Bob or Joel? I've just been struck with the number of companies ... The New York Times did a great piece on companies in South Korea and Japan who are producing gas masks, as well as bunkers underground, to prepare for some kind of eventual warfare. I found that interesting. |
|  | Yes? Next question over here. |
| [00:49:32]Josee P.: |  |
| Earl Carr, Jr.: | Yes. Please wait for the mic. Thank you. |
| Josee P.: | Josee [Pacabriat 00:49:38], the Foreign Policy Association. Do you think that the Winter Olympics that are taking place, I believe in February, in PyeongChang, almost at the border with North Korea, where apparently North Korean athletes have been invited ... Do you think there will be an occasion that Kim Jong-un will not want to miss to shine on the international stage and perhaps an opportunity for American diplomacy to step in and cut him down? |
| Earl Carr, Jr.: | Who wants to take that one? Don't all speak at once, now. |
| Joel Wit: | Well, I'll jump out. You would think so, but I'd be very skeptical about that, particularly in the current environment. I've been in countless meetings with North Koreans. I was in one meeting, where ... I won't mention who it was, but it was a prominent US senator ... was meeting a bunch of North Koreans. He looked at the North Koreans, and he said, "Well, you have to make the first move. You have to reach your hand out to us to talk." I knew what the North Koreans were going to say. One of them stood up, this feisty woman who's very important in the North Korean government. She said, "Why should we make the first move? You're the world's only superpower. You should make the first move to us. We're just a small country." |
|  | I think that's the mentality you're dealing with. So, in the context of what you're talking about, I don't see the North Koreans really seriously launching some sort of effort at diplomacy. I think the best you could hope for is that things stay fairly calm while the Olympics happen. |
| Earl Carr, Jr.: | Do we need some Dennis Rodman diplomacy? I'll take someone ... Matt, with the glasses. |
| Matt Kline: | Thank you. Matt Kline from Natural Science. This discussion, and also the panel before, is very much focused on ballistic missiles and nuclear weapons. I'm wondering why that is. I mean, I know that's what everyone talk about; but, in a certain sense, the [inaudible 00:51:49] of North Korea is not really based on the possession of nuclear weapons and missiles, per se. It's based on the attitude of the regime. Other countries have nuclear weapons that we find problematic, like Pakistan, for example. We can tolerate them within the international system. |
|  | I'm wondering, should we be focusing on this, or maybe would accepting the existing sort of status quo make sense and maybe instead trying to renegotiate the overall leadership? |
| Earl Carr, Jr.: | Interesting. |
| Joel Wit: | I hate to keep saying, "When we talk to North Koreans," but when you talk to a North Korean, you can get at that issue. Their logic is, "You've been a threat to us for many years. That's why we've built these nuclear weapons and ballistic missiles." So, at least they say, part of a diplomatic solution has to be a peace treaty ending the Korean War. The Korean War hasn't ended. There's a temporary armistice. That, I think, if it ever worked ... Who knows? It'd be very difficult. But, if it ever worked, that would get at what you're talking about, which is at least changing part of the equation, which is the political relationship. |
|  | I would say we don't want to do that and just let everything sort of go, their weapons of mass destruction. Part of that process has to be them gradually, well, certainly initially, freezing, and then maybe down the road, way down the road, reducing, and maybe even further down the road, getting rid of their weapons of mass destruction. You're absolutely right. At the base of the problem is the political relationship, and that's tough for us, because it's hard to accept a regime like that in the United States. |
| Ankit Panda: | Yeah. I just wanted to add one thing. I think you raise a really important point. The United States hasn't really come to terms with a threat like this, an adversarial, hostile state acquiring a thermonuclear ICBM. We're seeing that in 2017. The nuclear test they carried pout on September 3rd was the largest explosion on Earth in 25 years since China tested a nuke in 1992 at Lop Nor with a yield of 600 kilotons. This is a scary time, really. The United States hasn't seen this in a while. The last adversary that met both those criteria was China, Mao Zedong's China. We learned to live with that and deter that. |
|  | We're in a period of transition right now. We have an unusual president, who is willing to stretch the limits of dialogue at the United Nations. So, it is a dangerous time, but my hope is that we'll eventually get to a point where, maybe, at least as far as deterrence goes, we start thinking about North Korea as a nuclear weapons power, if not a nuclear weapons state, under the NPC. As a nuclear weapons power, it is the 9th nuclear power. |
|  | You raise a couple other things. Just a few things have been lost in the noise around North Korea, I mean, issues like onward proliferation of North Korean systems. North Korea is one of the most famous onward proliferators of missile technology, weapons technology. If the Scud missile is the most widely proliferated ballistic missile on Earth, North Koreans are incredibly good at refurbishing and modifying those Scud missiles. They've already tested new Scuds this years. They could potentially look to sell those designs to willing customers, especially as the sanctions ... That could be an important way of acquiring cash. |
|  | The second thing I'll say is, their asymmetric capabilities, like cyber espionage, cyber theft. I think they'll continue to get worse in the coming years. North Korea's capabilities there are nothing to scoff at, either. |
| Robert Einhorn: | There's a view among some experts ... I think it's a minority view ... that what we should do is set the nuclear missile issues aside. They're too hard. We haven't succeeded. Set them aside and engage with the North Koreans. Try to develop mutually beneficial economic relations, people-to-people exchanges. Try to alleviate, if you can, North Korea's concern about US intentions to undermine the regime. Do that in the hope that over time they won't see a need to have a deterrent. |
