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*Rethinking Future Environments
and Strategic Challenges*



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Rethinking North Korea Policy Options

Notes:

1. Below are informal notes of the speaker's remarks as taken by a JHU/APL staff member.
2. The speaker used a set of detailed slides that are available in the *Video Archives* of www.jhuapl.edu/rethinking.
3. Links to the video, audio, and presentation files from other Seminars can also be found on the *Video Archives*, *Past Series*, and *Speakers* pages of the website. Videos from recent years may be found on the [JHU/APL YouTube Playlist](#).

Introduction

Ambassador DeThomas began by noting that he had rewritten his accompanying slides three or four times in the last month, given the on-going changes in the situation with North Korea, the Democratic Peoples' Republic of Korea (the DPRK.) He also explained that he had served at the State Department on the Korea issue from the Reagan through the Obama administrations. He did see himself to the right of most of the current State Department officials on the DPRK issue and far to the left of the current National Security Advisor. While he doesn't believe just being nice to the N. Koreans will work, he does believe that diplomacy is important here.

Understanding North Korea's Current Peace Offensive

- The Problem: the DPRK now has ICBMs that can hit the continental US
 - They have been working toward this for decades and they now seem to be there
 - There are some questions about the viability of the reentry vehicles but may be months away from solving those issues
 - Bottom line: the DPRK is now reaching the culmination of its nuclear weapons program, which we have been aware of for 30 years
- N. Korea's nuclear weapons program:
 - *Six nuclear tests* have been held indicating they probably do have a thermo-nuclear device with about a 150-200 kiloton yield
 - *25-60 nuclear weapons* with this wide range indicating how much we don't know about their program
 - *1,000 shorter range missiles*, which were designed to deliver Soviet-made nuclear weapons that could reach S. Korea or Japan
- As important as the numbers are is the diplomatic / geo-strategic situation
- There is no need to worry that the N. Korean regime is not rational enough to worry about its own survival and would one day wake and decide to nuke Washington
 - DeThomas' analysis won't take him there; however, some people do believe this is possible

- The more rational problems to consider are:
 - *Decoupling* Will our alliances function if the US is at risk?
 - We went through considering this problem with Europe from the 1950s-1970s
 - Could the US be decoupled from its alliances when US cities are at risk?
 - *Nuclear decoupling* What would happen if our allies no longer believed in the US nuclear umbrella or that the US no longer wanted to take the risk?
 - If our allies develop their own nuclear programs, it wouldn't be a total disaster
 - However, having a nuclear Japan and a resurgent China without a US presence in the area would not be a good situation
 - *Trade goods* Would the N. Koreans take the opportunity to sell their surplus nuclear devices or materials to a customer list we would not appreciate?
- Strategic bottom line:
 - We are having problems today because the DPRK has been making political decisions about nuclear weapons over decades but particularly in the last few years
 - They have now upset the nuclear applectart by trying to develop nuclear weapons that can reach the US
 - The Korean peninsula has had 65 years of an ugly, but stable peace, which is better than a pretty war
 - There was mutual deterrence there even without nuclear weapons
 - Significant portions of S. Korea's population and economy can easily be held hostage with N. Korea's old artillery troops, chem/bio weapons, etc.
 - S. Korea and the US can do little to threaten the DPRK because of the likely high cost of winning, which would result in a failed the DPRK and a devastated S. Korea
 - the DPRK has now destabilized the situation given this hostage-taking maneuver of threatening US cities
 - We would have had a nuclear-related crisis with the DPRK today even if Hillary Clinton had won the election
 - The Clinton campaign saw this as the likely next crisis point in foreign affairs, believing that we would have to act before the DPRK got its ICBM
 - This is not an evil Trump plan – it is a problem built into the strategy equation

Accepting a Nuclear North Korea

- We have basically been accepting the concept since at least 1994 and certainly after 2006
 - The US did not react to any of N. Korea's nuclear advances in all that time
- What we can't accept, according to the Trump administration, is a nuclear the DPRK that can target the continental US
 - When we are sure the DPRK could finally do that, it will be a big trigger moment for war
 - This is not to say whether this is a correct or wise answer since there are alternatives to going to war before that happens
 - The unacceptable development the ICBM that could hit the US could become the proximate cause of war
- America's transitioning from one administration and one party to another adds to the confusion of the situation which then requires relying heavily on ideological speculation
 - We are still ignorant about the thinking of the leadership and the facts on the ground
 - We maybe more ignorant about the DPRK than any other country – similar to our ignorance about China in the 1960s or the Soviet Union in the 1950s
 - To fill in these vast gaps we turn to ideological speculation, which did not work well in the case of Iraq and so we should be humble about our assumptions
- There need to be different policies depending on whether the N. Koreans are:
 - Crazy and violent?

