

THE BROOKINGS INSTITUTION

BROOKINGS CAFETERIA PODCAST

KIM JONG UN'S ASCENT TO POWER IN NORTH KOREA

Washington, D.C.

Friday, May 1, 2020

**PARTICIPANTS:**

**Host:**

FRED DEWS  
Managing Editor, Podcasts and Digital Projects  
The Brookings Institution

**Interviewer:**

MICHAEL E. O'HANLON  
Director of Research, Foreign Policy  
Co-Director, Security and Strategy  
Senior Fellow, Foreign Policy, Center for 21st Century Security and Intelligence  
The Sydney Stein, Jr. Chair  
The Brookings Institution

**Guests:**

JUNG PAK  
SK-Korea Foundation Chair in Korea Studies  
Senior Fellow, Foreign Policy, Center for East Asia Policy Studies  
The Brookings Institution

SARAH BINDER  
Senior Fellow, Governance Studies  
The Brookings Institution

\* \* \* \* \*

## PROCEEDINGS

DEWS: Welcome to the Brookings Cafeteria the Podcast about ideas and the experts who have them. I'm Fred Dews. As speculation runs rampant about the health and location of North Korean ruler Kim Jong Un, this episode features an in-depth discussion of who Kim is and how he commanded all the levers of power in his isolated and nuclear armed country at such a young age. A tale told in a new book published just this week titled, "Becoming Kim Jong Un, a Former CIA Officers Insights into North Korea's Enigmatic Young Dictator. That former CIA officer is Brookings Senior Fellow Jung Pak, who holds the SK-Korea Foundation Chair in Korea Studies at Brookings. She's interviewed here by Senior Fellow Michael O'Hanlon the Director of Research and Foreign Policy and the Sydney Stein Jr. Chair.

Also, in this episode Senior Fellow, Sarah Binder offers four lessons about how Congress has responded to the Corona Virus Pandemic and what may follow.

You can follow the Brookings Podcast Network on Twitter @policypodcasts. To get information about and links to all of our shows, including Dollar and Sense the Brookings Trade Podcast, The Current and Our Events Podcase.

First up, here's Sarah Binder with what's happening in Congress.

BINDER: I'm Sarah Binder aa Senior Fellow in Government Studies at the Brookings Institute. Congress and the President have now enacted four emergency bills to respond to the health and economic crisis caused by the global pandemic. All four secured broad bi-partisan support and most law makers believe that more relief will be needed. But cooperation is beginning to fray. This most recent package totaled just under 500 billion dollars, which means that Congress has committed roughly 3 trillion for emergency aid so far. This last measure replenishes funds for small businesses, sends money to hospitals treating COVID-19 patients and

ramps up testing to detect the virus. Here are four lessons about what Congress just did and what might come next.

Lesson number one. Even in a crisis these Congressional parties are at battle. A lot of folks suggest that Congress just turned off its partisan switch to make these four deals possible. And at some point, they'll flip the partisan switch back on. But I don't think that quite captures what we see on Capitol Hill. For sure, crisis can motivate Congressional parties to cooperate. Why? Neither party in the crisis wants the public to blame them for stalemate. No surprise then, that when millions file for unemployment and tens of thousands of Americans die, Congress can move swiftly. But that doesn't mean partisans lay down swords. This deal took shape only after Senate Democrats blocked Republicans from adopting a measure that would only replenish funds for small businesses. Senate Republicans then promptly killed Democrats preferred bill which added in funds for hospitals and state and local governments. Democrats stood their ground, even when the small business fund ran dry. They just negotiated with the administration to combine the wish list of both parties. So, the parties got much of what each wanted without having to want the same thing. And that creates a spectacle of bipartisanship.

Lesson number two. This is centralized Congressional bargaining on steroids. In recent years, party leaders have tended to dominate negotiations on big ticket items. Often with the support of rank and file who believe leaders will secure deals they can endorse and sell to voters back home. Negotiations on this fourth bill centralize power even more firmly in leaders' hands. When the public expects Congress to act fast, lawmakers are even more willing to allow party leaders to bargain on their behalf. Of course, the unique health risks the Coronavirus isolating most law makers in their district and states, further concentrates leaders' power. The speaker called members back to Washington only after the parties had inked a deal. But patience in both

chambers is running thin with this arrangement. Senator Mike Lee, of Utah said on the chamber floor last week when the Senate adopted the bill by voice vote “this crisis is too big to leave up to a small handful of people.”

