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BEFORE THE

UNITED STATES SENATE FOREIGN RELATIONS SUBCOMMITTEE ON EAST
ASIA, THE PACIFIC, AND CYBERSECURITY POLICY

AT A HEARING CONVENED TO DISCUSS

"AMERICAN LEADERSHIP IN THE ASIA PACIFIC, PART 4: THE VIEW FROM
BEIJING"

November 14, 2017

Mr. Chairman, Ranking Member Markey, and Members:

I thank you for the opportunity to testify today on critical questions about "American leadership in the Asia-Pacific: the view from Beijing." My grandfather was fond of quoting a line from the Old Testament book of Proverbs that says: "oh, that my enemy had written a book." On the array of questions that you have posed for the members of this panel, I have written a book entitled Destined for War: Can America and China Escape Thucydides's Trap? The book was published on Memorial Day and I have been gratified by the responses from reviews in all the major newspapers and journals, including the front page of the Sunday *New York Times Book Review*, as well as the speed with which the major arguments of the book have entered the policy mainstream, both in Washington and Beijing. Indeed, at the 19th Party Congress that just concluded in Beijing, Xi Jinping was talking, among other things, about Thucydides's Trap.

If required to summarize the core argument of the book in a few bullet points, it is that:

- When a rising power threatens to displace a ruling power, alarm bells should sound: danger ahead. Thucydides's Trap is the dangerous dynamic that occurs in this interaction. In the case of the rise of Athens and its impact upon Sparta (which had ruled Greece for 100 years), or Germany in its rivalry with Britain a century ago in the run up to World War I, or China over the past generation as it has come to rival, and in many areas, surpass the

US, this dangerous dynamic creates conditions in which both competitors are acutely vulnerable to provocations by third party actions. One of the primary competitors feels obliged to respond and there follows a cascade of actions and reactions at the end of which the two find themselves in a war neither wanted. Ask yourself again: how did the assassination of a minor archduke start a fire that burned down the whole of Europe at the beginning of the past century? How did North Korea drag China and the US into war 67 years ago last month?

- Destined for War examines the past 500 years and finds 16 cases in which a rising power threatens to displace a ruling power. Twelve of these cases ended in war; four without war. Thus to say that war between a rising China and a ruling US is inevitable would be mistaken. But to say the odds are against us would not be.
- This book is neither fatalistic nor pessimistic. Instead, its purpose is to help us recognize that these structural factors create extreme dangers that require extreme measures on the part of both the US and China—if we are to escape Thucydides’s Trap. As I argue in the book, business as usual (which is what we have seen for the last two decades under both Democratic and Republican leadership) is likely to lead to history as usual. And in this case, that would be a catastrophic war that no one in Beijing or Washington wants. Indeed, every serious leader in both capitals knows that would be crazy. But none of the leaders of the major powers in 1914 wanted World War I. Neither China nor the US wanted war in 1950. The good news is that, as Santayana taught us, only those who refuse to study history are condemned to repeat it. We are under no obligations to repeat the mistakes made by Kaiser Wilhelm in 1914 or Pericles in classical Greece that led to war.
- In sum, the purpose of the book is to help us diagnose the condition which we now find ourselves in. My thesis is certain to frustrate Washingtonians—since the Washington template demands a solution to a problem in the same sentence in which the challenge is identified. In my view, that is one of the major problems with “Washington solutions.” We must recognize that a rising China is not a “fixable” problem but rather a condition that we will have to cope with for a generation. Success in meeting this grand challenge will require a surge of imagination and adaptability as remarkable as that demonstrated by individuals we now celebrate as the “wise men” who created the Cold War strategy that we sustained for four decades until success was at last achieved.

Your invitation for me to testify identified ten questions. Perhaps I can be most helpful by summarizing brief answers to each.

1. What is your assessment of Chinese strategic intentions in the Asia-Pacific region, and globally, over the short, medium, and long term? How will China advance those intentions?

I posed this question two years ago to the individual who was unquestionably the world’s premier China watcher until his death in 2015. Specifically I asked

him: “are China’s current leaders, including Xi, serious about displacing the US as the predominant power in Asia in the foreseeable future?”

I cannot improve on his answer. Lee Kuan Yew responded: “Of course. Why not? How could they not aspire to be number one in Asia and in time the world?”

Lee foresaw the twenty-first century as a “contest for supremacy in Asia.” China’s leaders see this as what they call a “prolonged struggle” over international order—especially in their neighborhood. This does not mean that Xi and his colleagues want war. Precisely the opposite. Instead, they are attempting to follow Sun Tzu’s maxim: “Ultimate excellence lies not in winning every battle, but in defeating the enemy without ever fighting.” As Henry Kissinger’s explains, for the Chinese this means that “far better than challenging the enemy on the field of battle is maneuvering him into an unfavorable position from which escape is impossible.” In economic relations today, China is doing just that to its Asian neighbors and indeed to the US.

China primarily conducts foreign policy through economics because, to put it bluntly, it can. It is currently the largest trading partner for over 130 countries — including all the major Asian economies. As China’s dominant economic market and its “One Belt, One Road” plan to network Asia with physical infrastructure (at a scale 12 times that of the Marshall Plan) draws its neighbors into Beijing’s “economic gravity,” the United States’ post–World War II position in Asia erodes.