- Rational and defensive?
- Just extortionate?
 - Many senior government officials over the years operated on the belief that the DPRK had a nuclear program simply to get a big payoff from the US
 - They were looking for the price point that the DPRK would allow us to buy their nuclear weapons
 - However, this is not a valid concept, at least not since 2002
- Different administrations have assumed different purposes behind N. Korean behaviors and have acted accordingly even though the assumptions were not always validated
 - If you have Purpose A, then you will need to deal with this threat; if it is Purpose B then you'll need to deal with that threat

DeThomas' View of N. Korea

- We are dealing with a dynastic rational actor
 - By their thinking, Kim Jong Un is rational but in the wrong century and political context
 - We would do better if we treated Kim like a Czar Ivan in the 16th century or Louis XIV in the 17th, or a Chinese emperor of many eras
 - It is a dynasty trying to ensure its security
 - We must see N. Korea as an extension of the dynasty, not the other way around
 - This resembles Louis XIV saying "I am the State"
 - What is important is the ruling family and its security and interests, which tend to be similar to the national interests
 - We can't analyze the DPRK like a fascist dictatorship of the 1930s or even worse, a liberal democracy of the 1990s because we will get the wrong answer
 - The DPRK is a rational dynastic family business and must be dealt with that way
- The DPRK has developed a hostile environment for anything outside its borders and it should be recognized that:
 - N. Korean propaganda told the people that American soldiers ate babies
 - All the outside players in the Six-Party Talks have invaded, colonized, or dominated the Korean people at some point in history
 - This view drives a lot of their analysis and diplomacy
- Lessons the DPRK has seen in recent history:
 - When the DPRK thinks about how to handle the US, they look at how the US has handled dictators recently:
 - Headline from Iraq that reported the end of Saddam's regime with "We got him!"
 - Gaddafi gave up his nuclear weapons and then died in a ditch
 - As a dynasty, the DPRK takes this sort of behavior very personally
 - These events are driving their thinking and their nuclear deterrence program now
 - We can't correct history for them
- The N. Koreans see a generally hostile force with a predilection for lynching leaders like theirs so they need a big life insurance policy
 - They have chosen a nuclear way to cope with the rest of the world, which is rational
 - They want to make the price too high for anyone, even someone as powerful as the US, to consider taking them out
 - Given what happened to Saddam and Gaddafi, the DPRK determined that price would have be the American homeland – a lesson from nuclear deterrence 101
- Problem: The DPRK in the last few years under Kim Jong Un has raced to get to that deterrence but this will also get them to the one way that would prompt the US to conduct a preemptive war
 - This would closely resemble the WWI situation where the Great Powers while trying to preserve their security, do the very thing that destroys it

