

Session: The Outlier: North Korea

Date/Time: April 25, 2018 / 15:15-16:45

Rapporteur:

Lisa Collins, Center for Strategic and International Studies

Moderator:

David Sanger, *The New York Times*

Speakers:

Kim Joon-hyung, Handong Global University

Andrei Lankov, Kookmin University

Gary Samore, Harvard Kennedy School Belfer Center

Tanaka Hitoshi, Japan Research Institute, Ltd.

Zhao Quansheng, American University

Session Sketch:

This panel, The Outlier: North Korea, discussed the challenges posed by a nuclear North Korea. The world has been surprised by recent developments occurring on and around the Korean peninsula over the last few months. The panelists largely agreed that President Donald Trump’s pledge to meet with North Korea’s supreme leader and the recent summit between Chinese president Xi Jinping and Kim Jong-un could be analyzed in both optimistic and pessimistic terms. The panelists debated what conditions and events were most influential in bringing North Korea back to the negotiating table. Some panelists believed that it was a combination of sanctions pressure and President Trump’s unpredictable leadership style that influenced the North Korean calculus. Other panelists asserted that

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it was more likely Chinese influence and South Korean diplomatic initiatives that drove North Korea to engage in dialogue. All panelists seemed to agree that North Korea’s fear of the United States using military force against the regime was also a factor in Kim Jong-un’s decision-making process.

Gary Samore argued that the chances for achieving the complete, verifiable, irreversible dismantlement (CVID) of North Korea’s nuclear weapons program at this point remained low, but the possibility of agreeing to a testing freeze that could lead to future progress in a series of negotiations remained a plausible and more realistic option. Kim Joon-hyung argued that with continued South Korean leadership, and with President Moon Jae-in’s determination to achieve peace on the Korean peninsula, the chances of North Korea making a fundamental change in the future were higher than in the past. Zhao Quansheng asserted that U.S. and Chinese leadership and coordination on sanctions pressure as well as dialogue would be the key to inducing North Korean change. Tanaka Hitoshi emphasized the importance of verification in any CVID process and relayed Japanese concerns about any peace deal that could potentially harm U.S. alliance relationships in Asia.

The panelists wrapped up the discussion by expressing hope that the inter-Korean summit and the U.S.-North Korea summit would be successful because the cost of failure would be too high. But at the same time they also emphasized that it would be important to maintain clear-eyed and practical views of the continuing negotiations with the North Koreans because of the danger of reverting to old patterns of behavior that had yielded little progress on denuclearization in the past.

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