

United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

September 12, 2018

The Honorable Mike Pompeo
Secretary of State
U.S. Department of State
Washington D.C. 20520

We write to express our continued support for a diplomatic resolution to the North Korean nuclear crisis, one that averts a war that Secretary of Defense Mattis has said would be “catastrophic.” The best way to prevent a war that could put U.S. armed forces, civilians, and Seoul’s twenty-five million inhabitants in immediate harm, is by forging a concrete and verifiable agreement that holds North Korea to its commitment to denuclearize.

We fear, however, that the administration lacks a clear strategy to turn Kim Jong-Un’s vague promise to “denuclearize” into an actionable plan. Ahead of the reported plans for a second presidential level summit with Kim Jong-Un this year, and Special Envoy, Stephen Biegun’s consultations in South Korea this week, we are particularly concerned that Congress has no information about the next diplomatic steps. The administration has yet to provide Congress with a classified briefing on the details of its diplomatic talks with North Korea.

We therefore request a classified briefing on the current North Korea policy, specifically including how, if at all, U.S. and North Korean negotiators have defined “denuclearization.” In addition, to jumpstart renewed diplomatic efforts, we urge you to take the following actions:

First, the administration should use the upcoming session of the United Nations General Assembly (UNGA) in New York to highlight North Korea’s continued defiance of its international obligations, and to insist that all countries, particularly China, strictly enforce existing multilateral sanctions. After all, multilateral sanctions imposed severe costs for the rogue regime’s illegal nuclear weapons and ballistic missile programs, which helped drive them to the negotiating table. It should be clear that these multilateral sanctions should not be lifted until North Korea changes course.

Second, the United States should articulate an interim goal of negotiations to secure concrete and verifiable limits on North Korea’s production and testing of nuclear weapons and ballistic missiles – particularly intercontinental ballistic missiles (ICBMs) – the systems which pose the gravest risk to the United States. According to press reports, North Korea continues to expand its ballistic missile program and its production of nuclear weapons material, steps that run counter to the spirit of the Singapore communique.

Third, the United States and North Korea should come to a shared, written definition of what is required by “denuclearization.” North Korea has a history of exploiting non-precise language in agreements related to its nuclear weapons programs. The 1994 Agreed Framework and the 2012 Leap Day Accords are cautionary tales of what can happen when each side is left to interpret the scope of their obligations. In the past, North Korean leaders have defined “denuclearization” as including an end to U.S. extended deterrence in South Korea and Japan –

we reject any concession that would cast doubt about our ironclad commitment to these two allies. We also commend South Korea's unflinching commitment to end the Korean War and hope that President Moon's summit with Kim Jong-Un later this month moves the two countries away from the persistent threat of conflict and towards a Peninsula free of nuclear weapons.

Fourth, the administration should negotiate a full declaration of North Korea's nuclear weapons and ballistic missile capabilities. This would provide a baseline which could pave the way for the eventual return of the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) to perform its vital verification and monitoring role after a fifteen year absence from North Korea's nuclear sites. A full declaration could also have a deterrent effect to keep North Korea from cheating on a future agreement, as a discovery of an undeclared facility or other discrepancies will make it easier to rally international support to dial up "maximum pressure" against North Korea.

The desired end state – a Korean Peninsula free of nuclear weapons – is best reached through clear, verifiable incremental steps, such as those identified in this letter. The best way to test the hypothesis that the Kim regime is actually prepared to surrender its nuclear weapons is by insisting that it matches its lofty rhetorical commitment in Singapore with action.

Sir Winston Churchill famously said "to jaw-jaw is always better than to war-war." We agree that there is no substitute to a negotiated peace with North Korea to avert the enormous human and financial toll of a war. To better support securing a diplomatic agreement, we encourage you to pursue the actions above through negotiations with North Korea and we look forward to a briefing as soon as is practicable.

Sincerely,



Jeffrey A. Merkley
United States Senator



Bernard Sanders
United States Senator



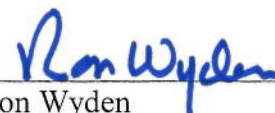
Tammy Baldwin
United States Senator



Kirsten Gillibrand
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Sherrod Brown
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Ron Wyden
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