

The Breach 108: Ankit Panda on North Korea

Lindsay: Welcome to the Breach, your deep dive into authoritarianism and corruption in the era of Trump. I'm your host, Lindsay Beyerstein. And my guest today is Ankit Panda, host of The Diplomat Podcast, a production of The Diplomat a current affairs magazine dedicated to covering geopolitics and intelligence in the Asia Pacific region. Ankit's here to talk to me about North Korea's nuclear program, and the Trump administration's policy towards North Korea, which is almost as mysterious at the hermit kingdom itself. Ankit thanks so much for coming on.

Ankit: Absolutely my pleasure, Lindsay. Thanks for having me.

Lindsay: Can you give us an overview of the genesis of North Korea's nuclear program?

Ankit: Sure. So the nuclear program has been surreptitiously under operations going back the early 90's. We have US intelligence estimates that suggested that North Korea started looking into a plutonium path to the bomb starting in the early 90's. And then eventually shifted to uranium. And actually the shift to uranium was on the reasons that the Clinton administration's 1994 agreement known as the Agreed Framework ended up collapsing. So they've been pursuing nuclear weapons for a while. you could track it down all three generations of the Kim family. Beginning with Kim Il-sung and running through Kim Jung-il, who presided over the first nuclear test. And then Kim Jong-un obviously, the current man in town in Pyongyang.

Lindsay: And can you tell us what the significance of the switched plutonium is?

Ankit: Well, they're thinking about switching to uranium. Their first few devices ... Every device that they have tested to date, we expect, has been a plutonium fission device. So those are fairly conventional nuclear weapons. They did claim that their last two tests were what are known as thermonuclear devices, which use a primary nuclear reaction to stimulate a secondary reaction. But basically, what listeners really need to know is that thermonuclear devices can be a lot more powerful than basic fission devices. So basically, North Korea is working towards bigger better bombs, and they're expected to continue testing these nuclear devices anytime they can.

Lindsay: Can you give us an overview of the diplomatic history that led up to this point? What's been done to try and dissuade the north or ... redirect the north to be a better player-

Ankit: Yeah-

Lindsay: And better international citizen I guess. (laughs)

Ankit: Yeah, sure. So this is a long and complicated history. I think a good place to start is looking back at the 90's. So the first Bush administration is a good place to start. They actually managed to win an agreement between the two Koreas to denuclearize the Korean Peninsula. And what this meant was that US tactical nuclear weapons ... The United States and South Korea are allies. US troops have been in South Korea since the

end of the Korean War. The United States used to have tactical nuclear weapons on the Korean Peninsula that the North Koreans were very unhappy with. And the South Koreans too. Some of them saw it as an impediment to peace.

So what the Bush administration ended up doing was denuclearizing Korean Peninsula. And there was an agreement on denuclearization. And then we go to the mid 90's. I brought up some of this history already with the Agreed Framework agreement, which was actually a pretty quick negotiation -- quick in the sense if you compare it to something like the Iran Deal, The Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action. The Agreed Framework was certainly a quicker negotiation. And that deal was pretty straightforward. North Korea would agree to allow international atomic energy agency inspectors into its country who had access to its plutonium reprocessing sites. Effectively cutting off its path to a plutonium weapon. And the Agreed Framework today gets bashed as a failure of the deal. But what you have to appreciate about the agreement is that it probably delayed North Korea's path to that first nuclear test by at least a decade, right?

Lindsay: Mm-hmm (affirmative)-

Ankit: Because if you went by these early 90's intelligence estimates, they were on a path to acquiring a nuclear capability probably by the early 2000s if not the late 90's. And we saw India and Pakistan break out in the late 90's as well. So that would have been a potentially different situation. And then we got to the second Bush administration, which, they come in with a traditional degree of Republican foreign policy bravado I guess is a good way to say it.

