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IRAN AND NORTH KOREA: PROLIFERATION AND REGIONAL CHALLENGES FOR THE NEXT ADMINISTRATION

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PARTICIPANTS:

Moderator
SUZANNE MALONEY
Vice President and Director, Foreign Policy
The Brookings Institution

Panel
ERIC EDELMAN
Distinguished Practitioner-in-Residence
School of Advanced International Studies

ROBERT EINHORN
Senior Fellow, Arms Control and Non-Proliferation Initiative
The Brookings Institution

MATTHEW KROENIG
Professor, Georgetown University
Deputy Director, The Scowcroft Center
Atlantic Council

SUZANNE MALONEY
Vice President and Director, Foreign Policy
The Brookings Institution

JUNG H. PAK
Senior Fellow and SK-Korea Foundation Chair in Korea Studies
The Brookings Institution

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P R O C E E D I N G S

MS. MALONEY: Good afternoon. My name is Suzanne Maloney and I'm vice president and director of the Foreign Policy program at the Brookings Institution. It's my great pleasure to welcome you all today for an online conversation on two of the most urgent challenges facing the next administration. Among the most numerous and various foreign policy challenges will be the nuclear proliferation and regional security threats posed by Iran and North Korea. The next administration will need to consider how to build international and domestic support for addressing these threats, whether and when to engage these regimes diplomatically, and the balance between pressure and diplomacy in pursuing U.S. policy objectives.

If we reflect on the past four years, the moments of greatest risk have come as a result of crises involving the two countries that we're here to discuss today. In 2017, North Korean tests of nuclear devices and intercontinental ballistic missiles brought the United States and Pyongyang to the brink of war. The balance earlier this year (inaudible) policy objectives. If we reflect on the past four years, the moments of great -- pardon me.

Earlier this year just before the COVID crisis hit, the United States was once again at a very close point to a military conflict with Iran after a strike that killed the foremost security leader from the Iranian Quds Force, Qasem Soleimani. While neither one of these incidents led to a direct military conflict between the two countries, it demonstrates and underscores the risks involved. And as a result, I think we can all say with some confidence, that Iran and North Korea will remain the top of the priority list for whomever is in the White House in 2021.

So it's with that spirit that we have asked the esteemed panel to join us to speak to both questions under either outcome of the elections next month. Let me give a brief introduction of our four panelists, all of whom have extensive experience in the U.S. government. And then I will add a few housekeeping notes before turning it over to the panel to discuss.

Let me first welcome Eric Edelman, the Roger Hertog distinguished practitioner in residence at the Philip Merrill Center for Strategic Studies at Johns Hopkins School of Advanced International Studies. Ambassador Edelman retired from the U.S. Foreign Service in 2009 at the rank of career minister, having served in the multitude of senior positions in the Department of State and defense

as well as the White House. He served as undersecretary of defense for policies from 2005 to 2009 overseeing strategy development with global responsibility for bilateral defense relations, war plans, special operations forces, Homeland defense, missile-defense, and a host of other issues. He also served as U.S. ambassador to Finland during the Clinton administration and U.S. ambassador to Turkey during the Bush administration.

Let me also welcome our own colleague, Bob Einhorn, a senior fellow in the Arms Control and Non-Proliferation Initiative, part of the Brookings Foreign Policy Center for Security, Strategy, and Technology. Before joining Brookings in May 2013, Bob served as the U.S. State Department advisor for nonproliferation and arms control where he played a leading role in the formulation and execution of U.S. policy toward Iran's nuclear program and helped shape the Obama administration's overall approach to nonproliferation and addressed other nuclear security and strategic stability challenges around the world.

He played a key role in the development of the 2010 nuclear posture review and served as the head of the U.S. delegation in negotiations with South Korea on a successor civil nuclear agreement. His previous positions include assistant secretary of state for nonproliferation, deputy assistant secretary of state for political military affairs, and member of the State Department's policy planning staff.

We will also be joined by Matt Kroenig, a professor of government and foreign service at Georgetown University and the deputy director of the Atlantic Council Scowcroft Initiative on Security and Strategy. He is the author or editor of seven books including one published earlier this year, “The Great Return of Great Power Rivalry; Democracy versus Autocracy in the Ancient World to the U.S. and China,” as well as a book entitled, “The Logic of American Nuclear Strategy,” published several years ago.

Matt also served in several positions in the U.S. government including the Strategy Office of the Office of Secretary of Defense and the Strategic Assessments Group at the Central intelligence Council -- Central Intelligence Agency.

Let me finish by welcoming my colleague Jung Pak, senior fellow and SK-Korea Foundation Chair in Korea Studies at Brookings Center for East Asia Policy Studies. She is the author of a monumental book, “Becoming Kim Jong-un: A Former CIA Officer's Insights into North Korea's

Enigmatic Young Dictator," that was published earlier this year to rave reviews. It is the authoritative book on North Korea under Kim Jong-un; examining Kim's personality, preferences, and policy choices and the implications for North Korea's internal stability, denuclearization, and global security.

Jung has held senior positions in the Central Intelligence Agency and the Office of the Director of National Intelligence including as deputy national intelligence officer. Prior to her work in national security, Jung taught at Hunter College and served as a Fulbright scholar in South Korea.

