



Speech to the Institute for Corean-American Studies:

**North Korea's Nuclear Weapons
and Missile Capability**

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Thank you for being here today and allowing me to share some thoughts regarding North Korea. Before I discuss the role my office plays in the intelligence community and the threat posed by North Korea, I'd like to pause for a moment to acknowledge the passing of Otto Warmbier and ask you to remember that there are three other American citizens amongst those North Korea holds captive. As President Trump said on June 19th, "the United States once again condemns the brutality of the North Korean regime as we mourn its latest victim."

As the National Intelligence Manager for East Asia, I work for the Director of National Intelligence and am responsible for integrating the Intelligence Community's collection, analysis, counter-intelligence and budgetary approach for East Asian issues. National Intelligence Managers also serve as the bridge between policymakers and the Intelligence Community to orient and guide collection and analytic needs. One of my key responsibilities is to identify gaps between what our policy makers need and what the Intelligence Community can provide to close these gaps.

With that as my job description, I can certainly tell you that this is an interesting time to work East Asia – especially since my responsibilities include North Korea. There are few issues that garner the same level of attention at the highest levels of government – and few issues have been such a high priority throughout our recent Presidential transition. North Korea is one of the Trump Administration's top national security priorities – just as it was for the Obama Administration. North Korea is a belligerent state actor that continues to be a critical security challenge because of the threat it poses to the United States, our allies, and the region.

Because of the threat the Kim Jong Un regime poses – and because of the Administration’s prioritization of this threat – the Intelligence Community considers North Korea one of our top intelligence priorities. With the high level of attention we apply to North Korea, I’m very pleased to be here today to discuss North Korea’s nuclear and ballistic missile developments.

As you all know, Kim Jong-Un became the Supreme Leader of North Korea following the sudden death of his father, Kim Jong-Il in late 2011. He’s in his early 30s, but has already been in power for nearly 6 years. He is firmly in control of the regime with no credible signs of internal threats to his rule or alternate centers of power. Kim has become quite practiced at using a combination of inducements, punishments and leadership shuffles to ensure the loyalty of regime elites, the military, and senior advisors. We’ve seen multiple examples of Kim Jong Un’s steps to neutralize potential threats to his unitary rule in a series of party, government, and military purges with accompanying reeducation or executions. Public executions, humiliating demotions, and sentences to

reeducation sessions or labor camps are frequently employed tools. In the most well-known example, in 2013, Kim accused his uncle Chang Song-taek, a top official under Kim Jong-Il, of counter-revolutionary acts. Chang was publically disgraced, removed from all North Korean media, and executed.

In May 2016, Kim Jong Un held the 7th party congress of the Korean Worker's Party. North Korea had not held this show piece event since his grandfather staged the 6th party congress in 1980 – a gap of 36 years. There hadn't been a Party Congress during Kim Jong Un's lifetime. At the congress, Kim unveiled new ruling structures to demonstrate his control. In addition to his titles of National Defense Commission Chairman, Supreme Commander of the Korean People's Army, and First Secretary, Kim Jong Un appointed himself as the Chairman of the Korean Worker's Party to help establish his own separate identity from his grandfather – who had been posthumously designated North Korea's 'Eternal President' – and his father – who had been posthumously named the KWP's 'eternal general secretary.'

Since coming to power, Kim Jong Un has championed *Byungjin*, an effort to simultaneously improve the domestic economy and advance nuclear weapons and delivery systems. I'm not going to go into detail on North Korea's economy – many of you in this audience are far more expert than me on the subject – but Kim's pet projects are more about ostentatious displays than actual development. Projects such as the Munsu waterpark, the Rungna Dolphinarium and the Masikrong Ski resort provide circuses for the elites and give Kim an opportunity to sell the country as an adventure destination for foreign tourists. But speed battles to build the Potemkin villages of Mirae Street and Ryomong Street are not a substitute for urban planning or efficient investment in the economy. It doesn't take an economist to know that this type of gross resource misallocation is not a recipe for economic success.

North Korea relies on foreign currency to fund the Kim regime's nuclear and ballistic missile programs. The largest foreign contribution to North Korea's economy remains trade

with China, which has come under pressure due to increased sanctions.

China remains committed to the denuclearization of the Korean peninsula and strongly prefers a peaceful strategy to achieve this end. Beijing has increased both economic and diplomatic pressure on Pyongyang, including passage of the two hardest hitting UN sanctions in decades against North Korea in 2016. However, even if fully implemented, UN sanctions will have a limited financial effect – as most of North Korea’s foreign revenue is generated by trade in goods and services that remain unrestricted by international sanctions – or only partially restricted.

We believe North Korea’s strategic objective is the development of a credible nuclear deterrent. Kim Jong Un is committed to development of a long range nuclear armed missile capable of posing a direct threat to the continental United States to complement his existing ability to threaten the region. Kim views nuclear weapons as a key component of regime survival and a deterrent against outside threats. Kim probably judges that once he can strike the U.S. mainland, he

can deter attacks on his regime and perhaps coerce Washington into policy decisions that benefit Pyongyang and upset regional alliances – possibly even to attempt to press for the removal of U.S. forces from the peninsula.