Lesson number three. Policy outcomes matter in a crisis. Students of Congress often say that voters reward lawmakers for the positions they take rather than for the policies that resolved. Why? Because in most cases blame or credit for policy outcomes don't stick to individual lawmakers. That's mostly because a single legislator vote rarely determines the result. So, lawmakers take on popular positions and worry less about how the policies will unfold, months or even sometimes years later. But in this pandemic, the news media reports daily whether Congress' policy solutions are working. Photos of nurses wearing trash bags for protection, large companies like Shake Shack securing forgivable loans intended for small businesses, well-endowed schools like Harvard and Princeton receiving federal aid, reports like these catch the public and law makers attention. No surprise then that party leaders moved relatively quickly on last week's deal. They replenished the funds for real small businesses, they pushed treasury to tighten program guidelines and they added more money for hospitals. These course corrections aim to produce better policies, but lawmakers also want to avoid embarrassing headlines.

Lesson number four. Pandemic politics are surely going to turn more partisan. Here are two battle lines that have already formed. First, is more government relief too costly? Republicans starting to show signs of bailout fatigue, but Democrats dismiss this newfound wariness of debt arguing that Republican tax cuts in 2017 added nearly 2 trillion dollars to the Federal debt. Second, who deserves additional relief? Speaker Pelosi has drawn a line in the sand, the next bill must include aid for state and local governments which face declining tax revenues while pandemic costs continue to rise. Republicans disagree, even amongst themselves.

Some agree with the Democrats. But others have lined up behind Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell who calls this aid blue state bailouts. Meanwhile, the virus is now emerging in rural Republican hotspots and more pain and layoffs are forecasts. Congress will continue to face public pressure to act. But they are a long way from cooperating on another deal.

DEW: And now on with the interview, here's Michael O'Hanlon with Jung Pak, author of *Becoming Kim Jong Un*.

O'HANLON: Hi, this is Mike O'Hanlon and I have a real privilege today of speaking with my colleague and good friend Jung Pak one of the world's top experts on North Korea who's just written this amazing book *Becoming Kim Jong Un*. And I just want to say, I want to gush for a minute before I welcome Jung Pak to say hello as well and just say this is one of my favorite Brookings books of all time. I've been at Brookings a quarter of a century, I've been reading Brookings' stuff for 35 or 40 years and this is just in my top five favorite books of fascination, what I learned, the quality of the writing, the intrigue, the story telling. And obviously the importance of dealing with a guy who now has, perhaps several dozen nuclear weapons at his beck and call. And is one of the main threats for the United States and Allies throughout Asia and even in North America with Kim's ICBM long range missile threats and so forth. So, Jung congratulations and just really exciting to be part of this conversation today.

PAK: Thanks Mike. Thanks so much for those kind words, and I have to say if we can engage some mutual admiration for a couple of seconds, is that everybody should have a Michael O'Hanlon in their lives and it was my privilege to enter Brookings and to have somebody like Mike to be there supporting me, championing me. He read the manuscript of the first draft of this book and ensured that it was reviewed by external reviewers who made this book so much better than I ever started with, so thank you Mike for being such a good friend, a good colleague, a

mentor. I worked my ass off and I'm good at what I do but think I would not have gotten to this place without having you supporting you and cheering me all the way. So, thank you so much.

O'HANLON: Well it's a pleasure. And before we get to Kim Jong Un, let's stay a little bit on Jung Pak just for another minute and talk a little bit about how you got to this point in your career and your knowledge of this enigmatic dictator. And the path that you took, because it wasn't as if you set out in life to necessarily study the North Korean dictatorial regime of the Democratic People's Republic of Korea, you got there sort of through a circuitous route and you did a PHD, but in American History as I recall not in East Asian Studies. Could you just explain a little bit about how you got interested in North Korea and how you wound up at the CIA, which of course is where you learned a lot of what you know about Kim Jong Un?

PAK: I'm not sure that any child or anybody grows up thinking yes, I want to be the North Korea expert or a North Korea expert. Some might grow up to say yes, I really do want to work for the CIA or do policy making or work in the US Government in some way, but that was not a part of my thinking at all ever. My interests were more toward writing and the arts and history. So, my major at Colgate, where I graduated was in history. Got my PHD at Columbia in US History and I went into Columbia to graduate school thinking that I was going to focus on African American history. Because I was really really interested in how the Civil Rights Movement, Slavery, the Civil War Reconstruction. And so, I was interested in all of those things and how we are the America of today as a result of the actions of some of the most vulnerable parts of our society.