- Plus, we have been accelerating the collapse of stability
- The DPRK uses the Vince Lombardi diplomatic approach – have only a few plays but do them very well and continue to use them
 - The DPRK has a very thin diplomatic playbook
 - Rather like a dog that only has 3 tricks – Roll over, play dead, shake hands
 - No matter what you say it will only use those 3 tricks over and over again
 - However, they do them very well and they keep doing them using very experienced negotiators
- The DPRK begins negotiations with the two same assumptions:
 - Everyone around the DPRK is richer than they are and they are all hostile to N. Korea
 - N. Korea's military is strong enough to make any war unpleasant
 - The US has made it clear that we don't have the stomach for the likely casualties given that all we get out of a war would be a failed state on the peninsula
- The DPRK has two objectives in negotiations that they use over and over
 - Never let all the powers involved coalesce on one policy
 - To be viable, always have at least one diplomatic sugar daddy since the DPRK has never been good at building an economy but it is good at accepting resources from others
 - Their high point came in the Sino-Soviet split era when they could let China and the Soviet Union compete in economic and military aid in order to deter the US
- After the Cold War ended and the DPRK got past 1994, China, Japan, S. Korea and the US alternated between being the bad guy ready to go to war and being the sugar daddy
 - It was a good policy for a weak party
 - The DPRK also maintains a 360-degree snarl – they are mean even in negotiations and threaten everyone
 - Basically, the DPRK uses the cornered dog attitude when faced with 4 other bigger dogs snarling and snapping at the others to keep them at bay
 - They use violent incidents, actions just at the edge of war, and provocations to keep the others off balance fearing the start of a high-cost conflict
 - These are rational acts by people who want to look crazy, and that behavior permits them to retain initiative
- Bottom line: the DPRK dances up to the edge of the cliff and then pirouettes
 - This presumes that they can always calculate exactly where the edge is, which is worrisome
 - the DPRK tends to look for a high-level mechanism to rescue the situation
 - In 1994, that mechanism was a visit by former President Jimmy Carter
 - The US was getting ready to evacuate dependents from S. Korea for fear that the US would need to make a strike on the DPRK nuclear program
 - Doing so also could have been a starting gun for war because the DPRK would be able to see that happening and would know what it meant
 - DeThomas was in the meeting about pulling out the dependents when the call came in about Carter going to N. Korea
 - It wasn't clear whether that would be a good thing or not
 - Once a high-level very visible mechanism comes into play, then the N. Koreans can trade on the sense of relief and use it for a lubricant to negotiations
 - This is N. Korea's whole playbook
 - Problem: This is a very effective playbook but then the creativity must come from the US or S. Korea
 - You have to admire the N. Koreans' tactics but strategically, this is a disaster

N. Korea's Errors

- Kim Jong Un is a young man with a different agenda than that of his father and grandfather, and he was in too much of a hurry so he tried to do too much too soon
 - He diverted from the playbook
 - Result: He simultaneously alienated all of the players
- Kim's errors included:
 - Creating military provocations against S. Korea, thereby drying up a lucrative source of humanitarian aid
 - Speeding up his nuclear and missile testing trying to rush development to make a nuclear deterrent against the US as an accomplished fact
 - He may have seen elections in the US and S. Korea as a useful gap in attention
 - Instead, his advances freaked out both S. Korea and the US
 - Refusing to show deference toward China, which may have been his worst move
 - The Chinese have had no respect for him either and call him *Fatty Kim*
 - As the major power in the region China has more latitude plus China's interests had diverged from N. Korea's especially in relations with the US
- Result: The US was given the opportunity to exert maximum pressure on N. Korea

The Sanctions

- DeThomas never believed that sanctions would get us as far as we have gotten and we would not have until China was willing to go along with the sanctions
 - This is a huge success for the Trump Administration, but it happened because Kim forgot one of the principles in his playbook
- March 2016 was the start of the first UN resolution to target the general economy of N. Korea
 - This was more of a signal than a blow because China amended it so that they could do whatever they wanted
- The new 2017 sanctions were more serious since China agreed to interpret the resolution to the letter thereby hitting the general economy
 - It was the beginning of economic war – not just sanctions
 - The idea was to bend Kim to their will using economic forces
 - This was Clausewitz but with decimal points
 - That war has started to turn in the favor of the UN, the US, and the allies
- By the 4th Quarter of 2017 we were beginning to see a big drop in N. Korea's exports
 - The DPRK has only a small foreign trade but it is always desperate for foreign exchange
 - A lot of the urban economy is dollarized so they see it operating and the need for foreign exchange
 - When the sources of foreign exchange dry up, they will feel the benefits of it
- Sanctions had been operating under a post-Iraq philosophy from 2006-2016
 - This philosophy resulted from the aftermath of the vicious sanctions we imposed on Iraq that crushed their middle class but didn't touch Saddam after the first Gulf War
 - In reactions to the problems that were created, the concept was to go after the bad leaders and leave the general population alone
- The 2006-2016 sanctions didn't work with a regime like Kim's because of the very narrow elite
 - The regime could shift resources around internally and it was repressive enough that there would be no political impact
 - Result: Kim could transfer the pain away from the elite and to the general population
- Bottom line: We had to return to the older style of sanctions against the whole economy
 - However, no one really knows how bad things are for the N. Korean people or how close they are to collapse because we don't know:
 - How big a foreign exchange cushion Kim has to protect his regime