Lindsay: (laughs)

Ankit: John Bolton is part of this administration, he's obviously no fan of the North Koreans, and in his memoirs, he actually writes about effectively looking for an excuse to torpedo The Agreed Framework. And the North Koreans did cheat on this agreement, right? They had a clandestine uranium program -- the uranium enrichment program that the CIA first uncovered, publicly at least, in 2002. And then everything kind of collapses. The North Koreans pull out of the nuclear non-proliferation treaty unilaterally, they scrap The Agreed Framework. Actually, both sides scrap it -- the Bush administration doesn't really make any effort to salvage this Clinton-era arms control agreement, right? This might sound a little familiar to anybody following kind of the early debate in the Trump administration on the Iran deal, which so far looks okay. But it's a ... It's a bad event as far as North Korean arms control goes, right? So this agreement goes away. 2006 North Korea tests its first nuclear weapon, and by then, the Bush administration has decided that scrapping the Agreed Framework maybe wasn't such a great idea.

And the six party talks are under way -- the six parties being The United States, North Korea, South Korea, Japan, China, and Russia. They try to come together and figure out a way to solve this problem. And they ultimately fail, right? By the end of 2008 early 2009 the process is totally collapsed. And then the Obama administration comes into office and we kind of start to see the beginnings of our current status quo diplomatically --

which is effectively sanction North Korea through the United Nations, and then try to apply pressure, try to get them to make any sort of bona fide move to show that they're interested in denuclearization, show that they're interested in stopping their ballistic missile development. Obviously the Koreans haven't done that. And I should mention that the Obama administration, to its credit, did try certain initiatives, right? So right before Kim Jung-ill died in 2011, there was already a diplomatic initiative between the US and North Korea underway that led to a 2012 agreement on February 29th, which known appropriately as the Leap Day Deal. But that didn't last, either. The North Koreans tested a satellite launch vehicle, and they were kind of ... It was sort of similar to the reasons that The Agreed Framework collapsed, right?

So the North Koreans had this uranium program with The Agreed Framework. People said well The Agreed Framework didn't explicitly reference uranium. So is this really cheating? Well it was clearly against the spirit of the agreement. Similarly, the satellite thing kind of torpedoed the Leap Day agreement and fell apart. And from 2012 onward you have Kim Jong-un. Early on, nobody really knows what kind of leader this guy's going to be, right? There was some kind of naïve hope that because he was educated in Switzerland as a child he might be a great reformer. That turned out to be absolutely false. He has only accelerated North Korea's pursuit of nuclear weapons and advanced ballistic missile capabilities. And here we are today with the Trump administration in office. They just completed their first nuclear policy review of North Korea in early April, right before Trump met Chinese president Xi Jinping. And, let's be real, they've essentially decided that they're just going to continue with strategic patience. So that's where we are.

Lindsay: (laughs) As much as they scoff at strategic patience and say it's over?

Ankit: Right yeah, yeah. I mean it is ... It is strategic patience but they're going to talk about it in a different way. And in an international diplomacy, international relations, the way you talk about things matters. And the fact that the Trump administration has both been signaling that they're going to stick to strategic patience, but also been kind of saber rattling, right? I mean, you have these interviews coming out with Trump where he says that there's going to be a major conflict soon with North Korea. That kind of thing is really really dangerous, right? I mean, if you look at the historic level of trust between North Korea and The United States, it actually makes The United States and Iran look like much better friends.

Lindsay: (laughs)-

Ankit: To put it lightly, right? So part of what made the JCPOA, the Iran deal, possible was this gradual process of building trust. In the US-North Korea case, not only is that trust just not there, but the North Koreans are incredibly -- I don't want to say 'paranoid' because that's makes them sound irrational and crazy, which I don't think they are. But they're incredibly worried that The United States will look to attack them first, right? They have this great fear of a preemptive strike. They say it, you see it in their state media all the time. Every year when The United States and South Korea hold exercises, the North Koreans effectively think that it's a rehearsal for an invasion. So when you have the US

president kind of saber-rattling, right, they don't know what we know about Trump. They don't kind of follow the daily kind of Twitter stream about what this guy's doing. They just think he's another US president and what he says should be taken with the same degree of seriousness that previous US presidents' statements were.

Lindsay: But don't they gather open source media just like we do and ...