So, I went into Columbia thinking I was going to do African American History and I wanted to study with Eric Foner who's one of the big names in this field. As I was going through graduate school, I realized my interests were much more on, and I think slavery also is part of

this narrative of transnational history, how people are transplanted. And I think maybe it had to do with my immigrant background as well. Transplanting of ideas, the transfer of people, how ideas of a particular setting grow, change, adapt. And that lead me toward US activities abroad and not just the government activities in the way that non-governmental actors, and in my case, I studied American evangelical missionaries who went overseas and how their ideas and how their very presence changes a society and how their changed by their society that they are living in. And as I was studying region and how it takes root, I decided to look at how region influences foreign relations, US foreign relations. So again, this transnational thinking how people can influence big government decisions. And they look at Korea, US missionaries in Korea studying how religion might have affected the beginning of the cold war there and how the US looked at Korea from a Cold War perspective.

After a while I decided I didn't want to be in academia anymore, and so while I was working on my dissertation, I applied for the CIA based on a friend's recommendation, and once I got in and I was hired by the CIA to cover North Korea. So, I went from African American history, Civil War Reconstruction to studying one of the most bizarre, enigmatic dictators. So, there is no linear path to where I am today, but you know I think all of those experiences and all of the thinking influences at how I look at Kim.

O'HANLON: It's fascinating and you wound up at the CIA just a little before Kim Jung Un became the leader of North Korea in 2011 is that correct in my timeline?

PAK: I arrived at the CIA just after Kim Jun Il's stroke in late 2008. And started right around the time that President Obama was inaugurated. The way I looked at my experience at the CIA is, I think that's Kim Jung Un's experience too, because our paths crossed in that way but in parallel worlds.

O'HANLON: Right. So, let's start talking about Kim Jung Un character, and you begin your book by reminding people that he has been caricatured in a number of different ways. Partly because he came on the scene and he was so young, still in his late 20's when he became the leader of his country as I recall and you mention his father Kim Jung Il, he was the third Kim in this country's history and the dynasty that has been on going now. But he was sort of an unknown quantity and also a little bit rumpely, a little bit rotund, a little baby faced, and he got all sorts of caricatures in those early years. So, I wonder if just to help frame our subsequent discussion if you could describe how you began the book and what some of those caricatures of Kim were, especially in the early years.

PAK: I think those caricatures still exist today. It depends on where your gaze is. If your gaze is on Kim Jung Un himself or even Kim Jung Il his father is that because until now, until 2018 that we didn't actually hear him speak in this way with the beginning of the summits. When we just look at Kim Jung Un he is ripe for caricature in that he has what many would consider bizarre or unconventional hair cut that he wears these very shapeless Mao suits with trousers that are too wide and that his weight is ripe for caricature. I think when we look at just Kim Jung Un as a physical entity it makes him very vulnerable to looking at him in a rocket man sort of way or Chung Yang's pig boy is others. And it was same with Kim Jun Il, as well his father that he was 5'2" or 5'3", he wore platform shoes. His hair was permed so that he could add a couple of inches of height. So, all of these things contribute to a sense that this was somebody who was not taken seriously.

I would also think that there is some element of other-izing this leader, this very bizarre dictator in Asia somewhere. He acts differently, he behaves differently the country is so isolated, etc. And I think that really reduces Kim as a person, through a caricature I think to our detriment.



And so, what I was trying to do with this book, which is why I like the cover image so much is that he is not a caricature, there is more than two dimensions to him and that he is a three dimensional character with hopes and fears, constraints, ambitions, and aspirations, frustrations. And I wanted to put all of that into this book and give him a fuller treatment than what we're used to.

O'HANLON: Yeah, in fact I heard you say the other day to remind us all that dictators are people too. They may not be nice people, Kim is certainly isn't a nice person, I don't think, and we'll get into that a little more. But he is a human being and he does have all these emotions and jealousies, and maybe paranoias maybe not. So, I want to come back and hear you explain how he established himself and made sure the work didn't just think of him as a ten-foot baby. A kid in a playpen with a few nuclear tip misses to go along with his other toys. And I know he spend a lot of time trying to disabuse the world that he could be pushed around. But if we could go back now to earlier years first and then we'll come up to the present and the time he's been in leadership. But you talk in the book about family about his father basically having a couple of family's, a couple of wives and this set up some of the competition as to who would inherit the dynastic succession.

Then of course Kim Jung Un was sent to Switzerland and I believe Germany for education. Could you just describe a little bit about what his childhood was like both in Europe and in North Korea? And also, how his father Kim Jung Il decided that the young Kim should become the follow-on leader?

