

Remarks on DPRK at Stanford University

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MR BIEGUN: Good afternoon. Thank you, Dr. Shin, and thank you to Stanford University and to the Shorenstein Asia-Pacific Research Center for inviting me here today. I want to add particular thanks to a few representatives of the university community who are here with us today, especially Dr. Sig Hecker, Bob Carlin, and my friend and former colleague, Andy Kim. Secretary of State Pompeo sends his regards to you all, and we are eager to work as closely as possible with your team here at Stanford to continue to benefit from your expertise and advice.

I hope I do not need to tell anybody in this room that here at Stanford is assembled the most formidable collection of expertise on North Korea that can be found anywhere in the United States today. You have in your midst former policy makers, intelligence officials, and scientists who have devoted a large part of their life's work to solving one of the most complex and dangerous challenges we face in the world today: an unresolved war, massive military capabilities on high alert, weapons of mass destruction and their means of delivery, and all smack dab in the most geopolitically and economically sensitive geography in the entire world.

In my position as Secretary of State Pompeo's special representative for North Korea, it is my assignment to oversee and lead the broad diplomatic initiative to achieve the final, fully verified denuclearization of North Korea. I am only the latest official to take on this task, following behind a line of long – a long line of distinguished diplomats who have devoted themselves to the same. Yet, two and a half decades after it was first found that North Korea was on the cusp of acquiring the means for weapons of mass destruction, we seemingly find ourselves farther away than ever from that goal. The last 25 years was not wasted, though certainly there were most – there were missed opportunities by both the United States and North Korea, and nothing in today's circumstances necessarily guarantees that we will be successful.

However, today we differ in both situation and approach from the past. In President Trump, the United States has a leader who, more so than any previous president, is deeply and personally committed to once and for all bringing an end to 70 years of war and hostility on the Korean Peninsula. In North Korea, a young leader stands atop a country of 25 million people, possessing one of the world's largest armies and nuclear weapons capabilities. And yet Chairman Kim Jong Un has stated his intention to denuclearize and to turn his energies fully to meeting the needs of his people and developing the North Korean economy.

Neither leader is constrained by traditional expectations that might doom their teams to try the exact same approach as in the past, with no expectation of anything but the same failed outcome. Instead, President Trump and Chairman Kim have decided to pursue a top-down approach with a breadth of actions that – if successful – will fundamentally transform relations between our two countries. In the process of that transformation, we could see a historic set of events in the region

that would help establish a more stable, peaceful, and prosperous Asia for this generation and for many to come.

It is well known that during the presidential transition after the 2016 election, then-President Obama impressed upon President-elect Trump that the number one danger the United States faced in the world was the burgeoning nuclear weapons and intercontinental ballistic missile programs of North Korea. From that briefing it sounded as if the possibility of conflict on the Korean Peninsula was imminent, and for much of 2017 it seemed that that just might be so. Numerous provocative tests of North Korean ICBMs and ever-larger nuclear weapons caused the escalation of tensions on the Korean Peninsula to their highest level in decades. Tough sanctions were imposed upon North Korea by the United Nations Security Council, and threats and counter threats were hurled between the two countries.

Yet by the end of 2017 something began to shift. Quiet outreach between the two Koreas led to a breakthrough moment of a joint Korean Olympic team participating at the Winter Olympics, followed by a face-to-face meeting between North and South leaders at Panmunjom Village in the demilitarized zone.

Around the same time, President Trump authorized American officials to engage directly with counterparts in North Korea in search of a diplomatic path forward. President Trump then made a bold and courageous decision to engage directly at the leader level with Chairman Kim at the Singapore summit in 2018. The course chosen by President Trump last year to engage directly with Chairman Kim interrupted the trajectory toward possible conflict.

For our part, we have communicated to our North Korean counterparts that we are prepared to pursue – simultaneously and in parallel – all of the commitments our two leaders made in their joint statement at Singapore last summer, along with planning for a bright future for the Korean people and the new opportunities that will open when sanctions are lifted and the Korean Peninsula is at peace, provided that North Korea likewise fulfills its commitment to final, fully verified denuclearization.

There are many challenges that make it especially complicated for the United States and North Korea to embark upon a diplomatic initiative of this magnitude. It is an understatement to say that our two systems are very different. Our relations are predicated on an armistice – or a ceasefire – that has been in place now for more than six decades. We are located in very different parts of the world with very different histories. We have dramatically different views on individual rights and on human rights. And those enduring realities have formed different worldviews about the region and about each other. We also have no trade of any sort, no diplomatic relations, and virtually no ability to communicate directly with one another.

