

United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

March 2, 2017

The Honorable Donald J. Trump
President of the United States
White House
Washington, DC 20006

Dear Mr. President:

As you assemble your national security team and formulate a strategy toward East Asia, we write to encourage you to take urgent steps to address the North Korean nuclear and ballistic missile threat. While the threat posed by North Korea has grown in recent years, our existing policy has failed to adequately restrain and reverse North Korea's nuclear progress. We believe that the United States urgently needs a bold new approach.

Despite increasingly tough United States and UN Security Council-mandated sanctions, North Korea has accelerated its nuclear program. Last year alone, Pyongyang tested two nuclear devices and carried out multiple ballistic missile tests. In recent months, it has threatened to accelerate its effort to develop a long-range missile capable of delivering a nuclear payload to the territory of the United States. Last month, North Korea conducted another missile test, this time a solid-fueled medium-range, mobile system. North Korea's growing military capabilities, together with its provocative activities and statements, pose a unique threat to the security of the United States and our allies in the region.

It has become evident that sanctions, without negotiations, will not induce the Kim regime to unilaterally constrain its nuclear weapons and ballistic missile programs. We believe that only a comprehensive approach that couples pressure with active diplomatic engagement will enable us to achieve our longstanding goal of a nuclear-free Korean peninsula. As such, we urge you to adopt a strategy of active diplomatic engagement with North Korea, backed by rigorous sanctions enforcement and a robust military deterrence posture in cooperation with our regional partners.

Evidence suggesting that North Korea was responsible for the recent use of chemical weapons to assassinate Kim Jong Un's brother underscores the urgency of halting further development of Pyongyang's nuclear and ballistic missile capabilities. Unless a deal can be struck, by the end of your first term this brutal regime could have an operational arsenal of several dozen nuclear-armed, ballistic missiles with increasingly longer-ranges.

Time is of the essence. We respectfully urge you to communicate to the leadership in Japan, South Korea, China, and Russia the United States' interest in resuming talks with North Korea on denuclearization and security issues, and to reach out directly and discreetly to North Korea with an offer to begin talks about restarting negotiations on their nuclear and ballistic missile activities.

The initial goal of discussions should be the North Korea's indefinite suspension of further nuclear test explosions or ballistic missile flight tests, followed by meaningful negotiations to verifiably halt North Korea's broader development and production of nuclear weapons and ballistic missiles. The ultimate, longer-term objective must be for North Korea to abandon its nuclear weapons program and rejoin the Nuclear Nonproliferation Treaty as a non-nuclear weapon state, in keeping with its commitment in the Joint Statement of Principles of the Six Party Talks in September 2005.

In exchange for progress, the United States and our allies should be willing to undertake mutual confidence-building steps. Such steps could be related to the size, scope, and objectives of future U.S.-ROK joint military exercises, coupled with corresponding reductions of provocative North Korean military activities. We should also extend opportunities for economic engagement by the United States and its partners, commensurate with progress in talks and consistent with current U.S., allied, and UN Security Council sanctions. As part of this reciprocal confidence-building process, the United States, North Korea, and South Korea should be willing to engage in discussion on negotiation of a permanent peace treaty to end the Korean War, currently in a cease-fire status under an armistice agreement reached more than six decades ago.

At the same time, the parties should urgently negotiate effective measures to mitigate the grave risk of nuclear war on the peninsula. While North Korea's nuclear arsenal is growing, it is still small and its strike capacity is limited. The Kim regime's awareness of this creates pressure for inadvertent escalation if North Korea fears that its weapons or its leadership are under imminent threat of preventive strikes. Establishing a military hotline with Pyongyang, for example, would allow communication during periods of tension, provide the opportunity to deescalate potential conflicts, enhance our ability to communicate intentions and set clear red lines, and reduce the risk that North Korea could mistake our deterrent posture for imminent aggression.

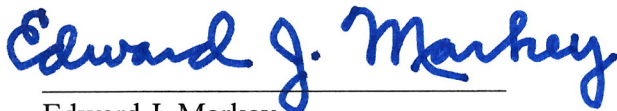
In order for this diplomatic strategy to succeed, the United States must reinforce our extended deterrence commitments to our allies. For the foreseeable future, we urge you to maintain the continued deployment of U.S. forces in South Korea, conduct consultations in the "2+2" format of Defense and Foreign Ministers and through the Korea-U.S. Integrated Defense Dialogue, and encourage continued South Korean-Japanese defense coordination.

Concurrent with our diplomatic approach, it is vital that you strengthen implementation of existing sanctions tools. To start, we urge you to review the North Korean Sanctions and Policy Enhancement Act and direct your team to consider the tools this legislation provides to designate additional entities found to be in violation of the law's provisions. In addition to tightening enforcement of unilateral sanctions, it will be essential to push China on the necessity for more effective implementation of multilateral sanctions mandated through existing UN Security Council Resolutions.

If North Korea refuses to negotiate, or if negotiations fail due to North Korean intransigence, then you should move to drastically escalate our use of sanctions to put severe pressure on the North Korean regime, and others who enable it. Before we reach that point, however, it is critical that we exhaust opportunities for tough diplomacy. Without doing so, North Korea is likely to continue exploiting divisions in the international community to steadily advance its nuclear and ballistic missile capabilities, as it has been doing for more than a decade.

Without diplomacy, coercive pressure is unlikely to succeed. Likewise, without properly focused pressure, negotiations will not succeed. We urge you, then, to integrate these two approaches with the aim of urgently addressing the grave risk of regional proliferation and war, and achieving the verifiable and peaceful denuclearization of the Korean Peninsula.

Sincerely,



Edward J. Markey
United States Senator



Al Franken
United States Senator

Cc:

The Honorable Rex W. Tillerson
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