2. How does the Chinese leadership view the United States and its role in the region and the world?

In 2014, former Australian Prime Minister Kevin Rudd and U.S. National Security Advisor Brent Scowcroft each came back from separate, extensive conversations with Chinese leaders with identical views of what they call the striking “consensus” in the Chinese leadership. According to both statesmen, China’s leaders believe that America’s grand strategy for dealing with China involves five “to’s”: to isolate China, to contain China, to diminish China, to internally divide China, and to sabotage China’s leadership. As Rudd explained, these convictions “derive from a Chinese conclusion that the US has not, and never will, accept the fundamental political legitimacy of the Chinese administration because it is not a liberal democracy.” Moreover, according to Rudd, this is based on “a deeply held, deeply ‘realist’ Chinese conclusion that the US will never willingly concede its status as the preeminent regional and global power, and will do everything within its power to retain that position.” Or, as Henry Kissinger says plainly, every Chinese leader he has met believes that America’s strategy is to “contain” China.

When I asked a Chinese colleague in their security community what he thought the US role in the region should be, he answered: “back off.” His own colleague proposed a more candid two-word summary: “butt out.” As realistic students of history, Chinese leaders recognize that the role the US has played since World War II as the architect and underwriter of regional stability and security has been essential to the rise of Asia, including China itself. But they believe that as the tide that brought the US to Asia recedes, America must leave with it. Much as Britain’s role in the Western Hemisphere faded at the beginning of the twentieth century, so must America’s role in Asia as the region’s historic superpower resume its place. As Xi told a gathering of Eurasian leaders in 2014, “In the final analysis, it is for the people of Asia to run the affairs of Asia, solve the problems of Asia and uphold the security of Asia.”

Prior to last week’s APEC meeting in Da Nang, China persuaded Vietnam to negotiate their South China Sea dispute through direct talks without the US, and the Philippines to end construction of facilities on Thitu Island, which China claims. As China’s Ambassador to the US put it: “I think it would certainly be better if others including the United States would not try to interfere in this constructive process.” At the conclusion of last week’s meeting with President Trump, Xi noted that “the Pacific Ocean is vast enough to accommodate both countries” But as China’s aggressive deployment of modern anti-ship missiles with longer and longer ranges keeps nudging US aircraft carriers further and further from its shores, one suspects that Xi hopes to persuade Trump to a division of spheres of influence on either side of Hawaii.

3. How is China’s regional and global posture taking shape under President Xi Jinping? What is your perspective on the outcomes of the recent 19th Party Congress?

In his speech at the 19th Party Congress, President Xi was very clear about China’s posture today. He said: “the Chinese nation now stands tall and strong in the East; no one should expect China to swallow anything that undermines its interests.” Moreover, he was bold enough to put a target objective and a date together, declaring China’s intention to become “global leader in terms of composite national strength and international influence” by 2050. If, by mid-century, China achieves a per capita GDP equivalent to that of the US, its economy will be four times larger than ours—since it has four times as many people.

Anyone who doubts Xi’s ambitions for China should listen to the declaration of his own sense of the march of history captured in a line that has not been reported by English-language media. He declared: “History looks kindly on

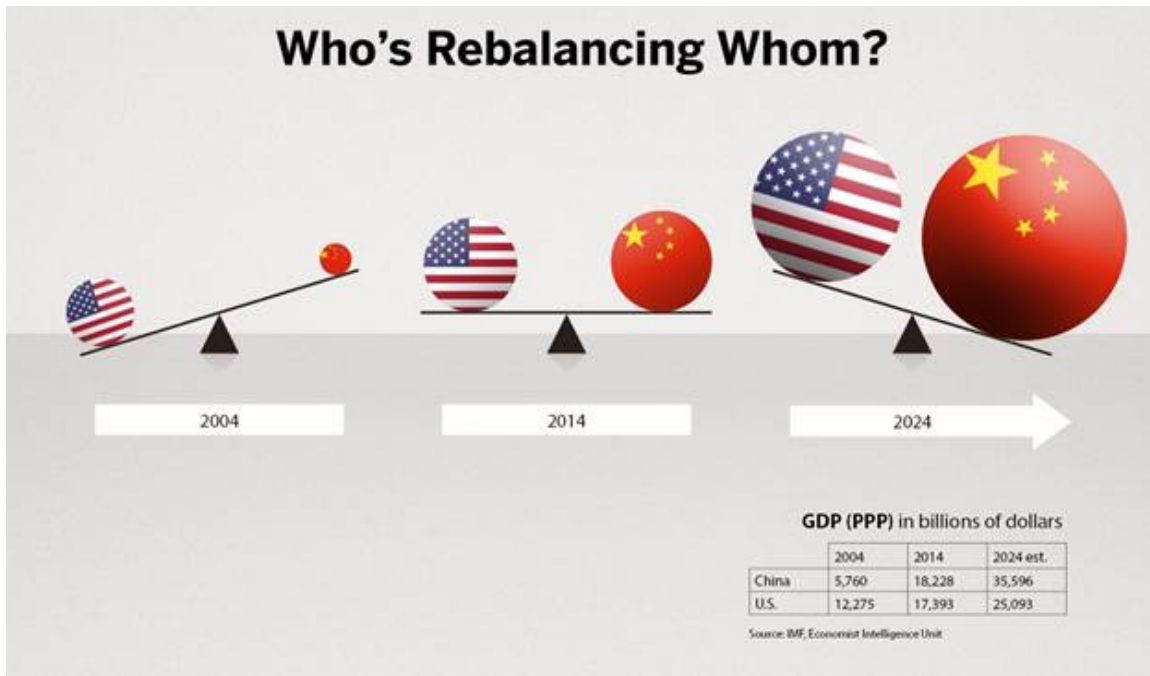
those with resolve, with drive and ambition, and with plenty of guts; it won't wait for the hesitant, the apathetic, or those shy of a challenge." That should give you an idea about his posture.

