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Thank you, Mr. Chairman, and distinguished members of the Subcommittee:

I am honored to have this opportunity to present my views on how best to address North Korea's rapidly growing nuclear threat.

I. Pan-Korean Contest for Legitimacy

Applying the adage that "All politics is local" to the Korean peninsula, one finds two Korean states, each claiming to be the sole legitimate one representing the entire people on the peninsula and adjacent islands, embroiled in a seven decades-old existential contest for legitimacy. In this systemic contest the Democratic People's Republic of Korea (DPRK) lags far behind the Republic of Korea (ROK) in all but one indices of measuring state power—military power.

By all other measurements—economic power, political culture, soft power, population size—the ROK clearly is the superior Korean state. South Korea is at least 50 times richer than the North. Such a stark wealth disparity between two neighboring states joined contiguously by land is a globally unique phenomenon. The gap, which each year grows wider, has grave implications for the inferior Korea.

The richer Korea, as a free and open democracy, is a magnet to the long-oppressed people of the North. More than 34,000 North Koreans have risked their lives to escape their land of misery and resettle in the favored Korean land of liberty and prosperity. In fact, as President Donald Trump, in his address to the South Korean national assembly in November 2017 aptly put it, "[T]he very existence of a thriving South Korean republic threatens the very survival of the North Korean dictatorship."¹

¹ "Trump's speech to the South Korean National Assembly," *CNN*, November 7, 2017.
<<https://www.cnn.com/2017/11/07/politics/south-korea-trump-speech-full/index.html>>.

That is why, from the DPRK leaders' vantage point, the ROK must be censored, intimidated, blackmailed and, one glorious day, incorporated into the DPRK. Completing the unfinished job, or, as the DPRK Constitution states, the "supreme national task" of Korean reunification that Kim Jong Un's grandfather, Kim Il Sung, attempted by war in June 1950 is for the current supreme leader of the despotic dynasty a non-negotiable proposition. It is not a mere "fancy" or "slogan," but instead the very *raison d'être* of the North Korean state, party, and the supreme dictator himself.

II. North Korea's Nuclear Threats

Today, North Korea's security threat to the South, the region, and even to the continental United States is higher than any time since the early stage of the Korean War. In April alone Kim Jong Un and his sister, Kim Yo Jong, have issued threats of preemptive nuclear destruction on the South. In her April 4 written statement, the First Sister of North Korea threatened that her nation's "nuclear combat force" will visit upon the South "a miserable fate little short of total destruction and ruin." She added, "This is not just a threat."²

Kim Jong Un, during the April 25 military parade marking the 90th anniversary of the founding of the so-called Korean People's Revolutionary Army, stated, "[O]ur nukes can never be confined to the single mission of war deterrent even at a time when a situation we are not desirous of at all is created on this land...If any forces try to violate the fundamental interests of our state, our nuclear forces will have to decisively accomplish its unexpected second mission."³

The Kim siblings appear to be taking a page out of Vladimir Putin's playbook in trying to routinize threats of nuclear attack as a new fact of life. Through repeated threats of nuclear annihilation supported by tests of intercontinental ballistic missiles (ICBM) and nuclear devices the Kims' threats may in time come to be normalized. To the North's leader, his own repeated threats may even become a tempting option. At the very least, he will continue to conduct ICBM and nuclear tests while justifying them as a defensive response to "hostile policy" and "violation of the fundamental interests" of his state.

As a result, the security situation in the region today is perhaps the most volatile as in the days of the Korean War, the thousands of skirmishes since the 1953 armistice notwithstanding. The Ukraine tragedy prompts Pyongyang to be more adventurous. In the coming weeks, there will be more provocative weapons tests and perhaps even controlled lethal attacks on the South. With each provocation, Pyongyang will threaten to escalate with nuclear attacks even in the event of a non-lethal response by Seoul and Washington. Pyongyang considers even non-lethal

² "Press Statement of Vice Department Director of the Central Committee of the Workers' Party of Korea Kim Yo Jong," *Korean Central News Agency*, April 5, 2022 (signed on April 4, but released the next day).

³ Yi Wonju and Chae Yun-hwan, "N. Korean leader vows during military parade to strengthen nuclear power," *Yonhap News*, April 26, 2022. <<https://en.yna.co.kr/view/AEN20220426005300325?input=tw>>.

sanctions, human rights condemnation, and dissemination of information into North Korea as “anti-state acts” or “hostile policy.”⁴

III. South Korea under President Yoon Seok-Yul

The U.S.-ROK alliance and the U.S. Forces in Korea have kept the peace in the Korean peninsula since the 1953 Korean War Armistice. During the past 69 years of de facto peace—unstable but actual peace, one without war—South Korea has developed into the world’s tenth largest economy and a free democracy. The alliance has been repeatedly affirmed by combined military exercises and the credible commitment by the U.S. to defend South Korea against North Korea’s persisting aggression. However, today, the traditional rhetoric of “ironclad alliance” etc., in the face of North Korea’s direct nuclear threat, is insufficient. Both sides need to do more to preserve the peace in the region and beyond.