PAK: Yeah, and the North Korean Regime kept mum on this, and his father kept mum on this probably because he didn't want to inspire more jockeying than there probably was. And also, to avoid undermining his own rule by having others cast their loyalties elsewhere, to the

most likely successor. So, it makes sense from my perspective, for Kim Jung Il to be very circumspect about who might be the designated leader. Kim Jun Un lived like his father before him, a very privileged life, cocooned by his privilege surrounded by small armies of servants and sycophants and family members and cooks and drivers and playmates. And the family had villas sprinkled throughout the country where there were horses, and bowling alleys, swimming pools and cars that were redesigned so that children Kim Jun Un's age or Kim Jung Il's age could drive them when they were just children. From this cocoon of privilege that was also transferred when Kim Jung Un was sent overseas to study in Switzerland.

But I would add here that Kim Jung Un spent about 4 years overseas as far as we can tell, whereas his older half-brother Kim Jun Nom spent many many more years, if I recall correctly it was about a decade that he spent his years overseas. So, Kim lived also in a life of luxury and ease outside of North Korea and Switzerland going to the French Alps, going to the French Riviera, skiing in the Alps, going to various places in Europe. So, I think he didn't live the life that one would typically expect an average North Korean would take but he did live the life of what I think a lot of us would be familiar with is of a son of a dictator with all of the resources at his disposal. So, for the past two generations of the Kim family, these are people who lived in the life of luxury and privilege.

When we look at how Kim Jun Un was chosen over the others, Kim Jung Il, his father had many consorts and he had two favored consorts and Kim Jung Un's mother was one of those two favored consorts and Kim Jun Un as two siblings, two full siblings and many other half siblings. And it was said that because the eldest brother, Kim Jun Nom was too tainted by outside influences, given his years abroad. Apparently, Kim Jung Il was enraged when Kim Jung Nom suggested that the country open up. The second son is Kim Jung Un's full brother. He was

reportedly not as aggressive enough and Kim Jung Il eventually landed whether by process of elimination or by active grooming that Kim Jung Un, the youngest of the three boys in the family that would be the most likely to succeed because he was most like his father in his aggressiveness in his style. So that makes sense in that even though the culture would suggest that the eldest son would take over. Kim Jung Il made the decision that the youngest son was the one that had the disposition and the will as we've learned to take North Korea into the 21st century.

O'HANLON: Fascinating. So, he comes back to North Korea from this period, this four-year period in Europe. One last thing I wanted to ask you about, that time in the west however before we come back to his return in his ascent. Both his father loved James Bond movies and Rambo and obviously all these luxuries imported from the west and had a fascination with Japanese movies and did some kidnapping of actors and so forth to try to create his own industry and then the son Kim Jung Un who had a fascination it appears with American basketball among other things.

I wondered if you could talk a little bit about that, we know that Dennis Rodman, the American Basketball great wound up going over to visit a couple of times in the earlier years of Kim Jung Un's leadership of North Korea. But this was not a complete accident, right? Kim Jung Un, like his father, had a certain fascination with the west even though he certainly did not want his country to become like the west and often was at logger heads with the United States or South Korea or Japan.

PAK: And that what was so tantalizing about the idea of a son of a North Korean dictator, the future dictator, having this western education and to have that exposure. They think our assumptions are that of course if you are going to be exposed to this open, liberal, western

lifestyle of course you're going to want to transfer that into your own country and I think that when we think about Kim Jung Un as a child, I think we have to think of him a child, not as a dictator to be. In that, as a child growing up in the 90's of course you're going to like Dennis Rodman, of course you're going to like Michael Jordan, of course you're going to love all of the Nintendo games and all of the things that marked the 1990s. But here where you can like the luxuries of the west, but it doesn't mean you have to adopt all of the western ways; however, you might define that. And I think it's also that even if he did want to that, I think he was profoundly constrained by regime ideology from doing that.

But maybe we'll talk later about how he has translated some of that the west as well as South Korean pop culture and try to transfer that and translate that into the North Korean context. But I think that was what made people wonder a lot when he first showed up, that because of his western education, because he spent so much time being outside of North Korea, that he might be much more open. He could be the reformist. But I think those are more of our fantasies being transferred onto him rather than what was actually real.

O'HANLON: And whatever he might have an interest hypothetically in some degree of reform for no other reason than to have his country be a little more pleasant place to live. It seemed from your book that there were at least two other things that were even higher priorities for him when he came into power. One was to show his internal rivals and opposition that he was in charge, that he wasn't some chubby faced young guy who didn't know how to wield power. And then secondly that he wanted to build up a strong enough military there'd be no doubt in anybody's mind that North Korea was a force to be reckoned with.

Could you talk a little bit first about the brutality, the killing of his uncle and 2013, the killing of his half-brother Kim Jung Nom in 2017, also in the same period of time, we have his

strong reaction against that movie, The Interview that sort of farcical depiction of Kim which led then to a very non-farcical and very serious attack by North Korean hackers against Sony and some serious threats that could have even involved violence if people had dared to go to the movie theaters to watch.