And yet despite these many obstacles, we have managed to sustain engagement now for many months, largely due to the personal determination of President Trump and his consistent willingness to use voice and written word to send positive messages of trust and confidence to Chairman Kim and the North Korean leadership.

Since President Trump's summit with Chairman Kim in Singapore, the United States has remained in steady contact with North Korea. In July, shortly after the groundbreaking summit in Singapore, Secretary of State Pompeo made a follow-up visit to Pyongyang, where he met on extended – for an extended period with Kim Yong Chol, one of Chairman Kim's closest advisors and most senior officials. In September, Secretary of State Pompeo met at the United Nations General Assembly in New York City with North Korean Foreign Minister Ri Yong Ho. In October, the Secretary traveled to Pyongyang, where we met with Chairman Kim, with his sister and close advisor Kim Yo Jong, and again with Kim Yong Chol.

A New Year's speech by Chairman Kim at the beginning of this year reaffirmed his commitment to both denuclearization and economic modernization. Less than three weeks after, Secretary of State Pompeo hosted a senior North Korean delegation in Washington, D.C., led by Kim Yong Chol. This visit, which was just 10 days ago, allowed us to cover a number of outstanding issues and, during the course of an hour-long Oval Office meeting with President Trump, set in motion plans for a second summit between President Trump and Chairman Kim.

Less noticed but nonetheless very important, I also had the opportunity during that visit to hold a first extended working-level discussion with my newly appointed North Korean counterpart, Ambassador Kim Hyok Chol. In our meeting, we had a discussion that was productive, focused, results-oriented, and it laid out the first steps in a plan for comprehensive working-level negotiations ahead. We were satisfied with the outcome of the visit, and in the very near future we'll be pursuing concrete plans to advance all of the elements of the Singapore joint statement.

Over the past many months, not only the President and the Secretary of State, but also the Vice President, National Security Advisor, and other administration senior officials have continuously pressed the goals of our North Korea diplomacy with our friends, partners, and allies around the world, including at the United Nations, at the APEC Summit, at the ASEAN Regional Forum, at the East Asia Summit, at the G20 Summit, and in the many bilateral meetings with counterparts around the world. The skilled and seasoned diplomatic team that I have the privilege to lead at the Department of State has likewise built and maintained the support of partners, friends, and allies around the world to our approach, giving a strong backbone to our diplomacy.

For my part, I have now been in this position for five months. During that time, I've had the opportunity to meet every North Korean official at every level with whom the United States will be engaged in this diplomatic endeavor, from Chairman Kim to my newly appointed counterpart.

In the past five months, I have traveled a lot, with a trip to North Korea, multiple trips to South Korea, two trips to Japan, two to China, two to Russia. In the past week, my team had the opportunity to play host to visits in Washington, D.C., led by delegations – my Chinese counterpart and my Russian counterpart. With both China and Russia, there is the promise of cooperation on the denuclearization of the North Korea peninsula and the establishment of a lasting peace on the peninsula.

North Korea is not just a regional issue, but one of importance to our allies and partners around the world. We meet regularly with the British, Australian, New Zealand, and Canadian counterparts, who have been a critical part of our global efforts and our pressure campaign. Last

fall, we had the opportunity to lay out our strategic vision to our NATO allies at the North Atlantic Council and our partners in the European Union at the Political Security Committee (sic). The French Ministry of Foreign Affairs generously hosted a quad meeting that included my senior counterparts from Britain and Germany. And finally, a week and a half ago, our team had the opportunity to attend an extremely useful and informative international conference on North Korea hosted by my counterpart in Sweden, with American, South Korean, and North Korean participation.

Of course, the purpose of diplomacy is not more meetings. The purpose of the meetings is to produce outcomes and progress.

Over the fall, we and North Korea have gained familiarity among our leaders and our senior officials. We have seen both governments create dedicated positions to advance their diplomacy. We have found a more consistent pattern of communications, though still challenged at times, but the most intensive between our two countries in many years.