President Joe Biden will hold a summit meeting with the newly inaugurated President Yoon Seok-Yul in Seoul next week—on May 21. President Yoon will seek to reassure President Biden that he will strengthen the U.S.-ROK alliance, which has drifted over the past five years. Yoon will say that South Korea will play a more proactive role in deterring North Korea and participate in regional multilateral forums like the Quadrilateral Security Dialogue. In his February 8 *Foreign Affairs* article, Yoon wrote that South Korea under his leadership shall go beyond the hitherto “subservient” and parochial North Korea-specific policies and become a global state that “advances freedom, peace, and prosperity through liberal democratic values and substantial cooperation.” He also pledged South Korea’s participation in “trilateral security coordination with the United States and Japan.”⁵

The Yoon administration may in time broach the sensitive subject of redeploying U.S. tactical nukes in South Korea or, at the very least, deploying U.S. strategic assets on a rotational basis in South Korea and its vicinity. Seoul’s rationale will be that the status quo only emboldens North Korea to extort and bully the South, further tilting the revisionist Kim regime in the direction of gambling on a Russia-style invasion or launching a series of serious attacks. The cost of defending South Korea against the North’s nuclear-armed forces would be incalculably greater for both Seoul and Washington should Kim Jong Un gamble on Seoul’s capitulation in the wake of Pyongyang’s preemptive nuclear strike. Only a clear message of guaranteed nuclear counterattack will deter the North Korean despot, who values above all his own well-being and longevity.

⁴ North Korea enacted in 2020 the “Law on Rejecting Reactionary Ideology and Culture,” under which persons found to be consuming South Korean media may be imprisoned up to fifteen years and those found to have distributed such media may be punishable by death. Seulkee Jang, “Daily NK obtains materials explaining specifics of new ‘anti-reactionary thought law,’” Daily NK, January 19, 2021. <https://www.dailynk.com/english/exclusive-daily-nk-obtains-materials-explaining-specifics-new-anti-reactionary-thought-law/>.

⁵ Yoon Seok-yul, “South Korea Needs to Step Up,” *Foreign Affairs*, February 8, 2022. <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/south-korea/2022-02-08/south-korea-needs-step>.

Rather than rebuff Seoul's proposals for redeploying U.S. nuclear weapons in South Korea, the Biden administration should send engage its ally in such discussions and encourage Seoul to support U.S. interests in maintaining peace in the Taiwan Strait, freedom navigation in the East and South China Seas, and South Korea's active cooperation with Japan, Australia, New Zealand, Canada, the United Kingdom, and NATO. South Korea today, a wealthy nation that once was saved by the U.S.-led United Nations coalition in war, should be encouraged to contribute arms and greater humanitarian assistance to Ukraine. North Korea will take note of such a proactive and globally-engaged South Korea.

IV. Pyongyang's Carrot-and-Stick Strategy

In the coming weeks and months, North Korea will escalate. A nuclear test may take place as soon as sometime this month. In the past, North Korea has chosen its own and American holidays for such weapons tests. North Korea carried out its first-ever nuclear test on October 9, 2006, on the eve of Party Foundation Day, which happened to be Columbus Day weekend in the U.S. Earlier in the year, North Korea fired seven missiles in the afternoon of July Fourth in the U.S. east coast. In 2017, North Korea launched its first-ever ICBM on July Fourth, which, three years later the DPRK celebrated as the "July Fourth Revolution." North Korea also conducted its first hydrogen bomb test on September 9, 2017, National Foundation Day. In 2006, North Korea carried out its second nuclear test on May 25, which was Memorial Day in the U.S. This year, Memorial Day falls on May 30.

As in the past, after a period of provocations and weapons upgrading, the DPRK will revert to its well-honed, post-provocation peace ploy. Such a strategy has proven a most lucrative business model. Over the past 30 years, Pyongyang's stratagem of provocations-negotiations-reap concessions has won the despotic regime tens of billions of dollars in food, fuel, cash, and other blandishments. Kim Jong Un's coming out in 2018 was merely the fourth act in this long-running North Korean charade of dramatic image makeover and mood change. The U.S. must not fall for this game again. It must maintain financial pressure on Pyongyang even in the wake of the next overture by Kim Jong Un or his twisted sister.

At some point, North Korea is likely to conduct an atmospheric nuclear test. In September 2017, North Korea's Foreign Minister Ri Yong Ho, asked by reporters what Kim Jong Un had meant in his written statement threatening to "tame" President Trump "with fire," Mr. Ri speculated that Kim likely had in mind "an unprecedented scale hydrogen bomb over the Pacific Ocean."⁶ A missile borne-nuclear explosion in the skies or in outer space will create a stunning image and infuriate many. In its wake, the U.S. and South Korea must remain calm and not over-react. Rather, the two nations must galvanize the world to come together and impose on the Kim regime the kinds of biting sanctions on Russia in the aftermath of its invasion of Ukraine. U.S. sanctions on North Korea still remain lukewarm in degree and too few in kind. Above all, the U.S. and South Korea must not loosen sanctions at North Korea's next fake

⁶ Hyonhee Shin and Linda Sieg, "A North Korea nuclear test over the Pacific? Logical, terrifying," *Reuters*, September 22, 2017. <<https://www.reuters.com/article/us-northkorea-missiles-atmospheric-test/a-north-korea-nuclear-test-over-the-pacific-logical-terrifying-idUSKCN1BX0W5>>.

proposal for mutual disarmament talks, which is what Pyongyang has always meant by the phrase, “denuclearization of the Korean peninsula.”