So with that distinguished panel to discuss these very important issues, let me just turn to a couple of housekeeping notes. First, outside of the work for Brookings, our scholars occasionally advise political candidates on the issues in accordance with the Institution's nonpartisanship policy. That policy can be found on the Brookings website and all affiliations are disclosed on individual expert pages also found on the Brookings website.

Second, I would like to thank the MacArthur Foundation for their generous support of Brookings work on non-proliferation challenges including, but not limited to, Iran and North Korea. As always, Brookings has an ironclad commitment to research independence and the views expressed today are solely those of those speakers.

One final reminder, we're on the record and streaming live. So please send your questions to the email address events@brookings.edu or using Twitter with the #policy2020.

Now let me turn to you Bob to start our conversation. And obviously we're only two weeks away from a major election in the United States that will have important implications toward the approach toward either one of these countries for the next four years. And I wanted to ask you, given your experience in the Obama administration, how you think former Vice President Biden and the team of national security officials that he is likely to put in place might approach these two urgent diplomatic challenges.

MR. EINHORN: Thank you very much, Suzanne, and thank you to the audience for tuning in. Of course I can only speculate on what the Biden administration's thinking will be on North Korea and Iran. I have no inside information. North Korea and Iran clearly would be important issues to both -- for the Biden administration. But I don't think they would top Biden administration's list of priorities. Top priority, at least at the start of the administration, would be domestic, the pandemic, the economy,

restoring stability, racial justice.

In foreign and security policy top priorities would include regaining the world's respect for the United States, shoring up alliances, rebuilding U.S. credibility, reestablishing U.S. leadership, and on and on. North Korea and Iran would be seen as serious early challenges that must be dealt with. North Korea, because it poses an existing nuclear threat to our East Asian allies and to the U.S. homeland. Iran, because it poses a potential nuclear threat and a current political and security threat to U.S. partners and interest in the Middle East.

In dealing with these threats, the Biden administration, like its predecessors, would rely on the traditional tools of pressure and diplomacy, but it would lean more to diplomacy, certainly more than the Trump administration.

The Trump administration's maximum pressure campaign did major harm to the North Korean and Iranian economies, but it utterly failed to compel these countries to capitulate to U.S. demands and it alienated countries whose support was essential to dealing successfully with North Korea and Iran.

The Biden administration would pursue negotiated solutions with both regimes, more actively with the Iran because the JCPOA showed that an effective agreement could be reached with Iran, but more cautiously with North Korea.

Excuse me. Sorry.

It would pursue negotiations with North Korea more cautiously because the likelihood of success with North Korea would be lower. And the political minefields of dealing with North Korea are either more treacherous than those dealing with Iran.

On Iran, the Biden administration, I think would seek a follow on nuclear deal that would be based on the JCPOA, extend the expiration dates for its nuclear restrictions, and ensure effective means of deterring and detecting covert nuclear activities. Separately, and not linked to progress in the nuclear negotiations, it would work with the U.S. regional partners to push back against Iran's maligned regional activities and explore whether understandings could be reached with Iran to reduce regional conflicts and regional instabilities.

As a starting point for negotiations on a follow-on deal, former Vice President Biden has

said his administration would return to full compliance with the JCPOA if Iran did the same. Turning to North Korea, I think a Biden administration would be reluctant to put -- to plunge into early talks with Pyongyang. I believe it would first want to rebuild South Korean and Japanese confidence in U.S. security assurances. And that includes not threatening to reduce U.S. military forces if our allies don't pay enough.

A Biden administration would want to work closely with its allies to develop a common diplomatic approach to North Korea, and then to reach out for consultations with other critical countries including China and Russia. Any positive outcome on North Korea will require the cooperation of China. Carving out an area of cooperation with China in an otherwise increasingly adversarial relationship will be a major challenge for this -- for the Biden administration.

The Biden administration won't give up the ultimate goal of complete denuclearization of North Korea, but it may be prepared to approach that long-term goal step-by-step with reciprocal benefits to each party at every stage of -- every stage of the process. Success in negotiations with North Korea is hardly guaranteed. Kim Jong-un is unwilling to give up his nuclear capability altogether and may keep -- he may even be unwilling to accept meaningful limits on nuclear and missile programs and the intrusive measures, verification measures, needed to ensure confidence and compliance. And in that event, if agreement can't be reached with the North, a Biden administration may have no choice but to work with its allies on a long-term strategy of pressure, deterrence, and containment.

The Trump administration failed on North Korea and Iran largely for three reasons. First, it acted alone without the support of key countries, even America's closest allies. Second, it did not align ends and means. It generated tremendous economic leverage, but pursued overly ambitious, unachievable negotiating objectives.

And third, it underestimated the determination and resilience of countries prepared to pay an enormous price to protect what they regarded as vital interests. And I don't think a Biden administration will make those mistakes. Thank you.

MS. MALONEY: Thanks, Bob. Turning to you Matt, I wonder if you could give us a sense of how you think a Trump administration 2.0 might either change its approach to one or both of these countries and what you would advise President Trump if he is successful in his reelection campaign

to do -- to make some progress on these two issues where he's invested a lot of his own personal diplomacy. Whereas Bob suggested, we've seen an enormous toll from the economic pressure, the maximum pressure strategy that he's applied, but where he has not yet actually achieved the agreements as it rolled back the nuclear ambitions by the state. What would you advise? What do you think may happen?

MR. KROENIG: Well, thank you, Suzanne, and thanks to Brookings for hosting this discussion. I would like to start with an overall point and then go into to each country and the Trump administration's policy.