4. How has the United States' view of China evolved over the past century, and how do you see it evolving in the decade ahead?

To put it in one line, the US has assumed that, as it matured, China would become "more like us." Particularly after the Cold War ended abruptly in 1991 with the collapse of the Soviet Union, most of the American foreign policy establishment took a victory lap in which we engaged in more than a little triumphalism. Celebrating the US position as the Unipolar Power, Frank Fukuyama famously declared the End of History. Democratic capitalism had swept the field and hereafter nations would follow our lead first in adopting market capitalism in order to grow rich. As they developed a middle class, they would become democracies. And according to the "democratic peace" hypothesis, war would become obsolete since democracies do not fight each other. Thomas Friedman popularized this argument with his "Golden Arches" theory, declaring that two nations that had McDonald's Golden Arches could not fight each other.

Obviously, this victory lap was premature. Americans are now waking up to the fact that, as Lee put it, a powerful China will insist on "being accepted as China, not as an honorary member of the West."

5. What is your perspective on the Obama Administration's "Asia Pivot" or "rebalance" policy, and what policy should the Trump administration pursue with respect to the Asia-Pacific, and China in particular?



This illustration comes from my testimony to the Senate Armed Services Committee in 2014. It compares the relative weight of the US and Chinese economies as if they were two competitors on opposite ends of a seesaw. While we have been debating whether we should put less weight on our left foot (the Middle East) in order to put more weight on our right (Asia), China has just kept growing — at three times the US rate. As a result, America's side of the seesaw has tilted to the point that both feet will soon be dangling entirely off the ground.

What strategy should the Trump Administration adopt to deal with this challenge? I wish I knew. I wish anybody knew. But truth be told, I am still struggling to diagnose our challenge. As I argue in DFW, diagnosis must precede prescription. If when one walks into a doctor's office, he immediately proposes to put you on the trolley and roll you into the operating room for surgery, beware. Washingtonians live by the creed: "don't just stand there, do something." But I believe that we need first to understand the shape of the challenge we face. There is no "solution" for the dramatic resurgence of a 5,000-year old civilization with 1.4 billion people.

What America needs most at this moment is not a new "China strategy," but instead a serious pause for reflection, followed by a surge of strategic imagination as penetrating as that displayed by those "wise men." In short, it will demand something far beyond anything we have seen since the opening to China.

What I will say is that the strategy toward China that America has followed since the end of the Cold War, known as “engage but hedge,” is fundamentally flawed: it is a banner that permits everything and prohibits nothing. It relies on balancing China while hoping that China will become a liberal democracy, or at least accept a subordinate place in the American-led international order. It should now be obvious that this is not going to happen. If the US just keeps doing what it has been doing, future historians will compare American “strategy” to illusions that British, German, and Russian leaders held as they sleepwalked into WWI.

6. What is the current state of China-North Korea relations? How have they evolved in recent years? Given China’s desire to avoid a collapsed state and/or having the US military close to its borders, how much pressure can China be expected to apply to North Korea?

China-North Korea relations are worse than ever before. Outraged by Beijing’s support for sanctions, some North Korean statements have even begun implicitly threatening China, noting that North Korea’s missiles can fly in any direction. Chinese internet users commonly refer to Kim Jong Un as “Little Fatty” and reportedly Xi Jinping personally cannot stand him. When Kim tested a missile during Xi’s important BRICS Summit, Xi took it as a serious personal insult.

However, the strategic situation has not fundamentally changed for China. They see stability on the Korean Peninsula, even with an antagonistic neighbor, as preferable to any feasible alternative. They remain unwilling to support any action that would lead to the collapse of the regime. And they continue to see the biggest anomaly on the peninsula as the presence of the US.

7. How likely is it that a US-North Korea military conflict would trigger a wider Sino-American war? Under what circumstances might we expect China to intervene (or not intervene) in an American conflict with North Korea?

Anyone who finds it hard to believe that a military conflict with North Korea could drag the US into war with China should remember 1950. In June of 1950, a Communist North Korea led by KJU’s grandfather attacked South Korea and almost succeeded in reunifying the country under his control. The US came to the rescue at the last minute and US troops pushed the North Koreans back up the peninsula, across the 38th

parallel, and rapidly approached the Chinese border. McArthur expected to wrap things up before Christmas so that US troops could come home. The possibility that China, which just the year before had consolidated control of its own country after a long, bloody civil war, would attack the world's sole superpower, who just five years earlier had dropped atomic bombs on Hiroshima and Nagasaki, was for McArthur inconceivable. But he awoke one morning in October to find his forces attacked by a "peasant army" of 300,000 Chinese who beat the US back down the roads they had come up, to the 38th parallel, where the US was forced to settle for an armistice. Tens of thousands of Americans, hundreds of thousands of Chinese, and millions of Koreans died in that war.