So, it seemed like in that period of time he was intent on showing that he was very capable of being a tough guy in both in terms of his domestic opposition and in terms of his military and his weapons program. What were the key milestones for you? Out all of those different things that you watched, which really struck you and helped solidify in your own mind that this really was a guy not to be trifled with?

PAK: Kim almost certainly aware of the scoffing, the doubts about his leadership skills. Oh, the international community, all of the commentaries about how this is the end of North Korea after Kim Jung Il died and when Kim Jung Un came to power just shy of 28. This is the end North Korea's definitely collapsing in the near future, there's no way that this kid, 27-28 years old is going to come into North Korea and lead it successfully. And I think his father was very aware of how he was going to gird his son's power. And so, during a very compressed grooming process from the stroke in 2008 to December 2011, Kim Jung Il was mindful about creating a therapist around Kim Jung Un. Having the uncle by marriage be one of his close advisors, and having the old guard be surrounding him. So, when we look at the funeral procession, Kim is surrounded by seven others who represented the party in the military to show that there is a continuity between the past and the future. And that these are the people, the institution of North Korea that are supporting Kim Jung Un, despite his youth. And I think that what we saw in that what was surprising and probably surprising to those seven leaders who surrounded that hearse or that so-called gang of seven, is that Kim quickly went through almost

all of them. And in the first two years of his rule he had purged, demoted or disappeared five of the seven. And after that, the remaining two were demoted to such an extent or marginalized to an extent that they were nonentity. So, he did this within the first two years. And of course, the killing of the uncle was one of the shocking points because it happened so early on in his rule.

So, this happened at the end of 2013. Remember King Jung Un came to power in December of 2011. So just two years later he has assassinated, he's executed his uncle by marriage in a very spectacular way. And this was shocking to Korea observers because family members don't get killed in such a brutal way that he was killed by anti-aircraft guns and people were forced to watch. Family members who do wrong they disappear for a few years but then they come back. The Uncle, Jang Song-thaek who was killed in 2013, he had also disappeared and purged at least couple of times, but he had always come back because he was married to Kim Jung Il's younger sister. So, to kill a family member in this way and have all of the family's dirty laundry out in the open was shocking. It showed that Kim did not hesitate to do this that he wanted to prune the family tree and to make sure that everybody knew who was boss. And so, while the world scoffed at his youth, he took his youth and bigger and vision as an asset. And killing his uncle that was a way of showing everybody who was boss, this is a new guy in town, and everybody should be falling in line. What was so interesting about the uncle, Kim didn't just kill the uncle. He started systematically going through all of his family members, his closest contacts, his nephews and other people who were close to him and that really revealed the network of cronyism and nepotism that has seeped into or has been a part of the North Korean system for so long. Kim had an elaborate six thousand word or thousands of words of why Jang Song-thaek was so terrible. He was anti-socialist; he was human scum. He was worth less than a dog, he tried to foment a coup, he was anti-North Korean. There was a litany of charges against

him to show that he was outside the bounds of what was acceptable. And his half-brother again was part of the pruning of the family tree, in that when he was killed in Malaysia at the airport in Kuala Lumpur in doing in such a spectacular way that was a message to the outside world how brutal he can be and that he means business. But also, internally that even outside the geographic boundaries of North Korea Kim will find you and get you.

O'HANLON: Yeah, its striking. I was noticing the fascination with western movies and to some extent the whole North Korean elite perhaps has had, makes you think of The God Father where it's as if Kim Jung Un wanted to make sure none of us thought he was Fredo. And if there was any doubt, that if he looked a little funny, he was much more like Michael Corleone maybe even on steroids then he was like Fredo. But its striking and also throughout this period is you document the North Korean military is improving. And that was a top priority for Kim and of the, I think now, six nuclear tests that North Korea has conducted, I believe four are on Kim Jung Un's watch? Is that right?

PAK: Right

O'HANLON: And also, all three long range ICBM tests which could put the United States at risk from a nuclear tipped long-range missile, in theory. One more thing you say in the book, Kim was willing to accept failure if a test went awry, or something didn't work out, I don't know what he did to the unlucky scientists who were associated with that test but he was willing to admit to the world the test failed and just go back to the drawing board and make sure it worked the next time. So, there was a little bit more of a western sense, maybe a Swiss sense of precision if it didn't work the first time let's get it right the next time rather than pretend, we're living in this Potemkin village. Is that an important theme here, the modernization of the North Korean military on his watch?