So the overall point is I think there is actually more bipartisan consensus in a way on these issues than we often realize in our internal base. I think there is a bipartisan consensus that the nuclear missile programs of both of these countries are major challenges and we want to aim for denuclearization in the case of North Korea, and preventing Iran from going nuclear, in the case of Iran.

And second, I think there is basically a bipartisan consensus on how to handle these challenges, which is pressure and engagement. As long as these countries continue to develop their nuclear missile programs, we are going to increase the economic, political, and military pressure. But if they're willing to come to the table and negotiate, we are willing to discuss releasing that pressure in exchange for limits on their nuclear programs.

So the Obama administration policy towards Iran was called pressure and engagement. The Trump administration policy toward North Korea is maximum pressure and engagement. So pretty similar, maximum pressure is the policy toward Iran. So I think the real difference is on how hard you lean on the pressure and the engagement tracks, and then when do you stop. When is good enough good enough and we do need to keep going?

So first, on Iran, talking to some senior Trump officials when they think to a second term, they do see China as the top priority and a place where they think they can continue to make progress. But I think they see Iran is an area where, contrary to much of the discussion in Washington, they think the strategy is working and they are optimistic about what can be accomplished in a second term. So they think the strategy has succeeded in hurting Iran's economy, limiting their resources to support malign influence in the region. The regime is under intense pressure, maybe more pressure than at any time

since the founding of the Islamic Republic.

And so it's really a two-part strategy. The pressure is meant to force Iran to come to the negotiating table and it hasn't succeeded in that second step yet. But I think there is a sense that Iran is waiting out this selection and that they are hopeful that they can get a better deal with Biden so they are not wanting to come to the table now. But in the second Trump term, that they wouldn't build to resist this pressure for four more years, that they would have to come to the table and discuss some kind of limitations.

So I think some quibbles maybe for me, but I think overall this is the right approach. We have generated enormous leverage and we should see -- try to exploit that in a second term.

Among North Korea, the policy was maximum pressure and engagement. And early on there was a lot of pressure, threats of fire and fury, the toughest ever economic sanctions on North Korea. And I think that did generate the leverage that brought Kim Jong-un to the table, Singapore and Hanoi. But then I think the negotiating agreement with North Korea proved more difficult than maybe some of the Trump administration expected. I think many of us on the outside were skeptical.

So I think since that engagement track hasn't panned out, that it's become much less of a priority for the Trump administration. It was a top priority early on including it was the very first national security review that H.R .McMaster finished as national security advisor. And now we don't care about it as much. It's more of a back-burner issue.

So I think in a second term, my hope is that it would become more of a priority. And I think we've leaned on the pressure track early on. Then we tried the engagement track, and that hasn't worked. So in my view, it's time to lean back on the pressure track and try to increase, especially the economic, political, and military pressure to try to get North Korea in a place where maybe it would come back to the table and discuss serious limits. And it is a nuclear armed power. So in the meantime we do have to put in place a serious deterrence and strategy to deal with the threat that exists. So I think I'll end my remarks there and look forward to the discussion with my colleagues.

MS. MALONEY: Thanks so much, Matt. Jung, I would love to bring you into the conversation specifically to talk a little bit more about how this election is playing out from the eyes of our adversaries. How are the North Koreans looking at the prospects for either another four years with the

Trump administration and maximum pressure or the possibilities of some kind of change in approach as a result of an election of a president Biden. How are other allies and partners around the region, particularly in Seoul, thinking about the possibilities and the options?

And particularly, if you could speak to these questions of how we continue to engage our partners under either one of these scenarios. That's obviously been a key element of the remarks of both Bob and Matt.

MS. PAK: Thanks Suzanne, and thanks to the panel. It's a pleasure to be involved in this program.

Let me talk first about the view from Pyongyang. Elections are not a new thing. So this is not a surprise for Pyongyang as the Kim family has been playing the long game for a long time and they are well aware of our practices and sometimes better than we do. Kim Jong-un himself has outlasted President Obama, South Korean President Geun-hye, and is likely to outlast presidents Trump and Moon in South Korea.

And while diplomacy has been deadlocked since the Hanoi Summit in February between President Trump and Kim, the North Korean leader has been continuing weapons development as he defiantly showcased at the 75th anniversary of the Korean Workers Party on October 10th. What we saw there was a wide range of weapons comes including what might have been North Korea's biggest ICBM yet, which was probably the new strategic weapon that Kim threatened it to unveil back in late December, early January of this year. We don't know if these weapons work, but Kim is clearly seeking to possess road mobile missiles and solid fuel engines that could be more quickly deployed and more maneuverable to counter U.S. and South Korean missile defenses.

The parade and various U.N. panel of experts reports and analysis of satellite imagery of North Korea's nuclear and missile related facilities suggest that Kim has not veered away from his strategic goals of diversifying and mass-producing more capable nuclear weapons, even despite three meetings with President Trump. In that parade, Kim in his speech and said that he would strengthen the war deterrent against the hostile threat posed by outside powers and frame them as defensive in nature. He made no specific references to the U.S. suggesting that he was keeping his options open on diplomacy or provocation. This is not entirely surprising.

Earlier this month, Kim sent President Trump a get well soon message after the President was diagnosed with COVID-19. And in July, his younger sister, Kim Yo-jong, in a rather rambling statement said Kim and Trump relationship was good.