Chinese believe that Mao established the proposition that Korea would never become a unified state under the control of an American military ally. As they put it pointedly, if we were prepared to fight to make that point in 1950 when we were 1/50th your size, it should not be necessary to test that proposition again with a China that now has a GDP larger than that of the US.

China has considered Korea to be its vassal state since 670AD. And for China the prospect of South Korea conquering the North and bringing US troops to China's borders is as unacceptable today as it was in 1950. Expect China to intervene in some fashion on the peninsula in almost any military scenario—even if only to seize and hold a buffer zone in the north, as Chinese troops have recently been drilling to do.

Even if Chinese forces entered North Korea with no intention of fighting the US, there are many scenarios in which war could still occur through miscalculation, including a "vertical track meet" between Chinese and US special forces rushing to secure the North's nuclear weapons in the event of a regime collapse. These weapons are held near China's borders, so it is very likely that if and when US troops arrive, they will find Chinese special forces already there.

8. What diplomatic role can China play to defuse tensions between the US and North Korea, and advance diplomacy to denuclearize the Korean peninsula?

The immediate cause of tension between the US and North Korea is North Korea's drive to develop a credible threat to strike the American homeland with nuclear weapons, on the one hand, and President Trump's determination to do whatever is required to prevent that from happening, on the other. This is the dynamic that will in the next 12 months take us

to one of three destinations: (1) North Korea will have completed the next series of ICBM tests and be able to hold American cities hostage; (2) Trump will have ordered airstrikes on North Korea in an attempt to prevent that from happening; or (3) a minor miracle in which Xi and Trump, working together, convince Kim to halt his nuclear advance.

China controls North Korea's oil lifeline. If it squeezes that pipeline, North Korean aircraft, tanks, missile launchers, trucks, cars and factories will feel the pain. China has been reluctant to exercise this influence for fear of how Kim might react. But after recent provocations, Chinese officials have begun signaling that Xi might be willing to take that risk.

Careful watchers of last month's 19th Party Congress in Beijing have noted the dog that did not bark. During the coronation of China's new emperor, the only peep from Pyongyang was a letter of congratulations from Kim. This caution carried over to the meetings between Trump and Xi last week, which Kim did not greet with another nuclear or missile test as some feared he would.

If Trump and Xi seek to hammer out a joint plan for stopping Kim from further ICBM and nuclear tests, what could that look like? The Chinese government has offered a formula it calls "freeze for freeze." North Korea would stop testing for the year ahead and the U.S. would stop or significantly modify joint U.S.-South Korean military exercises that Kim despises. The U.S. has rejected that idea outright. But if Trump recognizes that the only alternatives are the two previously mentioned, it should be possible to find adjustments the U.S. could make in exercises, bomber flights and troop levels in South Korea that, while uncomfortable and ugly, do not compromise anything vital. Whether that would be sufficient to persuade Xi to threaten Kim's oil lifeline, and whether Kim would accept a freeze for freeze, is uncertain. And even if such a deal were possible, this would only kick the can down the road for another year.

Nonetheless, given where events stand today, if Trump and Xi can find their way to cooperate to produce this minor miracle, we should all give thanks.

9. Other than North Korea, what flashpoints do you see that could trigger military conflict between the US and China?

The dangerous dynamic of Thucydides's Trap leaves both parties vulnerable to actions by third parties, or events that would otherwise be inconsequential or readily managed, but that trigger reactions by the primary competitors that lead to war. Chapter 8 of my book is titled "From Here to War." It sketches five all-too-plausible scenarios that could escalate mundane crises into a war that neither the US nor China wants: North Korea; an accidental collision in the South China Sea; a move by Taiwan toward independence; a clash between China and Japan in the East China Sea; and an economic conflict that escalates into a shooting war.

I am ready to describe each in detail if members are interested.

10. How do you assess President Trump's visit to the region?

One is reminded of Zhou Enlai's response to Henry Kissinger when Kissinger asked him how he assessed the French Revolution. Zhou said: "it's too soon to tell."

Overall, the trip seems to have been more successful than most observers had expected. Through a twelve day marathon, an individual known not to like to travel or to participate in big meetings with foreign leaders played his role and stayed on script. Since his primary objective was to develop support for stopping KJU's nuclear advance, the fine words we heard both from Trump and from all his counterparts are good enough. But the proof of what was accomplished on this front—or not—will be in actions we see in the weeks ahead.

The Trump Administration's choice to focus on Xi and to do whatever it can to persuade him to rein in KJU was, in my view, the best of the feasible approaches available—given the realities they inherited in January. Whether Xi believes that if he fails to stop KJU from conducting another series of ICBM tests, Trump will order US strikes, time will tell. As noted above, I am hoping and indeed praying for a miracle. But as an old Pentagon hand, I know that hope and prayer alone are not a sufficient plan.