PAK: Right, and that's part of his file too which is transparency. In that when something fails, he says something failed. Whereas before Kim Jung Il used to sweep failures under the rug or just not acknowledge it.

But Kim is much more transparent in many ways. Transparent in very hands on, he's there at the satellite command center, he's there at the ballistic missile test. He is in the sea observing SLBM tests. He is sitting there at the table with military commanders marking up maps and providing guidance. So, he is very hands on in the military. So, he has amped up the nuclear weapons program but he's also amped up the conventional military capabilities as well. With an eye toward putting the resources in certain sectors. So, he has focused on a lot of realistic training and making sure that the officers and the people in the military are being trained whether it's at night or on a dirt road or on a beach. And that the officers themselves are physically fit. I remember when he told some Korean peoples Navy Officers to strip down and to do laps in the ocean. And you can imagine how much some of the older officers might have felt very scared about their performance. And again, he's using his youth and vigor as an asset in a way to call the older peoples.

He said once that moss under stones if they are not rolled over. There's a constant need to transparently train people, make sure that they know what's expected of them. I also think that when he talks about failures about the need to do better. He's also said that he needs to do better. But I think it's a warning to others. I think if I were sitting in that auditorium or that meeting hall listening to Kim, that I would take that as well if my leaders working and he recognizes some of his deficiencies then I better get my act together and make sure I do my very best. He hasn't been content with just the nuclear weapons and the longer-range ballistic missiles. He also wants to make sure that his conventional military is as good as it can get. But let's face it, they're walking



with 1950's, 1960's equipment. Some of them work, some of them don't. But that's what he has to work with.

O'HANLON: So, two more things that I'd like to ask you about before we finish up. And one is about the economic and reform agenda such as it is which you've already thrown a little bit of cold water on.

You also talk about Poyang Hatten and waterparks and Kim Jung Un's efforts to bring a little higher quality of life to at least the elites in North Korea and at least allow other people to see the trappings of modernity even if most of them will never enjoy those. And he's got the stylish wife and the stylish sister. He seems to want to portray a little bit more of a hip with it kind of existence even though he certainly hasn't opened up the politics or the information flow into the country.

But I want to hear you talk little bit about that and then I want to come back of course, to President Trump and his outreach to Kim Jun Un and what that bodes for the future and what we've learned. And what you conclude again putting on your CIA hat and invoking your mentor Richards Hewer that I know you want to speak about also. How we have to avoid giving the wrong messages to Kim and learning the wrong lessons ourselves from this experience.

But could you, before I get to that and the Trump Kim relationship. Could you talk a little, please, about economic reform? How's it going in North Korea, they've been severely sanctioned now for a couple of years? So that's put a damper on any progress, but they've also made some headway and Kim seems to want to open up, have a little more of a market economy, a little more of a skyline in Pyongyang, etc. How do you juxtapose those competing concerns and tendencies?

PAK: So, Kim wanted to create a socialist fairyland, is what he called it. And some of

the trends started with the father, the waterpark projects in the apartments complexes that started with the father. But as with the military program, Kim Jung Un really amped up and really accelerated the building boom in Pyongyang and elsewhere. I mean it's this idea of, I think what he's trying to do with the high-end restaurants, the department stores that sell luxury items, the coffee shops, the Italian restaurants, the high rises, the taxi cabs all the shopping. I think Kim wants to combat the idea of a failed state, of an economic decrepit economically hobbled North Korea that is constantly scrounging around for bits from humanitarian organizations. But he wants to project this 21st century modern North Korea with its computers, with its tablets, its laptops and this is part of this policy that he introduced in 2013 where he said that he told the people that they didn't have to tighten their belts anymore. That they could have nuclear weapons and economic prosperity.

So, he's been doing the nuclear weapons part quite well, and he also at least has the superficial look of economic prosperity. And to be honest, people in North Korea are making money and that's a result of this marketization that has been happening ever since the famine of the 1990's when people could not rely on the state anymore, so they resorted to smuggling and trading across the border and it was this 900 mile border with China that provided this lifeline. So, people are making money, which means that the regime is also benefiting from all of this.