But regardless of the election, and my colleagues Bob, and Matthew, Matt, have talked about how the U.S., as the actor, as the agent triggering action. But I think regardless of the election, Kim is looking at the long view and that he still has agency in all of this in framing how the next U.S. administration, whether it's Trump 2.0 or Biden administration, is going to respond.

Kim Jong-un in his New Year's address, in his New Year's comments, told his people to buckle up for a prolonged confrontation with the U.S. This was in January 2020.
His sister back in July said that, "Even if the U.S. ties itself over the current crisis of the presidential election, we have to anticipate its endless hostile actions against the DPRK."

She added that North Korea should not adjust its tactics on the U.S. and our nuclear program depending on the relations with the U.S. president. That is, no matter how good the relationship is between her brother and any U.S. president, including especially President Trump, the strategy is going to make – is going to be consistent. I think that this view suggests that regardless of the personal relationship, whether -- whatever personal relationships that Kim has with the – with this U.S. president or future U.S. president, that the presidency itself and the person of the president is constrained by the national security bureaucracies.

As Matt mentioned, who has a very -- there is a very broad consensus on how to approach North Korea, in that -- on the sanctions pressure and calling for human rights improvements and that Pyongyang is not going to change its strategic posture, that we would expect opportunistic tactical moves, whether with President Trump or President Biden.

So what is the likelihood of change in the North Korea posture? So Kim has shown the weapons. This is part of some of the playbook that he goes through is that he shows the weapons. And the next thing is to threaten to use them. And the final thing is to demonstrate them and to continue to improving on existing capabilities. Precedence suggests that the regime will test a strategic weapon early on in a new administration to lay down the market for a new president. Kim -- the regime did this in 2009 with President Obama and did it again with President Trump in 2017. But it's also possible that Kim will

do a similar move, perhaps start with a threat implicit or explicit with the Trump administration to show, hey, we are still here.

So -- and I think what the key factors for what might factor into Kim's decision-making on provocation or dialogue is that he feels reasonably assured that he can pivot it to diplomacy and that there will be a welcome reception for that, a receptive environment for a pivot even as he has demonstrated his weapons and that he can still continue to be able to pivot and drive situation on the ground. And I think part of Kim's calculus has to be on how comfortable or uncomfortable he is with his dependence on China.

So far, as a result on maximum pressure, as a result of the years of sanctions that have been building up, that China as a trade partner, as a political partner, has grown in recent years as a result. And so right now trade with South Korea is down to very little. Trade with other countries is down to little. Trade with Russia is very minuscule. And so that dependence on China grows even as – especially as – during the COVID lockdowns, during the -- especially as the sanctions continue to remain in place and we had the global pandemic that really inhibits North Korea's tourism industry and other moneymaking ventures.

So when we look at some of the other allies and how we should be looking at our other allies, the muscle memory of how we focus on alliances and a multilateral approach are still there. This is not a new thing for the United States to be building up and shoring up our ties with South Korea and Japan to make sure that we are all on the same page.

On the South Korea side, the ties have been tense. We had some very high level visitors with South Korea come from – come in last week to talk about a variety of things. There have been fissures during the Trump administration in terms of, as Bob mentioned, some of the host nation support issues that is still outstanding, that when President Trump demanded a 400 percent increase on host nation support from South Korea. There has been disagreement about how to approach North Korea. South Korea has been very much focused on engagement, on improving economic cooperation and providing humanitarian aid. So that continues to make ties between South Korea and U.S. a little bit difficult.

When we look at some of the polling on how the South Koreans view the U.S. election,

some of the South Korea newspapers are talking about the chaos of this election. When we look at polling, the Pew polls indicate – a Pew poll recently said that 17 percent view President Trump favorably. But a Chicago Council poll found that 90 percent, and this is reflective of other polls, 90 percent of South Koreans still support the alliance. So we have a deep reservoir of alliance networks, working level networks, working level relationships in a deep reservoir of goodwill and the American people and in the South Korean populace for maintaining the alliance.

So let me stop there Suzanne, and turn it back to you.

MS. MALONEY: Thanks so much, Jung. I would like to turn out to Ambassador Edelman. I think one of the interesting points that Jung just raised was that despite, as Bob suggested earlier, the fact that any new administration, whether it's the Biden administration or a second term of the Trump administration, is necessarily going to be focused inward on domestic priorities. Either or both of these countries may try to force itself onto the agenda early on in the next term.

And so one of the key elements of the strategy of the Obama administration and frankly, the Bush administration before it, was a reliance on trying to devise and maintain relationships with our allies and partners that could help us solve these problems or at least defer the ambitions of both countries through multilateral diplomacy. Do you see any opportunities for revising the broad-based diplomacy with partners and allies including those countries that as Matt and Bob and Jung have all pointed where there have been frictions including China, including Russia? Is an opportunity for the next president to build on those important relationships and try to fashion some sort of common approach?

AMBASSADOR EDELMAN: Well, thank you Suzanne. Thank you for inviting me. And it's great to be on such a distinguished panel including with two former colleagues from government, Matt and Bob. I would say old colleagues, but I don't want to draw attention to Bob's and my advanced age.

Let me start by saying that there's no question that U.S. alliances, which have been a strategic advantage for the United States both in its dealings with the kind of great power adversaries that Matt focuses on in his book and that the national security strategy and national defense strategy focus on, but also on dealing with rogue actors like the DPRK and Iran.