Ankit: They do, right? Yeah they do -- we have good evidence that they even read tweets from The North Korea watching community. And they process kind of news reports. So this is actually funny, right? There's actually a great anecdote that I've been sharing recently. So you remember this whole Carl Vinson aircraft carrier stuff-

Lindsay: Of course yeah-

Ankit: That we had going on. Yes. In April. So Trump said that this aircraft carrier was going to Korea. Turns out it was going a few weeks later. Everybody thought it was already in Korea. And what's funny is that the North Koreans actually bought it, right? You looked at their state media and they said that "The USS Carl Vinson is off the Korean Peninsula and we're really mad about this." And then we saw the reports that the carrier was still by Indonesia. So it's funny because they do rely on this open source information. They were actually completely wrong, right? You'd think if the North Korean's were planning on ever fighting a war, they'd want to know where US naval assets are. But apparently they just have no idea.

Lindsay: What is North Korea's nuclear capacity right now? I mean, they had all these parades recently. It was kind of like a nuclear trade show, where they just paraded all the goods out for display. What have they got in their arsenal at this point?

Ankit: Yeah, so the parade was pretty crazy. so I'll ... I'll caveat this by saying that I'm not ... a weapons expert, a nuclear weapons expert by any means. I've been following issues closely talking to a lot of experts myself. And the understanding that I have is that North Korea effectively is a ... effectively it is a nuclear weapon state right now. So they've carried out five nuclear tests. We're anticipating their sixth anytime now. And they will probably test one this year, right? There was kind of a lot of wrangling in April, that they would look to test on these specific anniversaries like Kim Il-sung's birthday on the 15th of April when they decided to stage this massive parade, or April 25th which is the 85th founding of the Korean people's army. But they're not that predictable. They'd still like to surprise us a little bit.

So one of the areas where they've made a lot of progress that I think people are still in a little bit of denial about is the miniaturization of their nuclear devices. Building a nuclear weapon is not easy. There is declassified information available to kind of everyone about how nuclear weapons work. But that doesn't mean that the science behind it is easy. And the engineering is particularly difficult, right? Even though you could kind of get the fissile material you need, the right plutonium and uranium isotopes, and put them into a device, implode them in a way that they actually create a nuclear reaction -- that doesn't mean that you're actually going to be able to make that small enough to

the point where you can put it on a reasonable ballistic missile, right?

Lindsay: Right-

Ankit: That would be useful to fly to any range. The North Koreans are making progress on that front. And I think most experts that I've spoken to and that I trust think that if they really wanted to they could put this on one of their medium range or intermediate range missiles. The intercontinental ballistic missile program gets a lot of attention in The United States, right? For obvious reasons, Americans are probably more worried about the missiles that could hit them one day-

Lindsay: Yeah-

Ankit: Than the missiles that can't hit them one day.

Lindsay: That's you interest Americans in foreign policy.

Ankit: Yeah exactly-

Lindsay: Can it hit us?

Ankit: Can it hit us? And I mean I have my frustrations about this that I could go into about later. But I'll just talk about the capability. So they haven't tested these ICBMs for now and testing intercontinental ballistic missiles is a big part of deterrence, right? If North Korea tests it's missiles, shows that world that they work, that's going to affect the decisions that planners of the pentagon are going to be making. They'll know that if they escalate past certain thresholds the North Koreans will probably launch an intercontinental ballistic missile that will probably work. And that affects how The Unites States thinks about things. So they haven't don't that yet. And we think they will look to do that probably by the earliest next year. I don't think they'll do it this year.

There is some evidence that actually already tried to test a variant of their intercontinental ballistic missile last year. In October, there were a couple tests that just kind of blew up on an airstrip in western North Korea near a town called Kusong. And experts think that those missiles, which were never really definitely identified by intelligence at least publicly, could have been intercontinental ballistic missiles. So they are on this cusp of kind of testing these new devices. So, that's obviously a source of concern for Americans. And you mentioned the parade. I think that's a great place to start. I mean at the end of the parade, right? They always- Whenever North Korea does these parades they always start with the infantry. They move on to they heavy armor, artillery systems, and they end with the big ... The big monsters which are the-

Lindsay: You want to finish strong in this show flow as it were-

Ankit: Yeah, so they kind of blew everyone's mind. And when I say everyone's mind I mean North Korean experts, right? People who think about North Korea every day of the week. I mean I was watching this parade. I was live tweeting it with all these other

people who watch North Korea. And everybody just kind of freaked out when they brought these massive canisters out. The canisters are basically these tubes -- imagine a massive Pringles can that could stick an intercontinental ballistic missile. They could stick an ICBM inside so they brought these out on these massive trucks. And that I think told us what they were trying to do, right?