While there is still much work to do, we should also not ignore the progress we have made to date. For one, there are no American citizens wrongfully detained today in North Korea. In fact, last fall an American citizen crossed illegally into North Korea on foot from China. Shortly after that, the North Koreans informed us that this person had been detained, interrogated, judged to not pose a threat, and would be expelled from North Korea. Aided by Sweden, our consular protecting power in Pyongyang, this American citizen was on a plane and back in the United States in time for Thanksgiving. I do not need to tell anyone who follows North Korea closely that one year ago this sequence of events could have played out in a very different manner.

It is possible to read too much into something like this, as this was simply the normal action, one that governments around the world take on a daily basis as people enter countries illegally. But with North Korea and the United States, normal has rarely been the norm.

In December, at the direction of Secretary of State Pompeo, the United States, working together with humanitarian aid groups operating in North Korea, eased rules on the delivery of legitimate humanitarian assistance to the people of North Korea. We are now making quick progress, clearing a backlog of approvals that had accumulated at the United Nations sanctions review committee. At the same time, with the confidence that we gained from the normal treatment of the U.S. citizen who illegally entered North Korea last fall, we have also more favorably reviewed requests for travel exemptions for American citizens for purposes of implementing and monitoring these humanitarian aid programs.

In another area of progress since the Singapore summit, the United States and North Korea have cooperated on the return of 55 sets of human remains believed to be those of Americans who fell in the Korean War on the battlefields of North Korea more than 60 years ago. The painstaking work of identifying those remains is under way by the Department of Defense. And just last week, we saw another set of remains confirmed and identified to be those of Frank Julius Suliman, age 20, from Nixon, New Jersey. Sergeant Suliman perished in North Korea in a POW camp at the age of 20 in the bloom of his life.

The Department of Defense is currently in discussion with the North Korean military on plans for ambitious recovery excavations at the site of some of the Korean War's bloodiest and most costly battles. With more than 5,000 fallen Americans still unaccounted for from the Korean War, President Trump is committed to press for closure for every American family. It is our hope that the progress in remains recovery will take us a step closer to finally healing the wounds of that terrible war.

On the Korean Peninsula, we are seeing a level of cooperation between the North and South that has been absent for a decade and a half and perhaps exceeds any undertaken in the past. In addition to multiple summits between the leaders of South and North Korea, dozens of inter-Korean projects have been undertaken, including people-to-people exchanges, humanitarian assistance, and major surveys of peninsular rail and road infrastructure that both advance and tantalize the potential for economic cooperation that would flow from denuclearization, the lifting of sanctions, and the establishment of a lasting peace on the Korean Peninsula.

The militaries of the North and South together, working through and with the United Nations Command and U.S. Forces Korea, have embarked upon a number of confidence and security building measures that have lowered the threat level and tensions at the Demilitarized Zone. And while there is still much that remains left to do, for the first time in my lifetime the Demilitarized Zone is actually being demilitarized.

I made my most recent visit to Panmunjom Village just before Christmas last year. It was quiet and peaceful, with the restoration of regular communications between the two sides of the border. Not a weapon was to be seen. Not even a sidearm. What an amazing difference from one year ago, when frontline troops on both sides were prepared for imminent conflict.

Last and most important, we've also made some progress on addressing the central issue of our diplomatic engagement: the final, fully verified denuclearization of North Korea. While we would want to be much farther along, and while – than where we currently are, we have made some progress over the last six months with expectations of more to come. It has been more than 400 days since North Korea has undertaken a provocative test of missiles or nuclear weapons. Over the past year, North Korea has taken preliminary steps to dismantle and destroy the test sites used for these missile and nuclear tests: Tongchang-ri and Punggye-ri.

At the last North-South summit in Pyongyang, Chairman Kim committed to allow access for international experts to verify the complete dismantlement and destruction of Tongchang-ri. During the Secretary of State's October meetings in Pyongyang, Chairman Kim likewise committed to invite American experts to ensure the complete destruction of Punggye-ri.

While these sites are not critical parts of the current North Korean missile or nuclear programs, after an interlude of 10 years in which no international inspections of any kind have occurred, they represent a step in the right direction for our two countries to renew cooperation on the steps necessary to give confidence to the process of denuclearization. We will soon be in discussion with our North Korean counterparts on the modalities to follow through on Chairman Kim's commitment for both of these sites.

In addition to the commitments on Tongchang-ri and Punggye-ri, Chairman Kim also committed, in both the joint statement from the aforementioned Pyongyang summit as well as during the Secretary of State's October meetings in Pyongyang, to the dismantlement and destruction of North Korea's plutonium and uranium enrichment facilities. This complex of sites that extends beyond Yongbyon represents the totality of North Korea's plutonium reprocessing and uranium enrichment programs.