I mean, traditionally our alliances have been, to borrow a phrase from Walter Lipman, “the shield of the republic.” And there is no question that they suffered previous damage I think not just

under the Trump administration frankly, but going back into the Bush administration as well. In the Obama administration, I don't think you have to back that far or dig that deep. If you read President Obama's interviews with Jeffrey Goldberg, there are plenty of comments critical of our allies and along -- you know, in much more polite terms, but very much along some of the same lines as we've seen President Trump views about free-riding and not carrying their weight, etc.

I would say if there is a second Trump administration, it will be very hard, in fact maybe not possible, to fix the damage to America's alliances. I know for instance that John Bolton has said both in his book and publicly repeatedly, he worries that in a second Trump term, President Trump might make good on his threat to withdraw from the NATO alliance. Jung had just talked about some of the issues that bedeviled the U.S. ROK alliance. And I can't imagine those will get better in a second Trump term.

With regard to Iran, we already see some of the cost of that damage in the United Nations Security Council and the inability of the United States to get its closest allies to go along with it in extending the conventional arms embargo on Iran that expired on Sunday. And there is a -- every prospect if there is a second Trump term, although they haven't done it yet, of the administration launching secondary sanctions to impose snap back based on its reading of the legality here, which as a again, as National -- former National Security Adviser John Bolton has pointed out, whether it's legal -- whether the legal argument is right or wrong is less important than the fact that the objective of maximum pressure is to isolate Iran, not to end up having the United States being isolated.

So what can we do to try and reinvigorate our alliances? I would say there are several things. First, I think it's very important for the U.S. -- first of all, if there is a Biden administration, there will be a giant sigh of relief among allies. And I think that provides a certain opportunity for the Biden administration to reset things.

There is a danger, by the way, that they will reset things in the wrong way and just immediately sort of move to a position of agreeing with our allies on both how to deal with North Korea and Iran. I would argue that that is a mistake. The administration needs to figure out its own policy and strategy and then go to the allies to try to line them up rather than a kind of least common denominator approach.

But I think what's really important is to sort of pull the camera back and open the aperture

a little bit and address with the allies was really at stake in dealing with these two countries. I would basically say what's at stake is the entire nonproliferation treaty regime that has been arguably, in my view, the greatest achievement of arms control in the 20th and 21st century.

President Kennedy, after the Cuban Missile Crisis in the spring of 1963, had a very famous comment that he gave at a press conference when he was asked what kept him awake at night in the wake of the missile crisis. What was the thing he was most afraid of? In the thing, he said he was afraid of was having 20 or 30 nuclear weapons states by 1970.

Now here we are 60 years later and there are only nine nuclear weapons states. Why is that? Well, that's because of the enormous amount of work by people like Bob Einhorn who has helped make the nuclear nonproliferation regime a relative success. But that's at stake here. I mean, Bob mentioned in his comments that he didn't think the Biden administration will give up on the idea of complete verifiable, irreversible disarmament with North Korea even though there are many voices in the academy, and the think tank world arguing for just such a course. And I think there is a very simple reason for that. Because giving up on it ultimately would be to say you can join the NPT, get the benefits of the NPT, and then walk out of it.

And there are enough countries right now looking at this including the Republic of Korea where people are talking now openly about an independent Korean nuclear -- South Korean nuclear deterrent. It's something that was discussed in previous Korean government in the 1970s. So this is not something that is a completely strange subject for them. But in light of the problems in the alliance that has been created by President Trump, this is becoming a much more common conversation.

It's a bit more sub rosa in Japan, but I assure you it's there. And we certainly see it in hedging behavior in the Middle East dealing with Iran including in a country I know a little bit about, Turkey, where President Recep Tayyip Erdogan has spoken out publicly about Turkey being entitled ultimately to a -- its own nuclear arsenal as a major player in the international system. So I think we have to underline for our allies, the danger that both of these countries represent to the NPT.

Bob said in his comments, opening comments, correctly that North Korea is a current threat and Iran is a potential threat. Well, based on the latest IAEA report, Iran is a lot closer to being a real threat than it was in 2019. They now have 10 times the allowed LEU under the JCPOA that they had

in 2019. So their timeline for breakout is now about three and half months according to the IAEA. So this is something that is very near on the horizon.

And to Jung's quite apt points about the new ICBM that was demonstrated a couple of weeks ago by North Korea, North Korea is moving very, very aggressively towards a larger, more diverse nuclear arsenal enforced posture, which is going to impose also set dilemmas on the United States, not least the size and scale of this missile-defense effort, which was sized basically for a theory of the case that said North Korea was looking for a very, very small nuclear arsenal in order to deter overwhelming U.S. conventional power.

But that doesn't seem to be what they're doing. They are pursuing ICBM. Why do you need a bigger ICBM than the Hwasong-15? You could use a bigger ICBM if you want to put multiple, independently re-targetable warheads on it which would create a very, very severe set of dilemmas for U.S. defense planners.

So what I think the United States needs to do is heighten the sense of urgency among its allies, reaffirm unequivocally its alliance commitments to defend its allies, especially, including its extended nuclear deterrence commitments which I think requires moving ahead with the modernization of all three legs of the nuclear triad to make that credible. Bob talked about, and Matt talked about engagement and diplomacy. And obviously, I agree with Matt that there is a bipartisan commitment on the fact that you need both to deal with these challenges, but the art of policy is determining what the balance is between the two.