- How much the DPRK is getting under the table from illicit activities
- If we go with the high-end estimates and say that they have a \$5B cushion, we can assume that it won't take long before they eat through that and won't be able to import oil
- Problem: Too many unknowns exist to know how close that point is, but we can be sure that the N. Korean leadership knows that it could reach that point

Kim's Peace Offensive

- Sanctions are one of the big reasons why we are now seeing this peace offensive, which started on January 1, 2018 – Kim Jong Un's New Year's speech
 - It was another pirouette away from the edge of the cliff
 - At the end of 2017, DeThomas thought the probability of war was at least 50% since we were sliding down a slope and he saw no way off that slope
 - He would revise those numbers today – at least for the moment – because of that pirouette and their high-level diplomacy with S. Korea, which is now expanding
- Kim hasn't had an epiphany about his methods nor is he so far gone that he has no choice
 - He is simply going back to the old playbook
 - He began by identifying the weak points for each of the players in the coalition and then began dealing with each of them separately
- *S. Korea* – the weakest link (but not necessarily weak or wrong)
 - They have strongest reasons not to go full bore on the maximum pressure policy besides the fact they would have so much to lose in any war
 - Unique to this year was the Winter Olympics that the South desperately wanted to go smoothly, and was not being helped by the nuclear cloud hanging over the peninsula
 - The South very much wanted the North to participate to project the spirit of unity
 - N. Korea's participation, including the much appreciated attendance of Kim's sister, was a very well done diplomatic move
 - S. Korea's President Moon came into office with a sunshine policy and desperately wanting engagement with the North
 - However, the South Koreans are still doing what is expected with the sanctions
 - It was another smart move on the North's part to start their charm offensive with the South
- *The US* – doubtful that the DPRK thought it could get a summit with the US
 - S. Korea must have told the DPRK that they would have to do something about the nuclear issue otherwise the US would have pulled them back from engaging
 - As a result, Kim probably provided them the talking point that he would be happy to talk to Trump about denuclearization of the entire peninsula
 - Diplomats who have worked on Korean issues know that this does not mean Kim is willing to let go of his nuclear weapons
 - S. Korean diplomats then went to the White House and briefed President Trump about their meeting with Kim
 - Any other administration probably would have told them that the US would take it under consideration, which would then grind it down to diplomatic dust
 - President Trump surprised them when he said he was happy to take a such meeting and happy that they stood on his lawn to announce meeting plans
 - It isn't clear why Trump said yes:
 - He saw an opportunity to make history?
 - He thought he could make a good deal because the DPRK was over a barrel?
 - He feared S. Korea would go off on its own to make agreements without the US?
 - This is an unprecedented development

- There were years of diplomatic efforts to get a summit between Clinton and Kim Jong Il, but those negotiations got nowhere
 - And this time all it took was a talking point
- *China* – freaked out about the idea of a Trump summit because they feared a loss of leadership
 - China was willing to go along with the maximum pressure effort because they were willing to accept the 3rd worst outcome
 1. Worst: a second Korean War on their border with unknown consequences for them in dealing with the US
 2. Second worst: the failure of an East Asian Communist regime on their border
 3. Third worst: acceptance of a nuclear N. Korea
 - China feared that Trump could create outcome #1 and outcome #2 so it wanted to stay with the maximum pressure box to avoid those two options
 - China paid a big diplomatic price for this – loss of leadership
 - China never had the magic wand that three previous administrations believed it had and now if has given that up entirely handing Trump its proxy in 2017
 - The Chinese were horrified by the idea of a Trump summit so they rushed to have a summit of their own with Kim, which included an unusual communique that:
 - Emphasized the China / DPRK solidarity that has extended over 3 generations of Kims
 - Basically, reminded Kim that he belongs to them and that he should show them more respect from now on
 - We don't know if China twisted Kim's arm or bribed him to get him to their summit
 - The deal may have related to allowing N. Korean workers to once again get work permits for China, which would bring them back to a looser version of sanctions
 - Opens up a huge window for N. Korea's economy since about 80-90% of N. Korea's foreign exchange comes from China
- *Japan* – wants Trump to continue to take a hard line
 - Japan pushed the concept of the DPRK being a threat because it hoped to force changes in its constitution and to try to manage Trump
 - Japan is scrambling for their own summit with N. Korea
- Kim's successful return to his playbook
 - He divided his opponents and arranged 4 summits and is the only person in all 4
 - He is running the agenda now and can focus on the weak point of the other side
 - Basically, he is in charge
 - He is now separating the coalition members instead of in the Six-Party Talks when five others ganged up against him
 - No one is talking about preemptive war anymore with 4 summits going on
 - Because of the summits, there will be an effort not to ruin the mood with more sanctions
 - As a “medium-hard liner”, DeThomas said that he may not like that since he thought for awhile that he finally had some leverage against N. Korea