For more on my thoughts about the North Korean challenge, I have attached two op-eds from the past two weeks that summarize my views.

I trust that I have said enough to be responsive to your assignment and I look forward to the discussion.

Graham Allison, "Will Trump and Xi 'Solve' North Korea?" *Politico*, 11/8/17

The centerpiece of President Donald Trump's conversation with Chinese President Xi Jinping on Thursday will doubtless be North Korea. Before their first meeting in April, Trump's message to Xi was unmistakable: You solve this problem, or I will, and you won't like the way I do it. Then, just after he served Xi and his wife chocolate cake at Mar-a-Lago, Trump excused himself and went to an adjacent room to announce that the U.S. was launching 59 cruise missiles against Syria. Message: I'm serious.

Trump has repeatedly complained that his predecessors left him a mess in North Korea, with an emboldened regime in Pyongyang that threatens to soon have a credible capability to hit the United States with a nuclear weapon. "It should have never been given to me," he told an interviewer in October. "This should have been

solved long before I came to office, when it would have been easier to solve. But it was given to me and I get it solved. I solve problems.”

But will Trump really “solve” North Korea? The answer is most certainly no. Indeed, I am so confident in answering no that I am prepared to bet \$100 of my money—against \$1 of anyone who wants to wager—that when Trump leaves office, a nuclear-armed North Korea will remain a major challenge for his successor.

Why is the North Korea challenge essentially unsolvable? Because of brute realities that defined the problem before Trump arrived. Specifically, when he entered office nine months ago, North Korea already had dozens of nuclear weapons, as well as short- and medium-range missiles that could deliver them against South Korean and Japanese cities. Moreover, it stood on the cusp of an intercontinental ballistic missile capability to credibly threaten attacks on San Francisco and Los Angeles.

Well before Trump mounted his campaign for the presidency, Kim Jong Un had concluded that the surest way to protect his regime from an attack by the U.S. was a sturdy nuclear security blanket. North Korean leaders listened carefully to President George W. Bush’s 2002 State of the Union address when he famously named an “axis of evil”: Iraq, Iran and North Korea. Bush then proceeded to launch a massive attack against Iraq, the only one of the three that had no nuclear weapons or serious nuclear weapons program. A decade later, Bush’s successor joined the British and French in an extensive air campaign against Libya that overthrew Muammar Qadhafi, who just eight years earlier made a deal with the U.S. to give up his nuclear weapons program. As Bush’s Undersecretary of Defense Eric Edelman later quipped, we taught bad guys around the world that “if you have no nuclear weapons, we will invade you; but if you give up your nuclear weapons program, we will only bomb you.”

If these realities make it impossible for Trump to “solve” North Korea, what can he hope to achieve on this Asia odyssey?

Jump ahead a year to November 2018. At that point, we will know what happened in the current stare-down between Kim and Trump. There are three possibilities: (1) North Korea will have completed the next series of ICBM tests and be able to hold American cities hostage; (2) Trump will have ordered airstrikes on North Korea to prevent that happening; or (3) a minor miracle will have avoided the first two possibilities.

The safest posture is to hedge one's bets, or even better, to craft a Delphic pronouncement that sounds profound but leaves sufficient wiggle room to allow one to claim to have been right whatever happens. But if forced to place my bet, I'd wager that Kim wins. He will conduct the tests, and U.S. intelligence will report that he now has a credible threat to hit the continental United States. Of course, he would never do that—or at least almost never. He knows that doing so would mean committing suicide for himself and his regime. Nonetheless, Americans will be living in a significantly more dangerous world.

If required to quantify my odds, I put the first option (No. 1 listed above) at 50 percent. For the rest, saving 10 percent for possibilities beyond the three I am currently able to identify, I would split the remainder: betting that there is a 25 percent chance of a U.S. attack and a 15 percent chance of a miracle.

Currently, most of Washington's national security experts are not only expecting, but even hoping for the first option, since they find the second unacceptable and the third too remote a possibility to believe. Unfortunately, most have not yet recognized how dangerous that world will be.

Why will it be more dangerous than the challenge we face today? Because Kim will be emboldened by his success. He will have gone eyeball to eyeball with the leader of the most powerful country in the world and forced him to blink. He will have trumped Trump.

What can we look for in Kim's next act? If he follows his father's and grandfather's script, watch for coercive extortion. In response to Kim's tests, the U.S. will further tighten sanctions to threaten the regime's economic survival. His response will remind us of former Secretary of Defense Robert Gates's observation: North Korea will "sell anything they have to anybody who has the cash to buy it." A nation known in U.S. intelligence circles as "Missiles-R-U.s." will threaten to become "Nukes-R-U.s."

Could North Korea sell nuclear weapons to another rogue state? The U.S. would warn the regime that this would cross an inviolable red line. But what could we threaten that Kim would believe we would actually do? He will reflect on the fact that the U.S. was not prepared to attack North Korea to prevent it from acquiring an ability to strike the American homeland. For what else would it risk war—other than a full-scale attack on the U.S. or an American ally?