In Pyongyang he has this showcase city where you have all of the amenities and the luxury that we might see elsewhere. He has also developed other parts of the country he's trying to replicate through cellular replication of what he's being doing in Pyongyang with the restaurants and the high rises in the various provinces. As well as the beach resort area of Wonsan where paradoxically he's also launched ballistic missiles. So, this is a part of this narrative that you can be the strong, militarily strong country. But what we don't have to

sacrifice our economic prosperity to put all of our money and our resources into the military we can have it all. That is a big thing for now a 36-year-old to be handling. Given the fact he also has to procure luxury items to keep his elite happy. So, he's taken on a lot, but I think if consistent with his aggressiveness and a confidence I think is born of privilege where no one ever says no to you, everything that you do is great or the best thing that anybody has ever seen. So, when you are coddled and continually surrounded sycophants who are trying to curry favor. You kind of do feel like you are that god and that you can do all of those things. But I think what we see now with COVID and the global pandemic, the fact that he's locked down his borders and that the economy is shrinking and there are lots of reports about how there is a lot of grumbling and economic anxiety in North Korea. He can't do it all. And sanctions are also contributing to the sense of burden on North Korea at this point.

O'HANLON: So, let me now invite you to talk a little bit about where we stand with the nuclear negotiations with Kim and the broader US North Korea relationship. And just a quick word from me first. I also want to give a shout out to the part of your book that is a personal story about how to be a good analyst and learn from your mistakes and how all analysts need to learn from their mistakes. And you really invoke, I hope I'm pronouncing his name right, Richards Hewer (sic) and his book on intelligence. Several times, especially when you are talking about the Trump Kim relationship, and you say two things there that really struck me, one that you reminded yourself and all of us who are in the foreign policy field, that maybe we should give Trumps new type of diplomacy where he's actually now had three summits with the North Korean leader. First time any American President ever met face to face with a North Korean dictator, and Trumps done it three times. And maybe we should be a little more open minded and not just fall back on patterns of behavior that we're used to as foreign policy

specialists, you know. And rules that you should never meet with a North Korean leader until there's a deliverable, and etc., etc. The kinds of things we tend to say to each other and maybe we should give Trump a little bit of slack on trying something unconventional when previous policies hadn't worked very well. But then you also conclude, again I'm interpreting and summarizing and you can correct me here if I am getting this wrong, you also conclude that Trump hasn't really wound up in a very good place as of this point in 2020 because he's sending too many mixed messages to Kim and sort of doing mirror imaging. Which Richards Hoyer warns against. Trump seems to think that Kim wants to do a big real estate like deal with making a lot of money and opening up to the world economy and Trump is projecting his own world view and his own values on to Kim. And this has led him into sort of a sloppy form of diplomacy where he's giving Kim little rewards or leading him on in ways that ultimately don't bear fruit, don't lead to a constructive diplomatic path forward. Did I basically get that right? And where do you see us now in this three plus years into the Trump administration, two years almost since Trump first met with Kim in Singapore. Three summits now under the bridge but really no sense of positive momentum in the relationship or the nuclear weapons negotiations.

PAK: Yeah, thanks Mike. I would say that being a North Korea analyst is one of the most oneriest jobs that you could ask for. Its deeply uncomfortable doing North Korea analysis and I was always uncomfortable inside the agency. I'm uncomfortable now. I'm always trying to go through my mind of all of the various issues, what am I missing, what if I'm wrong, what if they're wrong? Its humbling and also humiliating because you can be so wrong about so many things. But also doing this for so many years you learn how to manage and process ambiguity. And I'm still learning to do that. I'm constantly reminding myself and trying to refresh myself.

As I mention in the book, Richards Hoyer, he spent many decades in the CIA. He was

both in clandestine service as well as in analysis. But when we first come in as analysts, this is handed to us like this is the bible of CIA analysts training. And it's because it makes you uncomfortable, it says you may not be thinking the right way. No, it says you are not thinking the right way, and this is how you figure out what's missing. And so, try to do structured analysis, trying to keep yourself uncomfortable so that maybe you can try to explore all potential scenarios and issues. And so when I look at Kim, and this goes back to how I wanted to present him as this very multi-dimensional person. It's also important to not see him the way we want to see him. And Hoyer reminded us that be careful about what your assumptions are, what is your perspective, how are you viewing this person, be careful about confirmation biased. Be careful that vividness bias, in which if you actually meet somebody that you tend to wade back that interaction more than you would be reading intelligence from somebody else. And so, when I look at Trump, and with all the summits and all the meetings, Trump admitted, he was very open about how he didn't need to prepare because he's done deals before. So, when you come from the perspective of a New York City businessperson who has never governed or worked in the government before or engaged in diplomacy, high stakes diplomacy, much less with somebody who is a dictator with nuclear weapons. You tend to see the other person as being like all the other people that you have met in your life. And so, when I saw Trump owning this relationship, leader to leader, man to man, I thought there were serious problems in a couple of ways. One is if they got along way too well. Or two if they didn't get along at all. And so, Trump approached Kim from the perspective of a New York City businessman. And thinking that make this great deal, Kim wants to be rich, he wants to make deals, he wants foreign investment to develop the beach resorts. He wants foreign investment to development the infrastructure, he wants all of the American technical expertise and the American entrepreneurs' flooding into North Korea and