What Will Kim Do with This Success?

- No one can predict what will happen next, but we do know that the new National Security Advisor John Bolton, a hard-liner, will be at the summit supporting Trump
 - Bolton will likely look to the Libya situation, in which terrorism sanctions and fear of being “next” after the fall of Saddam caused Gaddafi to give up his nuclear weapons
 - The nuclear weapons weren't working for him anyway and he wanted to get out from under sanctions
 - Bolton was part of the program in which Libya handed over to the US all his nuclear materials

- Bottom line: This is what the US means by denuclearization
- We can be sure that Kim has a different definition of denuclearization
 - At best, Kim's definition would be something like what US diplomats called a long-term normalization process – a long-term political, security, and economic process
 - In that process relations are normalized and in the course of that process, we can resolve the nuclear issues
 - Resolving these issues may be something more like arms control negotiations rather than denuclearization
 - Without a huge change in our relationship to N. Korea, it is very unlikely that the DPRK would give up its nuclear weapons
 - The concept of denuclearization is unlikely to survive the Trump-Kim summit
- Of greatest concern, we don't know what would happen on the day after such a summit, but other concerns include:
 - *S. Korea* – Under George W. Bush, S. Korea had very different views than those of the US, since the US believed in pressuring the DPRK when the ROK wanted to engage
 - Will Kim play the US as the bad guy and give S. Korea what they want?
 - *China* – What will it do with sanctions enforcement, since without their cooperation we lose leverage over N. Korea?
 - China could also suddenly decide to take on the US in a trade war
 - Will China give up on sanctions now that the DPRK is paying the proper respect to it?

Thin Ray of Optimism: How the Summit Could Go Right

- Example: The Reagan-Gorbachev Summit at Reykjavik was only supposed to be a get acquainted meeting with the new Russian president at a time when relations were horrible
 - Reagan was considered a not well-informed president but with great instincts
 - There had already been a couple of very close calls that could have led to war immediately before this summit
- Discussions were only to be about setting up some chemistry and building an environment for a real summit in Washington
 - However, Reagan and Gorbachev suddenly decided they wanted to make history
 - The unbriefed President was sitting with Gorbachev and the discussion went from discussing one weapons class to the idea of getting rid of all nuclear weapons
 - Their teams were put to work
- Their very serious arms control discussion failed at the last minute because Reagan wouldn't agree to confine his SDI (the Strategic Defense Initiative or *Starwars*) to the lab
- Although it was called a failed summit, looking back we can now see that:
 - Each side realized that it could work with the other
 - All the discussions including the concessions Gorbachev agreed to were on the record which subsequently allowed negotiators to develop two major arms control regimes
- Bottom line: If the Trump/Kim summit goes right, it probably wouldn't denuclearize the DPRK but it could change the environment radically

There Are Reasons Not to Want too Much of a Deal

- We don't want a complete verifiable, non-reversible disarmament treaty now because it would fail even if the DPRK is sincere about it
 - We must always expect them to cheat and we currently don't have a way to verify it
 - Problem: The amount of plutonium needed for a weapon could fit in a shielded container the size of a 6-pack – easily hidden in a country where we have few intelligence sources