The second option, particularly if it involves a limited cruise-missile attack like the one Trump launched in Syria, is operationally feasible and can interrupt Kim's ICBM tests. The question is: How will Kim respond? Most U.S. intelligence analysts believe he will shell Seoul with conventional artillery. Just last week, a high-level North Korean defector told Congress that this is the plan. North Korea has long deployed and regularly practiced the use of this threat to Seoul. Killing tens of thousands of people overnight would not be that difficult.

In order to stop the firing that could kill hundreds of thousands more, South Korea and the U.S. would conduct strikes to destroy these long-range artillery guns and other missiles and rockets poised to hit the South.

This would mean attacks on several thousand aim points. Even if the effort was successful in significantly limiting the number of additional bombs exploding in South Korea, the consequence of the attack would almost certainly be the initiation of a Second Korean War. And the further wild card that cannot be wished away is North Korea's substantial nuclear arsenal and missiles.

When asked about this scenario by Congress, Secretary of Defense James Mattis has repeatedly insisted that such a war would be “catastrophic.” He has reminded members of Congress that in the first Korean War, tens of thousands of Americans, hundreds of thousands of Chinese and millions of Koreans died.

Mattis has also assured Congress that at the end of such a war, the U.S. would win and the Kim regime would be gone. The question he has not addressed, however, is what China would do. The Chinese security community has been as loud and clear as it could be that Beijing would never allow a unified Korea that is an American military ally. That, they say, was the big lesson from the first Korean War.

Which brings us to pray for a minor miracle in which Xi and Trump, acting together, persuade Kim to halt his nuclear advance. This is not quite as far-fetched as it may seem at first glance. Xi has found Kim almost as frustrating as Americans have. Repeatedly, Kim has demonstrably dissed Xi by launching missiles or testing nuclear weapons to “celebrate” major events in Beijing: the BRICS [Brazil, Russia, India, China, South Africa] Summit, the grand announcement of Xi’s multitrillion dollar One Belt One Road Initiative, the visit of Secretary of State Rex Tillerson to plan for the summit in Beijing with Trump.

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Careful watchers of last month’s 19th Party Congress in Beijing have noted the dog that did not bark. During the coronation of China’s new emperor, the only peep from Pyongyang was a letter of congratulations from Kim. Whether this caution will carry over to the meetings between Trump and Xi on Thursday we will soon see.

If Trump and Xi seek to hammer out a joint plan for stopping Kim from further ICBM and nuclear tests, what could that look like? The Chinese government has offered a formula it calls "freeze for freeze." North Korea would stop testing for the year ahead and the U.S. would stop or significantly modify joint U.S.-South Korean military exercises that Kim despises. The U.S. has rejected that idea outright. But if Trump recognizes that the only alternatives are the two we have discussed, it should be possible to find adjustments the U.S. could make in exercises, bomber flights and troop levels in South Korea that, while uncomfortable and ugly, do not compromise anything vital. Whether that would be sufficient to persuade Xi to threaten Kim's oil lifeline, and whether Kim would accept a freeze for freeze, is uncertain. And even if such a deal were possible, this would only kick the can down the road for another year.

Nonetheless, given where events stand today, if Trump and Xi can find their way to cooperate to produce this minor miracle, we should all give thanks. Indeed, having found out what they can achieve when the U.S. and China are prepared to be more imaginative and adaptive in cooperating, they might find ways to go further, and begin rolling back Kim's nuclear program. And even this partial success would lay a foundation for managing other arenas where the Thucydidean dynamic of a rising power's threat to displace a ruling power creates serious risks of catastrophic war.

Would I bet on this happening? Nope. But I hope it does.

Graham Allison and Michael Morell, "North Korea Crisis Presents Risk, But Also Opportunity for U.S. and China," *Cipher Brief*, 10/22/17

Most discussions about the North Korea nuclear threat focus on the risk of conflict between the U.S. and North Korea. Serious as that is, an even more important issue is what the crisis will mean for the U.S. and China – the world's most consequential relationship. Great risk and great opportunity abound.

Will the 21st century be defined by great power war or peace? By prosperity or poverty? The answers depend largely on the course set by Washington and Beijing. But as powerful as both are, each is subject to structural forces not of their own making. Today, as a rising China threatens U.S. predominance in Asia and the international order the U.S. has underwritten for the past seven decades, both sides are locked in the Thucydides Trap. (Thucydides, the ancient Greek historian, was the first to identify the natural tensions between a rising power and the ruling

power it seeks to displace – in his case, Athens and Sparta – that can lead to conflict.)

This dynamic leaves the U.S. and China vulnerable to the decisions of third parties: actions that would otherwise be inconsequential or easily managed can trigger reactions by the great powers that lead to disastrous outcomes neither wanted. How else could the assassination of a minor archduke in Sarajevo in 1914 have produced a conflagration so devastating that it required historians to invent an entirely new category – “world war”? In the antics of the erratic (but rational) young leader of North Korea, whom the Chinese security establishment calls “little fatty,” it is not hard to hear echoes of 1914. The challenge for leaders in Washington is to deal with the acute crisis while also developing ways to cope with the underlying challenge in the relationship.