throwing money at Kim. I think that it was the absolute wrong approach. Kim has all the money that he wants. He's got the villas, he can travel anywhere, he's got highly advanced nuclear weapons and ballistic missiles to deliver them. And despite the sanctions and this pariah status, he had multiple meetings with Chinese President Xi, multiple meetings with the US President, multiple meetings with the South Korean President and one with the Russian leader. So, he did that without having all of that coming in. And I think while Trump thought Kim wanted all of this, for Kim from his perspective, these are threats. He doesn't want people, Americans running around inside his country, he doesn't want investments that he can't control. So, when he wants investment, he wants to be funneled toward sectors that he can control. And so, tourism is a main regime goal for revenue generation because let's think about it when we go to an island for our vacation, a lot of people just don't leave the resort. They just stay very much confined, they are not spreading these very anti-North Korean ideas outside talking to average people or the taxi driver, they're very confined in this very touristy area.

So, I think we have to be careful about and constantly think about how Kim sees us as much as how we see him. And I have to say that when Kim did this pivot to diplomacy in early 2018, there's a lot of optimism that this is it, he is different from his father and his grandfather, this is it. He is young and so his youth and the fact that he did this sudden pivot, really was a tantalizing thing for people who saw this. That this is our opportunity, yes Trump should make the deal. It doesn't have to be complete denuclearization it can be some phased aspects of it. And I remember thinking then as well as government analysts are, we too bogged down, are we too burdened by the history of failed negotiations that we can't feed you information, we can't see new behaviors. And I think that perhaps this is something that time has shown, that Kim is not interested in opening up and he is not interested in economic reform. And I don't think he's

actually interested in security guarantees which is a really vague and infinitely expandable way of trying to extract more and more from the United States and the outside world. And so, the way we have it now in the UN panel of expert's report that was recently published, suggests that Kim has continued to develop his weapons. He hasn't made significant changes in the economy, in fact as 2020 started Kim said we just have to double down on our way, we don't need diplomacy. We don't need the outside world, we're gonna do this our own way. And I'm not going to bargain away my nuclear weapons for some mere morsel from the United States.

O'HANLON: It's really interesting, I could go on with more questions and also, I just love to know your predictions. But maybe we'll save some of that for the rest of your book tour and also what you are going to write in the coming months as we watch what happens and how it intersects with the US Presidential race and with the COVID-19 crisis and everything else. So, Jung congratulations, best wishes with the book and thanks for the privilege of talking today.

PAK: Mike thank you so much for all that you do and thank you for this great interview. I couldn't have imagined doing it with anyone else.

O'HANLON: Oh, it's so kind. Thank you, privileged, it's all mine

PAK: Thank you

DEWS: You can order the book "Becoming Kim Jong Un, a Former CIA Officers Insights into North Korea's Enigmatic Young Dictator", published just this week by Ballentine Books from independent bookstores nationwide.

The Brookings Cafeteria Podcast is the product of an amazing team of colleagues, starting with audio engineer Gaston Reboredo and producer Chris McKenna. Bill Finan, director of the Brookings Institution Press does the book interviews and Lisette Baylor and Eric Abalain provide design and web support. Finally, my thanks to Camilo Ramirez and Emily Horne for

their guidance and support. The Brookings Cafeteria is brought to you by the Brookings Podcast Network, which also produces Dollar and Sense, The Current and or Events Podcasts. Email your questions and comments to me at [bcp@brookings.edu](mailto:bcp@brookings.edu) If you have a question for a scholar, include an audio file and I'll play it and the answer on the air. Follow us on Twitter @policypodcasts. You can listen to the Brookings Cafeteria in all of the usual places. Visit us online at [Brookings.edu](http://Brookings.edu). Until next time, I'm Fred Dews.

\* \* \* \* \*

#### CERTIFICATE OF NOTARY PUBLIC

I, Carleton J. Anderson, III do hereby certify that the forgoing electronic file when originally transmitted was reduced to text at my direction; that said transcript is a true record of the proceedings therein referenced; that I am neither counsel for, related to, nor employed by any of the parties to the action in which these proceedings were taken; and, furthermore, that I am neither a relative or employee of any attorney or counsel employed by the parties hereto, nor financially or otherwise interested in the outcome of this action.

Carleton J. Anderson, III

(Signature and Seal on File)

Notary Public in and for the Commonwealth of Virginia

Commission No. 351998

Expires: November 30, 2020