|  | I think no one in positions of responsibility have endorsed that view, and for a number of reasons. The feeling is that this regime needs to have an enemy. So, it's going to be very hard to persuade them over time to get rid of the capability they think is essential to hold off the enemy. Also, this is a regime that has very few sources of legitimacy. It's most proud of its nuclear missile programs. They're the only things that they do to, basically. They're proud of them. |
|  | Even if through a policy of gradual engagement and cooperation, I don't think it's going to be possible to get them to give up this capability. It's a danger. It's a clear and present danger. I think you have to go at this capability directly. Sure, there are things you can do on the side. There are confidence-building measures you can do in the conventional military sphere that I think would be desirable to do, but I don't think you can set the nuclear missile issues aside for very long. |
| Earl Carr, Jr.: | We've got four minutes left and many questions. If it's okay with the panel, I'm going to take three questions so that we can get as many questions ... Is that okay? |
| Ankit Panda: | Good. That's fine. |
| Earl Carr, Jr.: | Over here with the glasses, the red shirt. Okay. Red dress. Yes, you with the glasses. |
| Davina Lee: | My name is Davina Lee and I am a high schooler at [inaudible 00:58:09] High School. Sorry. I'm a bit nervous right now. I just wanted to ask, what cultural and societal impacts have these nuclear testings had on the South Korean people? How does the attitude of the South Korean people have an impact on the stage for future negotiations between the North Korean and the South Korean government? |
| Earl Carr, Jr.: | Okay. Thanks. Next question. You've been waiting patiently over here, the gentleman in the glasses. |
| Speaker 12: | I just wanted you to talk about the cyber capabilities they have, and what are the US's capabilities to check that? |
| Earl Carr, Jr.: | Okay, great. Yes? The last question. Right up in front. |
| Betsy Scott: | Hi. I'm Betsy Scott, Fellow, Foreign Policy Association. What I was wondering was, I heard a speech recently that theorized that the Chinese are weaponizing North Korea and that a lot of the hardware you see in North Korea has really come from China. I'd like to know if that's generally accepted policy. Thank you. |
| Earl Carr, Jr.: | All right. We'll start with the first one, what kind of cultural aspects the nuclear testing has had on South Korea. Who would like to take that one? |
| Ankit Panda: | It's Joel. |
| Earl Carr, Jr.: | Joel, you seem like you want to take that one. |
| Joel Wit: | I'm not sure about cultural aspects. I mean, the only thing I can say that comes close to societal and cultural is the growing support in opinion polls for South Korea getting its own nuclear weapons. It's grown and grown and grown. Whether it's based on a full understanding of what that means or not is another issue, but that's there, and it's going to be something the United States is going to have to deal with through what some of my colleagues have said, whether it's bolstering extended deterrence or other methods that reassure the South Koreans. |
|  | The bottom line is that ... We saw this in Europe during the Cold War ... trying to reassure an ally is an endless task. Sometimes you can't reassure your ally. At that point you reach something called "strategic divergence," where your alliance starts crumbling. So, this is going to be a real rat race between reassurance and North Korea's unconstrained weapons programs. |
| Earl Carr, Jr.: | That's great. On the issue of cyber capabilities, who wants to take that one? |
| Ankit Panda: | Sure. Just very briefly, there was an interesting revelation, I think by The New York Times, that US Cyber Command had actually retaliated against North Korea's Reconnaissance General Bureau, their equivalent of the CIA. Really, it's kind of an organized crime arm of the regime that carries out a range of nefarious activities across the world, including cyber and other asymmetric activities, including the VX assassination of Kim Jong-nam in Kuala Lumpur Airport. |
|  | The idea is that attribution of cyber attacks is very difficult, but a lot of recent cyber attacks are thought to have been carried out by North Korea: the WannaCry ransom attack, which ransomed users for bitcoin, cryptocurrency. That was thought to have been orchestrated by the North Korean regime, potentially a symmetric means of acquiring cash under sanctions. |
|  | They pulled off a spectacular heist, where they stole $81 million from the Bangladeshi Central Bank. So, I think these kinds of activities are an interesting way for the North Korean regime to cope with the pressure from sanctions. Actually, the 81 million was actually due to a typo. If the typo wasn't there, they could have stolen up to a billion, is what some accounts of that heist have to say. |
|  | The United States does have access. I think that story in The Times was meant to signal that Cyber Command had taken a shot across North Korea's bow. I think the operation took place for eight days, from September 22-September 30, showed North Korea the United States does have access to it's systems, and that, if push came to shove, that the United States could retaliate. |
| Robert Einhorn: | On the last point- |
| Ankit Panda: | I know. |
| Robert Einhorn: | ... I'm convinced that China does not want North Korea to have nuclear weapons. I do not believe China has knowingly assisted North Korea, provided technology, materials, and so forth. I do believe that, in the past especially, very lax Chinese controls have permitted North Koreans to shop in China and to acquire certain technology, certain equipment, but I don't think this was sanctioned by the government in Beijing. I think the Chinese are at fault for not cracking down on North Korean brokers and front companies that operate in China and try to procure this technology for their nuclear program. They're beginning now to do that, but they should have done that a decade ago. |
| Earl Carr, Jr.: | Okay. Well, thank you for a very stimulating discussion. Please join me in thanking our distinguished panel. [inaudible 01:03:30] |