What is the risk? In the next six to 12 months, either Kim Jong-un is going to demonstrate that he can reliably put a U.S. city at risk of nuclear attack and we are going to (reluctantly) accept that, or President Trump is going to try to prevent that from happening by ordering U.S. airstrikes on North Korea. Remember: upon becoming president-elect, Trump vowed that he would not allow North Korea to develop the capability to hit the U.S. with a nuclear weapon. A cruise missile attack like the one Trump ordered on Syria after the opening dinner for Chinese President Xi Jinping at Mar-a-Lago is not difficult to execute. The question is what would come next.

No one knows for sure. But the best judgment of North Korea experts is that the North will respond by raining artillery shells down on Seoul – the center of which is just 35 miles from the border between South and North Korea – killing tens of thousands or even hundreds of thousands of its more than 25 million citizens in just the first 24 hours of fighting. It is simply not possible for a U.S. preemptive strike to remove all the North Korean artillery along the border before it can fire on Seoul.

As that is occurring, what will South Korea and the U.S. do? Again, while nothing is automatic, plans call for the obvious: attacks on the weapons that are firing against Seoul. In addition to the artillery on the border, the U.S. and South Korean counterattack would almost certainly target the several thousand other North Korean rockets and missiles that could attack South Korea (including missiles that could carry nuclear warheads). Whether that attack would also attempt to kill Kim Jong-un and the leadership in Pyongyang involves another decision by the President. But the critical point is that after a U.S.-South Korean response against several thousand targets in the North, the second Korean War would have begun.

Secretary of Defense Mattis has offered his considered assessment of such a war in recent testimony before Congress. He has warned candidly that a second Korean conflict would be catastrophic, causing loss of life, including both U.S. combatants and U.S. civilians living in South Korea, unlike any we have seen since the first Korean War. But he has also assured members of Congress that at the end of that war the U.S. would “win,” Korea would be unified, and the Kim regime would be gone.

The question he has not addressed, and which no member of the committees before which he has testified has asked him, is: “what about China?” That was the question General Douglas MacArthur infamously failed to consider in October 1950, when U.S. troops who had come to the rescue of South Korea pushed the North Korean aggressors back up the peninsula. MacArthur imagined that he would unify the country and start bringing American troops home before Christmas. Since this was just five years after the U.S. had ended World War II by dropping atomic bombs on Hiroshima and Nagasaki, and less than a year after Mao had won a long, bloody civil war, the thought that a nation with a GDP one fiftieth the size of America’s would attack the world’s uncontested superpower was inconceivable. But Mao did. And his force of 300,000 fighters, followed by a second wave of half a million, beat American forces back down the peninsula to the 38th parallel where the U.S. had to settle for an armistice.

As a member of the Chinese security establishment explained to one of us in a recent conversation, Beijing will not permit a united Korea allied with the U.S. on its border. From a Chinese perspective, that point was written in blood when Mao's China entered the first Korean War. And they will do so again if Beijing believes that is the U.S. intention or the likely result of a U.S. and North Korean conflict. Indeed, just last month, the Chinese warned publicly that if the U.S. preemptively attacked North Korea, China would fight on behalf of Kim Jong-un.

This is a not a war we would want the U.S. to fight. No one should forget that the first Korean War claimed the lives of tens of thousands of Americans, hundreds of thousands of Chinese, and millions of Koreans. With China's extensive military modernization over the last two decades, particularly the deployment of weapon systems designed to deny U.S. access to the battlefield, the Chinese might even win the war — or force the U.S. to settle again for an equivalent of the armistice accepted in 1953. Such outcomes would mark a turning point in the balance of power in East Asia, if not the world. After World War II, the U.S. emerged as the leading global power. After a second Korean War, China might wear that mantle.

A similar risk of conflict between the U.S. and China exists in the other, and perhaps more likely, path that the U.S. could take in the near-term regarding the North Korean nuclear crisis – acceptance of the North's nuclear weapons capability along with containment and deterrence to deal with the threat. The problem with this option is not only that it leaves Kim with an ability to strike the U.S. homeland with nuclear weapons but also that Kim could see that capability as a tool to coerce the U.S. and South Korea to get what he wants – first, the withdrawal of U.S. forces from the Peninsula and second, reunification on his terms. Kim could calculate that since the U.S. was not prepared to risk war to prevent it acquiring the capability to attack American cities, the U.S. would not be willing to trade Chicago for Seoul. And, in taking provocative actions based on this assumption, Kim could bring the U.S. and North Korea to war – again with the risk of China joining the fight.

What then is the opportunity? Our vital national interest in North Korea is to ensure that Kim Jong-un cannot threaten the U.S. and our allies and partners with nuclear weapons. China shares this interest because Beijing understands that as the North Korean threat grows, the U.S. and its allies will move to protect themselves with missile defense, a development that would also put Chinese missiles and therefore China's deterrence at risk. Beijing also knows that South Korea and Japan may well respond to a North Korea armed with nuclear-tipped missiles by developing their own nuclear weapons, a serious and threatening development from China's perspective.

Given these converging interests, can we imagine American and Chinese diplomats finding common ground on a vision for the future of the Korean Peninsula — one without nuclear weapons — and developing a cooperative approach to achieve it that might start with significant limits on what North Korea has at present? If such cooperation were to result in eventual denuclearization of the North and enhanced stability in Northeast Asia, it would act as a bright shining beacon of what the U.S. and China could achieve working together. It would build trust in both capitals. It would be a major step forward in managing the Thucydidean tension in the relationship and pushing the two countries away from conflict and toward cooperation.

