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United States Senate

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The Honorable Rex W. Tillerson
U.S. Secretary of State
2201 C Street NW
Washington, DC

Dear Secretary Tillerson:

As you prepare to travel to New York to chair a special meeting of the United Nations Security Council, I urge you to work with other U.N. member states, and especially China, to seek a negotiated resolution of the North Korean nuclear and missile threat. Without negotiations, there is little prospect for addressing the threat from North Korea's growing arsenal of nuclear weapons and ballistic missiles. Yet Trump administration officials have made conflicting statements about the role of diplomatic engagement in the administration's strategy toward Pyongyang. I encourage you to pursue coordinated action with Beijing, in which China backs direct U.S. negotiations with North Korea with credible threats of drastically intensified sanctions if North Korea refuses to negotiate in good faith. Close coordination with our Japanese and South Korean allies must also remain a key component of the U.S. approach.

According to public reports, the Trump administration has settled on a policy toward North Korea that it calls "maximum pressure and engagement." However, it is unclear what the terms of engagement will be. During his visit to the demilitarized zone between South Korea and North Korea, Vice President Mike Pence affirmed that the U.S. aim was to achieve North Korea's denuclearization "through peaceable means, through negotiations." But in a subsequent interview, Vice President Pence declared that "the approach President Trump has taken is not engagement with North Korea," and he suggested that negotiations could only occur after North Korea abandoned its nuclear weapons program.

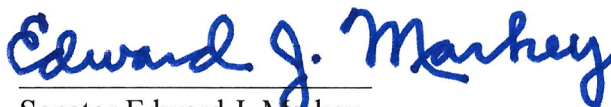
To delay negotiations until North Korea unilaterally disarms is to effectively foreclose a diplomatic solution altogether. Without a diplomatic track, China—which has urged the United States to talk with North Korea for years—is unlikely to apply sustained economic pressure on Pyongyang. As North Korea's principal economic patron, China is essential to any strategy for pressuring North Korea to live up to its denuclearization obligations.

The Trump administration's apparent refusal to negotiate with North Korea—together with its repeated public threats of preventive military action—will worsen Kim Jong Un's paranoia that the objective of U.S. policy is regime change rather than denuclearization. That will bolster Pyongyang's commitment to acquiring a long-range missile capable of threatening the continental United States with a nuclear strike. The United States will be faced with the unacceptable choice of living with a nuclear North Korea or taking military actions that could cause hundreds of thousands or even millions of innocent people to die.

The alternative path of coordinated action with China that combines negotiations with extraordinary economic pressure is far preferable. During your visit to the United Nations, I urge you work together with China and other members of the Security Council to develop a resolution that presents Pyongyang with a clear choice. North Korea must be forced to choose between direct negotiations that could lead to a formal end to the Korean War and an improvement in North Korea's economic standing or drastically increased economic pressure that includes sustained economic isolation of North Korea from its principal international patron, China.

By making diplomatic engagement, in coordination with our allies and China, a principal component of your North Korea strategy, you will create the opportunity to peaceably resolve the North Korea nuclear and missile threat while avoiding a military catastrophe that leads to untold destruction and death. I urge you to seize this opportunity at the United Nations while there is still time to do so.

Sincerely,



Senator Edward J. Markey
Ranking Member, Subcommittee on East Asia, the Pacific,
and International Cybersecurity Policy
Senate Foreign Relations Committee

Cc:

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