I think one of the things that the Obama administration lacked, and I think some members of the Obama administration candidly would admit this, was a credible nuclear option against Iran, which I think made it much more difficult to negotiate an agreement and in my view that led to the negotiation of an unsatisfactory agreement.

So I think you have to make sure you have military options and that your adversaries know that you are developing them and that you are prepared in extremis to use them. That's not because you want to, but because you want to enable the diplomacy to give them an alternate course to seek a solution to these problems.

Maximum pressure, in my view, is a tactic. And the Trump administration in my view has

been guilty of having a tactic but not a strategy. And it needs to be embedded in a broader strategy. Bob talked about the importance of going after the regional behavior of Iran, and I agree with that. I think it needs to be dealt with both in negotiation and in strengthening our ties with our allies including providing some of the things that only we can provide for our allies in the region, which is shared early warning and enabling them with some crucial military capabilities that only the U.S. has to be able to defend themselves not only from potentially a nuclear Iran, but from Iran's growing conventional ballistic missile force, which is a threat and a challenge in and amongst itself to gulf and economic infrastructure, tourist and economic infrastructure targets that would be very desirable targets from a point of view of Iran.

And then finally, I think we've given up both in the Obama and in the Trump administrations, one very important tool for dealing with both of these countries, which is our emphasis on human rights and promotion of democracy. That is a huge challenge in the North Korean context, but shouldn't be such a great challenge in the Iran context where Iranians have repeatedly shown over the last several years their discontent with their regime and their desire to replace this machine and seen it done with. I don't think the United States can accomplish regime change militarily in Iran, or should it try to. But it can and should try and help enable Iranians themselves to oppose this regime because at the end of the day is the most likely route for us to get some kind of agreement to limit Iran's regional ambitions and its nuclear weapons program.

Why don't I stop there?

MS. MALONEY: Thanks so much Ambassador Edelman, in part because what you just spoke to addressed at least one of the questions that we had from one of our audience. And we will be looking for more questions from all of you, #Policy2020 or email events@brookings.edu.

Let me turn back to the rest of the panel with another point that I think was implicit in some of your remarks is now, Ambassador Edelman, talking about the Obama administration's approach and why in fact the agreement that was negotiated didn't satisfy some within the United States. And that's really the question of bipartisanship.

Matt talked about a general bipartisan consensus around pressure and engagement. And certainly from my own work on Iran, I know that's true. In the earliest days after the seizure of the U.S. Embassy in Tehran, the first crisis group meeting that was held by the Carter administration outlined

just such a strategy of pressure and remaining open to diplomatic engagement with the revolutionaries. And that really has been the playbook that every administration has followed with obvious tweaks and differences in style.

We can see something similar I think from what everyone has said with respect to North Korea. And yet on both issues, there has been a fierce bipartisan debate. And at least with respect to Iran, that sense of partisan rancor and deep disagreement with the Obama administration's policy and approach to Iran led to the Trump decision to walk away from the deal. Is it possible to create or rebuild some kind of bipartisan consensus around tactics as well as strategy? And how would we go about doing that?

And I – is really a question to anyone on the panel who might want to jump in. Bob, I see you ready to take the mic.

MR. EINHORN: Yeah. Look, people have accused the Obama administration, with some justification, of not working hard enough in the JCPOA to get bipartisan support, not to bring in Republicans and so forth. I think there is a certain truth to that. But I think basically, President Obama recognized that many Republicans, especially in the Senate were bound and determined to thwart any Obama initiative. And that is terribly unfortunate that that's -- it's come to that in our polarized political system.

The Obama administration, I think correctly confined the JCPOA to the nuclear issue. It was the most urgent problem. But the administration said that separately we will take on Iran's maligned regional activities. But many people, Republicans and Democrats felt the Obama administration wasn't strong enough in pushing back against those activities. And I think the absence of any, what was considered a critical regional policy, was one of the reasons why it didn't have a bipartisan support. There was also the question of the sunsets, the expiration and key restrictions after a certain number of years. That's unfortunate.

Can bipartisan support be built for a follow-on agreement? I don't know. I think it will be hard. The Republicans have kind of staked out the JCPOA as an original sin and they have -- if -- one of my concerns with Vice President Biden's determination to immediately go back to the JCPOA is that it immediately alienates half of our electorate. And that's a problem. There may be alternatives to doing

that. But I think if the -- if a Biden administration took the regional Iran threat very seriously and worked with our partners to address it, I think that could help build support for a follow-on nuclear deal.

Also, I think that there may be mechanism. I remember -- you know, Eric and I are old-timers in this business. And I remember I was a member of the U.S. Stark delegation back in the 1980s. And we were visited by, it was called I think the Senate Arms-Control Observers Group. You had five Republicans, five Democrats. They sat in with us in the tank and our mission. We discussed strategy. We consulted with them in Washington. They became real experts.

I think the -- if there is a Biden administration, it should try to work with the leadership in Congress to establish such a mechanism to try to build bipartisan support. It will be hard. The JCPOA has a partisan history, but I think we can do better next time around.

MR. EDELMAN: I agree largely with what Bob just said, but let me add a couple of points that I could. One is that there was some bipartisanship in the Senate in the consideration of the JCPOA, which ultimately was the very reason why the Obama administration decided not to submit it for a vote. Because if you go back and recall, if the Democrats flip the Senate this year, which I think is highly likely, the incoming Senate majority leader, Chuck Schumer, announced himself against the JCPOA, said he would vote against it.