Chairman Kim qualified next steps on North Korea's plutonium and uranium enrichment facilities upon the United States taking corresponding measures. Exactly what these measures are are a matter I plan to discuss with my North Korean counterpart during our next set of meetings. From our side, we are prepared to discuss many actions that could help build trust between our two countries and advance further progress in parallel on the Singapore summit objectives of transforming relations, establishing a permanent peace regime on the peninsula, and complete denuclearization.

Finally and importantly, in describing to us their commitment to dismantle and destroy their plutonium and uranium enrichment facilities, the North Koreans have also added the critical words "and more." This is essential, as there is more – much more – to do beyond these facilities to follow through on the Singapore summit commitment to complete denuclearization.

Before the process of denuclearization can be final, we must also have a complete understanding of the full extent of the North Korean weapons of mass destruction missile programs. We will get that at some point through a comprehensive declaration. We must reach agreement on expert access and monitoring mechanisms of key sites to international standards. And ultimately, we need to ensure the removal and destruction of stockpiles of fissile material, weapons, missiles, launchers, and other weapons of mass destruction.

All of this must be addressed in a roadmap of working-level negotiations that will be essential if we are to put in place the necessary conditions to fundamentally transform U.S.-North Korean relations and establish a peace – a permanent peace – on the Korean Peninsula. And President Trump has made clear that should North Korea follow through on Chairman Kim's commitment to complete denuclearization, the United States will in return exceed anything previously thought possible.

So, with the progress made so far, what remains is where we go next. As I have mentioned, President Trump and Chairman Kim will meet at a second summit at the end of February. President Trump has made clear both to North Korea as well as to our team that he expects significant and verifiable progress on denuclearization, actions that are bold and real, to emerge from that next summit.

We expect to hold working-level negotiations with our North Korean counterparts in advance of the summit, with the intention of achieving a set of concrete deliverables, a roadmap of negotiations, and declaration – a roadmap of negotiations and declarations going forward, and a shared understanding of the desired outcomes of our joint efforts. We have that responsibility to our two leaders, who laid out a bold vision when they met in Singapore last year. We also have that responsibility to the people of the Korean Peninsula.

When President Trump met with Chairman Kim in Singapore, he showed him a vision of what robust economic development could mean for North Korea. This bright future, driven by investment, external engagement, and trade and built with the incredible resources of the Korean Peninsula is also part of our strategy to plan for success. At the appropriate time, with the completion of denuclearization, we are prepared to explore with North Korea and many other countries the best way to mobilize investment, improve infrastructure, enhance food security, and drive a level of economic engagement that will allow the North Korean people to fully share in the rich future of their Asian neighbors. This prosperity, along with the denuclearization and peace, lies at the core of President Trump's vision for U.S.-North Korea relations.

Much has transpired over the past two years between the United States and North Korea. Much has transpired since the Singapore summit. Much has transpired in just the past month, and much has yet to happen. I think it's fair to say that we have more work ahead of us than we do behind us.

As I have mentioned already, United States policy toward North Korea stands on the foundation of final, fully verified denuclearization. This means the elimination of all weapons of mass destruction, their means of delivery, and the means to produce them. But I also want to say again, emphatically, that President Trump's vision is also much, much more, including, as outlined in Singapore last summer, the transformation of U.S.-North Korea relations and the establishment of a permanent peace on the Korean Peninsula. The President believes in a bright and more secure future for all the people of the Korean Peninsula, in Northeast Asia, and the world.

It is a cliché to say that failure is not an option, but that suggests that failure is a choice rather than a consequence. I have intentionally not focused on the many ways that this could all fail. As the diplomatic record of the past 25 years shows, they are too numerous to count. We need to have contingencies if the diplomatic process fails, which we do. But if we are to avoid failure, it will take the United States, North Korea, and many other nations to make the affirmative choice for a transformed and peaceful Korean Peninsula. The United States has made that choice.

It is the promise of closing the door on 70 years of war and hostility on the Korean Peninsula that led President Trump to Singapore last year. His relentless pursuit of that goal has created the space to achieve everything I've discussed today. Now is the opportunity. Now is the moment. The United States is ready to turn the vision outlined by President Trump and Chairman Kim at Singapore into reality. Thank you