North Korea's nuclear program has been underway for decades; Pyongyang has conducted a total of five nuclear tests since 2006. Three of these took place in the five and a half years since Kim Jong Un came to power; two in the last year alone. Pyongyang claimed that the 4th test in January 2016 was a hydrogen bomb, but seismic data showed that the explosion was not large enough to have been a successful thermonuclear detonation. It claimed the 5th test in September 2016 was the 'standardized warhead for a nuclear missile.' These claims indicate an aspiration for advanced nuclear weapons.

Clearly, Kim is committed to developing these weapons and we believe North Korea will continue to produce and refine uranium and plutonium for additional weapons. In 2013, North Korea announced its intention to restart all nuclear facilities at Yongbyon and in September 2015, it announced

that those facilities — which include its uranium enrichment facilities—had resumed normal operation. In 2013, it probably also expanded the size of that uranium enrichment facility. North Korea’s unprecedented level of testing and displays of strategic weapons in 2016 show that Kim is intent on proving he has nuclear weapons and on demonstrating the capability to strike the US mainland with them. Pyongyang’s enshrinement of the possession of nuclear weapons in its constitution, while stating nuclear weapons are the basis for North Korea’s survival, suggests that Kim does not intend to negotiate them away at any price. Mounting UNSC resolutions have only been met with more testing, including at least 11 ballistic missile launches on eight different occasions so far this year. We are concerned that North Korea might conduct its first ICBM flight test this year, based on public comments that preparations to do so are almost complete.

North Korea’s other military capabilities also pose a serious challenge to South Korea and Japan. Kim has further expanded the regime’s conventional strike options in recent years, with more realistic training, artillery upgrades and new close-range ballistic missiles that enable precision fire at

ranges that can reach more US and allied targets in South Korea. North Korea possesses and has recently tested a substantial number of proven mobile ballistic missiles, capable of striking a variety of targets in the region. A number of these launches of already deployed missiles, such as SCUDs and NO-DONGs, demonstrate operational readiness. While older, it is important to remember that these shorter ranged systems are probably more reliable than developmental systems because they have more extensive testing and because – quite simply – launching to shorter ranges is less technically challenging.

Kim also continues to expand the size and sophistication of his missile force. Since 2016, North Korea has successfully launched a satellite, conducted multiple submarine launched ballistic missile tests, and tested more than two dozen theater ballistic missiles. It also conducted a high number of displays of its missile component tests including a reentry vehicle heat shield, ground-based propulsion tests, and static displays of multiple missile systems. Kim seems to recognize the necessity of testing, including accepting the possibility of failure, in his drive to gain credible capabilities. For example, although it

had been around for a number of years, the road mobile MUSUDAN intermediate range ballistic missile was not tested until 2016. North Korea has since conducted a number of launches of the MUSUDAN. Our data shows that most of these attempts failed early in flight, but North Korea could still obtain valuable engineering data and design insights from such tests, even when they fail.

North Korea has also begun to test a solid fueled missile for its ballistic missile submarine, and a subsequent land-based variant of the same missile. Solid fuel marks a more sophisticated and operationally useful design because missiles remain fueled and available at all times while liquid fueled missiles are generally stored empty and fueled just prior to launch, adding time and increasing the probability that their preparation for use will be detected.

North Korea has publically displayed its liquid fueled intercontinental ballistic missiles on multiple occasions. Most recently, at the April 15 parade marking the 75th anniversary of the Korean People's Army this year, North Korea displayed a

number of new missile systems, including two large canisters which may have been intended to signal that North Korea is working toward the development of a solid propelled ICBM in addition to more recently tested short range solid fueled missiles.

North Korea has a clear strategic objective - developing the ability to deliver a missile-based nuclear warhead to North America – but despite the increased emphasis of *Byungjin*, and the lessons that can be learned from failed launches, there are still several critical shortfalls. We have seen repeated test failures with longer range systems such as the MUSUDAN and have yet to see them attempt to flight test an intercontinental range ballistic missile. Delivery requires an ability to launch a heavy missile and a re-entry vehicle capable of surviving the stresses of atmospheric re-entry. These are difficult engineering challenges. However, recent demonstrations with new shorter range systems such as the new submarine and land launched ballistic missiles capable of threatening the Republic of Korea and Japan are concerning. They demonstrate that with sufficient time, technology and testing, North Korea can

overcome design deficiencies or other malfunctions, increasing the threat these systems pose to the region and advancing Kim Jong Un's goals against the continental United States.

For all of these reasons – and many more which we cannot address today, North Korea and the Kim Jon Un regime are top national security and intelligence priorities for the United States. North Korea is a uniquely challenging intelligence target, but I'm very pleased to say that we have some of our finest intelligence professionals dedicated to the task of understanding the Kim Jong Un regime and its nuclear, missile, and military programs. For the most part, you'll never hear of their successes –except to the extent that the intelligence community informs policy decisions. The partnership between the Policy Community and the Intelligence Community is strong – and while as a Senior Intelligence Community Official I am policy neutral, I am very proud of the role my community plays in informing the policy decisions made on our approach to North Korea. I also appreciate the role that ICAS plays in highlighting the challenges posed by North Korea for the public.

Thank you again so very much for allowing me to be here today – and for the opportunity to share these perspectives on North Korea with you. Thank you.