The incoming chairman of the Foreign Relations Committee, Bob Menendez, said he would vote against it. The next ranking Democrat on the committee, Ben Cardin, said he would vote against it. So there was actually quite a bit of Democratic opposition inside the Senate to the JCPOA. I suspect there were a couple of other votes that would have gone that way as well if the administration had actually gone to a vote.

So I think -- now having said that, and to be fair to the Obama administration, they suspected, I think Pres. Obama suspected, that there was nothing he could do to reach out to a certain number of Republicans. They were just going to oppose it because it was his deal. And the reality is that's true.

And I'm afraid to say that one of the things I worry about in a second Trump administration demonstration is that a second Trump administration would also squander all of its accomplishments with maximum pressure by agreeing essentially to a warmed-over version of the

JCPOA and saying that it was the Trump deal and it was the greatest ever. I mean, that's essentially what he did with NAFTA. I think you could see this coming again, same with the China trade deal for that matter. So I think you can see this coming if there is going to be a second Trump administration.

I think frankly, the prospects for bipartisanship are not great. And that's in part because our political system has become so polarized. Although, it's more polarization of political elites than it is the electorate. I think the electorate may be proving that in this election. We'll see, of course.

I think some of the prospects for bipartisanship will depend a little bit on how deep the defeat for Trump and Trump-ism is, if in fact he is defeated. And one of the reasons why I'm hoping for an overwhelming repudiation of the president at the polls is precisely because I think it will help get the Republican party back onto a saner track in terms of bipartisanship.

I think one thing that a Biden administration could do to help would be to say at the outset that it intends to submit whatever agreement it reaches with Iran. And I agree with Bob. I hope the vice president doesn't rush back into it for the reasons Bob said, but for others as well. I think they've got a lot of leverage. I don't think they want to squander it. The situation is very different from what it was a year ago. You can't kind of un-ring the bell here and just walk back into it, in my view. And I think they will face problems inside the Senate with their own caucus if they do.

So I hope that cooler heads prevail. But I think if the Biden administration said whatever agreement it comes to with Iran, it will submit with the Congress for a vote along with the lines of the SALT Agreement of 1972, which is what the Nixon administration did. I think it would go a long way –

AMBASSADOR EINHORN: And didn't require two thirds of the Senate. It was an executive – it required a simple majority in both houses.

MR. EDELMAN: Right. Right. But I think if they did that, they would actually submit it to a vote, majority vote, I think that would go a long way to help build some bipartisanship.

MR. KROENIG: I would just add on this. I think this is one of the tragedies in U.S. foreign policy in recent years how the Middle East in general and U.S. policy towards the Middle East has become a partisan issue. And I think it's a broader than the JCPOA, and I think there is the risk of that support for Israel and support for traditional partners in the region like UAE, the Gulf states, it is seen somehow as a partisan issue now, that that's something that Republicans do but not others.

But I do think it started in part from the Iran deal. I thought the Obama approach to the Iran deal was quite good actually. I was a supporter of the approach to Iran from the beginning until about 2015 or so. And I think problem in my view, is that the Obama administration stopped too short, that we could've pushed for harder terms and we gave Iran too good of a deal. I think there are some Republicans who would've thought that any deal with Iran is unacceptable, we can't trust them.

My concern was really about enrichment. You know, the United States has worked to stop the spread of enrichment reprocessing to all countries, even our allies for many years. We don't allow South Korea to reprocess. We got UAE to sign up to this gold standard of no enrichment reprocessing. And then we said, okay, we're going to have an international agreement where we give Iran, basically an enemy, the world's largest state sponsor of terror, the ability to enrich uranium. So we trust the clerics in Iran with this, but not our democratic allies in South Korea. I think that was a mistake and I think it was the right move of the Trump administration to say that our goal is zero enrichment.

So in terms of gaining, regaining bipartisanship, I think it could be harder. I think one thing the Biden administration could do is say, okay, we are in a different place now than we were in 2015. We have -- whether we like the Trump approach or not, we have new leverage now. The sanctions, I think, have been more successful that many people predicted. Many people had predicted that unilateral U.S. sanctions weren't going to have much of an effect. I think we've seen they've had an effect.

So I think that the Biden administration would push for tougher terms than what they achieved in the JCPOA. That may be one thing that could get more Republicans on board.

MS. MALONEY: Thanks Matt. I would like to take two of the questions that we've received from the audience and put them out there to our panelists and ask each of them to address either question or any other aspect of our conversation today in a few minutes of brief closing remarks.

The first question comes from Greg Thielman at the Arms Control Association who asks, “what role does U.S. strategic missile defense play in deterring Iran and North Korea?”

And then let me also pose a question from Maia Tanaka with Japan's Kyoto News whose question – “the Trump administration's approach on North Korea's short range missiles which have remained a threat for neighboring countries such as Japan, wondering whether either the Biden

administration or presumably Trump 2.0 might take a tougher stance on any testifying of missiles including short range missiles?"

Jung, if I could ask you to start with either one of those questions, or if you would like to make any other points on the questions of bipartisanship or future diplomacy.

MS. PAK: Thanks. One of the reasons I mentioned that North Korea might do a strategic test or demonstration were threatened to do it, even with the Trump -- with a second Trump administration, is that because the Trump administration so far has ignored those short range ballistic missiles despite the concerns of our allies, Japan and South Korea. So I think that that might be a way of trying to get the president's attention in a second administration to try to jumpstart something on North Korea's terms based on -- in part based on North Korea's unease with its dependence on China.