How do we get to a place with the Chinese where we can have such a conversation about North Korea? It cannot be through threats. We cannot achieve this by publicly scolding China over not doing more to pressure Kim Jong-un, by publicly raising the prospect of war between the U.S. and North Korea in an effort to frighten Beijing into action, or by publicly offering China a deal whereby they pressure North Korea in exchange for the U.S. backing away from action on Chinese trading practices. None of these will move China to act. They are too proud a nation and a culture to be bullied, bribed, or threatened into action.

Rather, the potentially productive path forward is to sit and talk turkey with the Chinese — in private, even secretly — about their real national interests and ours.

President Trump and President Xi should ask one or more of their most trusted senior officials to sit down for several days of hard conversation and come back with feasible, if ugly, options for a joint way forward.

For inspiration, they could read the transcripts—now declassified—of the initial conversations between Henry Kissinger (as Nixon's national security adviser) and Zhou Enlai (Mao's most trusted lieutenant). They could reexamine what John F. Kennedy did when he came to the final fork in the road confronting the Soviet Union over its attempt to place nuclear-tipped missiles in Cuba. They could consider what Obama did in sending Bill Burns and Jake Sullivan to secret talks that developed a path to prevent (or at least postpone for a decade) Iran's quest for nuclear weapons.

Critics will shout: "but in every one of these cases the U.S. compromised!" Yes, to achieve what these presidents judged vital for our country, they sacrificed other interests. To open relations with China in order to encourage its split from the Soviet Union, Nixon and Kissinger agreed to de-recognize Taiwan as the government of China and recognize Beijing (a decision that was officially implemented under President Carter). To escape the choice between accepting an operational Soviet nuclear base in Cuba and an attack on the missiles, Kennedy promised—secretly—that if the Soviet missiles were withdrawn, six months later, equivalent U.S. missiles in Turkey would be removed. And as Iran's nuclear program had advanced to a point that it stood just 2 months away from its first nuclear bomb, Obama signed an agreement that allowed Iran to keep a limited uranium enrichment program in exchange for pushing its nuclear program back to at least a year away from a bomb.

Ronald Reagan was determined to bury Communism. But to advance that cause, he repeatedly engaged in negotiations with the Soviet Union and reached arms control agreements that constrained or even eliminated American nuclear and missile programs as the price of stopping Soviet advances that threatened us. For this, many conservative supporters attacked Reagan. For example, George Will accused

Reagan of “accelerating moral disarmament” and predicted that “actual disarmament will follow.” But as Reagan’s Secretary of State George Shultz noted: “Reagan believed in being strong enough to defend one’s interests, but he viewed that strength as a means, not an end in itself. He was ready to negotiate with adversaries and use that strength as a basis of the inevitable give-and-take of the negotiating process.”

To persuade China to join us in taking responsibility for North Korea, and use its leverage to stop Kim’s nuclear advance and begin rolling back his program, what incentives could Trump’s secret negotiators offer as a reward for success? The Trump Administration and its predecessors have insisted that we will not make changes in our own military forces to reward North Korea or China for stopping bad behavior. But there is nothing sacrosanct about the number of U.S. troops who participate in the regular fall and spring joint military exercises with South Korea. In fact, the recent exercise included only 17,500 American soldiers, a 30 percent reduction from the 25,000 who participated in the 2016 equivalent. Though Trump has steadfastly resisted Xi’s call for a “freeze for freeze”—a freeze in North Korean nuclear and missile tests in exchange for a freeze in U.S./South Korean military exercises—some variant of that should be considered as part of the solution, given the alternatives. Even more enticing to China, the U.S. could offer to delay or even cancel and roll back deployment of missile defenses, including the THAAD batteries in South Korea, if China took actions that mitigated or eliminated the threat.

We recognize serious objections to each of these possible concessions and others. Indeed, we have often voiced them. But the brute fact is that, at this point, U.S. choices have shrunk to the zone between the horrific and the catastrophic. Accepting a nuclear-armed North Korea that can hold American cities hostage to a nuclear attack and attempting to live with that threat by a combination of deterrence and defenses would constitute one of the highest risks that the U.S. has faced in the seven decades of the nuclear age. Attacking North Korea to prevent that outcome will likely lead to a catastrophic second Korean War that could find thousands of Americans and Chinese killing each other.

Before choosing between these terrible options, we urge President Trump to explore a third way through candid discussions with the Chinese of options that heretofore have been “unacceptable” but that are in fact preferable to the alternatives. Kennedy and Khrushchev did. So, too, did Reagan and Gorbachev. There is no guarantee that such talks with China or the subsequent joint approach to North Korea would work – Chinese influence with North Korea may be more limited than most think – but we owe it to our security and to history to try.

If there is a better way out of the North Korea crisis, it will be through Washington and Beijing working together. For leaders determined to construct a productive U.S.-China relationship, North Korea offers a great opportunity. It also offers perhaps the greatest challenge and risk to that relationship, and therefore to U.S. leadership in the world, since the end of the Cold War.