- Given what we already know we can't find, we won't be able to find what we would need to see to verify N. Korea's behavior, as seen in these examples:
 - 2010 – The DPRK showed off its nuclear enrichment plant, which was the first time we knew where it was
 - We didn't know it was at that location even though inspectors had been there
 - We have no idea whether or not they have another such plant
 - Half of their nuclear program is invisible to us
 - 1990s – We demanded access to a suspect site where we thought something bad was being hidden underground
 - After months of negotiation, an investigating team was allowed in, but they determined that it had never been a nuclear site
 - This was a case of a false positive but it is worrisome that the US made policy on the basis of a false positive
 - Bottom line: An agreement signed in the near future would fall apart even if they did not cheat because there would always be accusations about cheating
- We want denuclearization to be out there as a goal – maybe in 10 years, maybe in a generation – when conditions are different
- Today we want stabilization, which means:
 - Putting the ICBM program in a box with at least no testing or deployment, thus removing the proximate cause of war
 - Developing procedures designed to reduce the risk of accidental nuclear war
 - Given its limitations, the DPRK would have to go nuclear first and early since they couldn't ride out a US attack
 - We must find ways to reduce their incentive to do so as well as reducing the incentive for the US to misinterpret what the N. Koreans are doing
 - We could start with simple things like limiting where they test their missiles – (e.g., not toward Guam); requiring them to announce tests beforehand; hot lines; etc.
 - The US may need to cut back on some of its symbolic gestures such as deploying B-1s near their airspace
- Moving on to harder goals, we should go after stopping their production of highly enriched uranium, plutonium, or any other fissile materials
 - However, we do know how to verify that
- Our first level problem is determining what they have produced and where they have produced it to get it stopped
 - Eventually, we will want to dismantle the facilities
- Bottom line: We want to stop the program from growing so that it doesn't reach the level of 100 to 200 weapons

QUESTIONS & ANSWERS

Re: N. Korea's Plans

- Part of N. Korea's timing of this current initiative was an effort to wait out the US
 - They were not just waiting for a new administration
 - They were also buying time to complete their nuclear development
- N. Koreans think that someday the US will wake up and switch sides
 - They think they are "a lot prettier" than S. Korea
 - They are self-delusional to think we will see how wonderful they are
- The waiting is good for US interests

- If this doesn't work, we still can grind away with diplomacy, containment, deterrence, and sanctions (if we can maintain them)
- History is on our side
 - In 15 years the US will be here, but can the DPRK say the same?

Re: S. Koreans' Attitudes about N. Korea

- South Koreans may not want to fight the DPRK because they believe that their neighbor is not so bad and there is a basic wish to move them toward unification because they are all one people
- It is not clear how much Kim is banking on the good will of the South even though they have a small group that closely monitors what is going on in the South
- The DPRK may not fully understand what it is like in a free society
 - The DPRK hated the switch in focus when the US went from the Clinton to the Bush administration
 - DPRK negotiators tried to lecture DeThomas that such switches should never happen

Re: Help for N. Korea's Nuclear Program from Russia and Pakistan

- Pakistan did a great deal of damage during the A.Q. Kahn era selling equipment designed to enrich uranium, however, it is no longer a significant player in this field
 - Pakistan would have no effect on the current initiative except as an example for the N. Koreans
 - Pakistan did everything that the N. Koreans are doing and then the US gave them billions of dollars and now they are considered "allies"
 - So, if we North Koreans just ride this out, we'll do fine
- Russia has not been a big player for years since they gave up on communism
 - However, it appears that someone gave the DPRK Russian designs for their ICBMs, which may be why the DPRK is now doing so well with the program
 - Russia has been active recently with economic development projects in the DPRK and meetings with officials
 - Russia could become a bad spoiler in the summit negotiations but there appears to be less of a chance than last year
 - Putin's general foreign policy is always looking for ways to damage the US, so he could have broken sanctions for that reason
 - Chances of that may be less now with a summit on the horizon
 - Russia currently defers to China about the DPRK while China defers to Russia about Iran