Lindsay: So they held off on the actual unboxing part of the program?

Ankit: Yeah. Yeah. So I mean there was kind of a lot ... I got a lot of questions like "Well this is probably, like, the tubes are probably empty. There's probably nothing inside them." And it's like well yeah like you might be, right? That these are either mock ups. there's all this focus that people kind of peer at these images attempting to see if these are detailed papier mache mock ups. And they don't actually have these capabilities. But that's not what the parade ... That's not the message I take away from the parade as an observer of North Korea's nuclear state, right? I mean, they're telling you where their program is going, they're telling you their aspirations, they're telling you what they envision their nuclear war fighting force as, right? Even if these capabilities are five years away from now, ten years away from now, they're kind of telling you that this is how we want to ready ourselves to fight a nuclear war, and hopefully to deter a nuclear war.

Lindsay: What kind of nuclear strategy is North Korea entertaining at this point?

Ankit: So this is the question of the hour. It's been something that I've been talking about with Vipin Narang who is a nuclear strategy expert up in Massachusetts Institute of Technology. I actually recently had him on my own podcast to kind of talk this stuff in like really wonky detail. I'll try not to get into too much detail right now-

Lindsay: It's wonderful everybody should go download that episode of The Diplomat, it's really good.

Ankit: Oh thank you. Thank you, Lindsay. But like to just very quickly wrap up what I think is going on in North Korea's nuclear strategy is that, they're essentially looking to use a first strike nuclear strategy. But they're planning to use a first strike within the theater. So the theater you can broadly think of everything kind of 2,000 to 3,000 miles out from North Korea. So, basically, what the North Koreans have been saying ... they're actually pretty explicit about it this. This isn't something that kind of tell us in poetry and we have to kind of spend hours decoding. They have very explicitly released statements through their foreign ministry – actually, their deputy foreign minister had a great statement in April where he kind of laid this out. Basically, this is what they say: if North Korea ever gets the sense that The United States and South Korea are mobilizing to preemptively attack North Korea, or preemptively take out Kim Jong-un, or preemptively kind of take out North Korea nuclear launch sites, they will launch everything they have except their intercontinental range systems, right? So they will launch their short range systems, their medium range systems, their intermediate range systems first, with nuclear war heads and conventional explosive range warheads. They will launch them at pretty much every US asset in the region, right? So this includes the

Port Of Pusan, Iwakuni air force base in Japan, Guam. And to kind of tell you that I'm not crazy and kind of envisioning this, when they release images of their recent nuclear tests -- it's really interesting they kind of dangle these maps, right? So if you look at Kim Jong-un's desk, for example, in February -- or sorry in March -- when they tested these four extended range scud missiles, there was this map on Kim Jun-un's desk. And I think this was the map that showed these missiles going to Iwakuni, right-

Lindsay: Yeah-

Ankit: So there was a line drawn on this map for Kim Jong-un showing these missiles kind of on a trajectory to the US air force base in Japan. And Guam is obviously a big target for them because that's where The United States keeps its bomber force in the western Pacific, the B2s and the B1-Bs. And North Korea really hates those, right?

Lindsay: Yeah-

Ankit: So after nuclear tests, US flies these bombers and they get really pissed off. They're like this is ... You're threatening us with nuclear war. We're going to strike you down with hellfire or whatever crazy adjectives they like to use. But basically this is all a pretty well framed strategy. It's actually pretty close to kind of Pakistan's strategy, right? You look to go first. And then this where the ICBMs come in, right? So North Korea goes first-

Lindsay: Go first with nuclear force but not necessarily first with force? That they're waiting for force or imminent force for the other side.

Ankit: Right, so in the nuclear strategy lingo you want to differentiate between two kinds of targets. So the first kind are counter-value targets. Counter-value targets are your cities. Los Angeles, New York, Seoul, Tokyo, Portland, whatever you can think of. So these are where the people live, where the economic value centers are in these countries. So threatening to strike those second is usually a pretty good deterrent, right? So countries like India and China say that they won't strike first in a nuclear war, but in a second strike they will look to do unacceptable damage to the enemies' cities. And that's a pretty good deterrent, right-

Lindsay: Yeah-

Ankit: You don't want to lose all your cities so you're not going to start a nuclear war hopefully. And that's kind of why that works as a principle deterrence. What North Korea says, though, is that it's going to practice what's known as counter force targeting. And this got pretty big during The Cold War. The United States and Soviet Union -- part of the reason their nuclear arsenals got so huge was because everybody started worrying about counter force targeting. And the idea behind counter force targeting is that you disarm your opponent. You imagine a Mexican standoff between two sharp shooters, and the idea is that instead of shooting the guy in the head you shoot the gun out of his hand, so you limit the damage that he can do to you because if you, for instance, miss his head on the first shot, he can shoot you back.