So I think that when we are talking about what to do next, is that it's not so much what we can predict. This is not the lottery, for example. We are not in the business of predicting what numbers are going to be the winning numbers. But how do we manage the unknown? The ambiguous?

And I think we have to be ready for all sorts of things whether it's a short range ballistic missile test or a strategic demonstration, and to make sure that we have all of those things in place. My concern with the demonstration of ballistic missile test early on in the next administration is that again, we will be flat-footed. And it's that we will be responding versus acting. That we will be scrambling for response versus having -- you know, even as the new administration might be going through a policy review, that North Korea might -- is probably not going to allow the next administration to have that option. So I think we have to be prepared and ready to respond and to act and to try to change the dynamics. But North Korea has a boat here and has a really big boat.

MS. MALONEY: Great. I will just turn next to Matt in the order that I have you on my screen.

MR. KROENIG: Okay, wonderful. Well, I guess I will address the question on missile defense. And I do think that missile defense plays an important role for Iran and North Korea, both theater missile defenses to protect U.S. allies and bases in the region, but also the homeland missile defense system. And North Korea either has an ICBM or is on the verge of having an ICBM. Making it only the -- you know, some people say that you know, a lot of countries have a lot of nuclear weapons.

Why are we so concerned? But North Korea would become only the third U.S. adversary after Russia and China to have the ability to threaten nuclear war against the U.S. homeland. So this is an important threat. And having the ability to defend against that is important.

If you look at the 2018 nuclear posture review, it says that our -- we don't have a policy of mutual vulnerability with North Korea like we might have with Russia or China, but it's an escalation dominant strategy, that we want to protect ourselves and be able to threaten the end of the Kim regime for any strategic attack. So I think continuing to develop our homeland missile defenses, to keep pace with the North Korea threat is important.

And as Ambassador Edelman pointed out, as the North Korean arsenal continues to grow, that is going to place upward demands on what we need in terms of home and defense and I think this is an important part of our deterrence and defense strategy.

MS. MALONEY: Thanks so much, Matt. Ambassador Edelman, over to you.

AMBASSADOR EDELMAN: Well, let me just add one thing in answer to Greg's question to what Matt just said, which is more specifically, I think we always face the danger of a conflict breaking out on the Korean Peninsula, a conventional conflict.

But the missile defense becomes a deterrent to North Korea using its nuclear weapons in a situation where they are facing a catastrophic conventional defeat, which might actually get them to use their nuclear weapons. I think the nuclear defense piece of this is important and it's something that's been recognized going back to the Clinton administration which first began raising the issue of the potential, what they call national missile defense, to deal with the rogue actor, which was aimed at North Korea. So I think there's been bipartisan support for this going back some ways.

MS. MALONEY: And finally to you Bob.

MR. EINHORN: Thank you, Suzanne. You know, quickly on the short-range missile threat to our North Korean missile threat to our allies. The -- I think the Trump administration has concentrated too much on dealing with a long-range missile threat, the threat to the American homeland and that has upset our Japanese and South Korean allies as Jung has pointed out.

In an interim agreement with the North, which is a kind of agreement I would support, is a step toward denuclearization. I would call for a ban not only in the testing of ICBM range missiles, but all

missiles down to very tactical battlefield missiles. The north already has these missiles. I don't think they are going to give them up. But I think constraining the testing to reduce the reliability of the systems, their ability to penetrate local defenses and so forth. So I would advocate that.

Now, Greg Hillman's question dealt with the impact of U.S. strategic defenses on deterrence. So let me focus on our homeland defenses. The policy, not just of the Trump administration, but Obama and Bush before him, has been deterrence by denial. In other words, trying to prevent North Korea from having the ability to attack the U.S. homeland with nuclear weapons.

And so we were sizing -- we were designing and sizing our homeland missile defense capability to get ahead – as much to get ahead of the North Korean threat, to be able to deny them that ability. Unfortunately, what's happening is the North Koreans have made real strides with their long-range missile capabilities. We saw in the October 10th parade. That's a missile. It probably can't carry multiple independently targetable reentry vehicles yet, but it probably has the payload to deliver several -- a multiple warhead payload to the United States and penetration aids and decoys. And it's clear that the North Koreans are going to do everything they can to ensure they have a reliable ability to attack the United States homeland.

So look, we can try with directed energy, with space -- you know, all kinds of exotic technologies to say ahead of the game, but I think at the end of the day, unfortunately, we're going to have a situation where we will rely on the threat of retaliation with U.S. offensive strategic forces to deter the North Korean nuclear attack. It's unfortunate, but sooner or later that's the world we're going to have to live in.

MS. MALONEY: Thanks so much, Bob and thanks to all of our panelists, Ambassador Edelman, Matt, and Jung Pak. This has just been a fascinating discussion. And what I'm so really pleased about is that we've been able to hear from a variety of different perspectives from a variety of different scenarios involving two of the most urgent threats that will be facing the next president.

I really want to commend everyone and ask our audience to join everyone in a round of virtual applause for this terrific group of experts. And I hope we can reconvene you back sometime after January when we will have an opportunity to talk about who is actually in the White House and how they are going to be approaching these challenges and others. Thanks so much and look forward to seeing

you all soon.

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