Re: US Reassurance to Allies over Decoupling

- The US should always start by trying to make its deterrent in the region creditable
 - Six months ago, the US tried to show S. Korea and Japan that we are in this by sending in new deployments to the region and not just something symbolic
 - Now is not the time to add more
- Six months ago as things got bad, DeThomas was prepared to consider drastic concept such as reintroducing tactical nuclear weapons to the peninsula
 - Basically, it would have been a very bad idea for stability, etc.
 - However, saying that we would do it and then trading it away would have been useful
 - All major military changes would take a long time to plan and do, however, an announcement of a change could go out at any time
 - Even that would reassure allies and it would give us something we could trade away that the DPRK worries about
- We must identify what the DPRK fears most and tell them that will be on the negotiating table along with their ICBMs

- During IMF negotiations in the Carter and Reagan administrations, we started to deploy forces the Soviets feared but openly said we would trade them away for the right deal
- To reassure its allies the US needs to keep talking and consulting with them as it negotiates with the N. Koreans
 - We need to identify the deployments that will shore up deterrence, which will be tougher now that we have summitry going on

Re: N. Korea's Continuing Odd Behaviors

- Kim had to be in on the plans to kill his half-brother
- Rogue elements aren't very likely in the DPRK so they must assume all these incidents are government efforts
- These aggressive behaviors go all the way back to the USS PUEBLO incident
 - They think it is acceptable to continue doing such things since they have never really faced any significant consequences
 - It has been frustrating that we have not had any way to develop a consequence that would show them that such behavior is stupid without starting a general war
- That S. Korea has almost gone on autopilot about the provocations they have faced recently is worrisome
 - S. Korea could respond too strongly to an incident creating another Archduke Ferdinand situation and starting a new world war without US input
- The provocations have dropped off somewhat now that we are talking about negotiations
 - The DPRK knows when to pull back and make nice

Re: Potential N. Korean Use of Nuclear Weapons

- Nuclear weapons are instruments of influence over behavior
 - They tend to reduce the willingness of major powers to go after those who have them
 - They could be used for coercion
 - Example: Pakistan just after it tested its nuclear weapons suddenly felt safe for state-sponsored terrorism and low-level, cross-border attacks against India
 - India couldn't respond because if they did, things would go nuclear
- North Korea may now believe that it had made the world safe for much worse provocations
- The taboo about the use of nuclear weapons has grown stronger every year since 1945
 - DeThomas now worries about the breaking of the nuclear taboo and not necessarily by N. Korea
 - If the President decided we needed to eliminate N. Korea's nuclear weapons, the question would be how much of the US strategic forces would he be willing to put into the effort
 - It would need to be relatively cost free to our allies and our own forces
 - It would need to involve a first strike and it would have to be big
- However, do we want to live in the world that comes after that strike
 - The Chinese would mobilize
 - The Russians would go crazy
 - Others would suddenly think that nuclear weapons are now also for winning wars so they want some of them
 - Bottom line: A very ugly world
- DeThomas is almost more worried about the US breaking the nuclear taboo
 - However, he can't see a scenario where the DPRK wouldn't go nuclear very early in any conflict because if they don't use them, they would certainly lose their nuclear weapons
 - This would be the equivalent of the early Cold War conditions of unstable deterrence since a vulnerable nuclear force is one that has to be used early

Re: Underestimating N. Korea

- We could mis-estimate the DPRK rather than underestimating them
 - We just don't have enough intelligence on them to get our diplomacy right
 - We have done a great job at deterring them and turning the strategic tables on them
 - In the 1950s, North Korea was the prosperous side of the border
 - History is on our side but we have been out-maneuvered tactically
- We need to think like a North Korean
 - They use Roadrunner diplomacy while we are Wylie Coyote
 - It is hard to figure out how they are still there and even though they really did fail in the 1990s
 - We underestimated them

Re: Denuclearization

- We didn't use the word through most of the 1990s
 - We discussed normalization – controlling, dismantling, freezing the nuclear program
- The term did come up during the George H.W. Bush administration in an effort to cut the program off at the pass
 - The concept was that we would remove our tactical nuclear weapons and the DPRK would not get nuclear weapons nor the means to get them
- The denuclearization term has recently reappeared on the N. Korean side as part of a normalization process
 - Their view has a major political component also
 - The US view involves complete, verifiable and irreversible disarmament (CVID)
- Administrations from George W. Bush through Trump have more often used the term CVID
 - Korea analysts tend to think of denuclearization as not just getting rid of nuclear weapons but also including a political component such as a Korean War peace treaty, a change to something about our alliance, etc.