V. Long-Term Public Diplomacy

The convergence of North Korea human rights priorities on the part of the Biden and Yoon administrations is a welcome development. President Yoon has vowed to call North Korea out on its manifold crimes against humanity. The Biden administration should lend support to such efforts and increase funding for radio broadcasts and other information transmission efforts into North Korea. It is in the interest of the U.S. and the international community to normalize domestic and international conversations on the deplorable North Korean human rights problem with sustained diplomatic and financial support. North Korea may respond with small-scale military provocations. But, as I wrote in a March oped, “the absence of justice in inter-Korean relations is a greater problem than the presence of tension. There can be no justice without freedom, and no true peace without justice.”⁷ Human rights discourse should not be sacrificed at Pyongyang’s altar of temporary diplomatic outreach. It must be sustained.

President Biden may visit the Hiroshima Peace Park with Japanese Prime Minister Kishida, if not on his Japan visit this month, then perhaps sometime in the future. In May 2016, when he was vice president, President Obama visited the memorial park together with Prime Minister Shinzo Abe. Paying homage, President Obama said that the memories of the atomic bombing “must never fade. “That memory allows us to fight complacency,” he said. “It fuels our moral imagination. It allows us to change.” History will judge, if it has not already, that gesture to have been moral, good, and just.

Likewise, were President Biden one day to visit Park together with President Yoon the Jeju April 3rd Peace Park, it will mark a turning point in the bilateral alliance. The memorial park commemorates the victims and families of the Jeju Massacre, the biggest peacetime massacre of civilians in post-1945 Korean history. In the wake of a rebellion by about 350 armed Communists on April 3, 1948, the U.S. Army Military Government in Korea (USAMGIK), which at the time was had de jure and de facto operational control over South Korea’s constabulary, deployed 1700 troops into Jeju Island to quell the rebellion. Over the course of the next several years, the government forces massacred over 30,000 unarmed civilians, including thousands of women and over 800 children under the age of ten, all in the name of quashing Communism.⁸ The USAMGIK bears moral responsibility in its complicity.

Mr. Yoon, as the president-elect, visited the Jeju Peace Park twice in April. He became the first leader of South Korea’s conservative party to pay homage at the Jeju memorial. At the

⁷ Sung-Yoon Lee, “South Korea’s new president must embrace the people of North Korea,” *The Hill*, March 11, 2022. <<https://thehill.com/opinion/international/597771-south-koreas-new-president-must-embrace-the-people-of-north-korea/>>.

⁸ Sung-Yoon Lee, “Biden should visit South Korea’s Jeju April 3rd Peace Park,” *The Hill*, April 6, 2022. <<https://thehill.com/opinion/international/3258230-biden-should-visit-south-koreas-jeju-april-3rd-peace-park/>>.

memorial, Mr. Yoon said he will do his best to heal the deep pain of survivors, build a better future together, and defend the values of peace and human rights. President Biden now has the opportunity to help South Koreans' efforts to heal, seek reconciliation, establish the truth, and shed much of the pent-up anti-U.S. sentiment that periodically clouds the bilateral relationship. A visit to the memorial by President Biden will greatly strengthen the bilateral alliance, mitigate the deep ideological divide within South Korea, and be remembered as good, moral, and just.

VI. Conclusion

As I posited in my written testimony before this honorable Subcommittee in April 2018, a “temporary lull in North Korea’s bellicose rhetoric and nuclear blackmail are a mere interlude before its next big provocation.” Since then, North Korea has fired over 50 missiles, including five ICBM and ICBM components this year alone. Yet, there has not been even a single United Nations Security Council meeting on North Korea’s flagrant violations, let alone a tough resolution.

Likewise, North Korea expected continued provocations this year are a prelude to coaxing its adversaries to dream once again of peace and denuclearization. In the next round of talks, North Korea will seriously call on the U.S. to take mutual “action for action” steps to “denuclearize the Korean peninsula,” that is, withdraw the U.S. Forces in Korea in return for partial freeze of its nuclear facilities. Pyongyang will, after major escalation, also propose peace treaty negotiations, mindful of the 1973 Paris Peace Accords on Vietnam.

The United States must eschew such ploys and pursue proactive coercive diplomacy—one that employs unremitting financial sanctions and multi-faceted information dissemination operations into the North. The Pax Americana that has made possible the past seven decades of peace and prosperity in South Korea and much of Pacific Asia must not be compromised by an unworthy Korean state, the despotic and deceitful Kim dynasty.