So it's a damage limitation strategy. And the North Koreans know that in any conventional war they will probably be pretty severely beaten in the end, or at least the regime knows that even if North Korea's massive military force ... So they have a conventional numerical superiority. That's how they kind of make up for their lack of fancy technology. Is that they just have a massive military. They spend about 25% of their GDP annually, people think, on their military, which is absolutely insane. So it's a ... It's a highly militarized state, they have the largest paramilitary force in the world. And the whole idea is that the regime wants to avoid ... It wants to ensure its own survival.

Lindsay: If North Korea were to unload with everything we guess it has right now according to that strategy. What would the actual devastation look like?

Ankit: So, that's a good question. That would come down to the number of nuclear warheads we think they have, and the accuracy of their missiles. Both of those -- they should be some what reassuring, right? So, everything I said -- taking out Guam, taking out Iwakuni, Pusan, even Osan air force base in South Korea -- they probably wouldn't be able to do all that right now, right? They just either don't have enough nuclear warheads or don't have enough confidence in their targeting capabilities. And there are ... And this is why they test missiles. They want to test missiles not only to make sure that they work -- and the missiles that they are pretty confident with are the short range systems, the SCUDs that we think they got from Egypt in the late 70's, they started testing those in the early 80's. So they have decades of experience with those systems. They know they work. But it's kind of the ... Like the Musudan missile got a lot of attention last year. They tested it for the first time ever in April. So just about a little over a year ago. And they kept testing them because they didn't work. And they finally got a successful test out in June. But we don't even know if that missile, which has been described in headlines, as The Guam Killer.

Lindsay: (laughs)

Ankit: Right. We don't even know if it can actually reach Guam. It's range in fact might be just able to get it to Guam. But then you have questions about accuracy at that range. You have questions about how its range varies with the payload that it's carrying, right? Because you actually have to put something in the tip of the missile to strike. So when you're putting that nuclear device in there how does that affect the missiles range. So those are kind of open questions right now. Obviously we don't want to dare the North Koreans to prove that they can reach Guam. But just some of those issues to think about.

Lindsay: Is there any appetite in the US among hardliners for some kind of preemptive strike attack on North Korea to prevent them from going any further in their nuclear program?

Ankit: Yeah. There definitely is. And you find that with kind of every problematic country. There were plenty of people who wanted to strike Iran. That was a huge constituency, a lot of op-eds where you'd read "there's still time to strike Iran," respectable publications. On North Korea, I think, you don't quite see that level of kind of hawkishness, but there are people who definitely still want to go first. the thing that

really bothers me about kind of this brand of hawkish analysis is that, a lot of the people who are willing to kind of take the risk of a war with North Korea just ... I'll be blunt about it -- they don't care about South Korean or Japanese lives. And to an extent they don't care about American lives, because 150,000 Americans live in South Korea. 100,000 live in Japan. There are 50,000 troops in Japan, 30,000 troops in South Korea who would also be subject to any North Korean attacks.

Lindsay: Right so their main ace in the hole, other than the counter force stuff, is that they could simply vaporize South Korea.

Ankit: Yeah I mean they would do significant damage to Seoul. I mean Seoul is just about 30 miles out from the demilitarized zone. It could be struck with artillery. It can be struck with multiple-launch rockets systems. They can do considerable damage. Some estimates of a war with North Korea estimate that 100,000 people in Seoul could die within the first kind of three days of fighting. And that's absolutely devastating. And there's ... I mean, Seoul is a major international commercial hub. It wouldn't just be Americans and South Koreans dying. You'd have Chinese, Japanese, Southeast Asians, Indians, Europeans, Africans all sorts of casualties. It would be an international incident, right? It would probably tank global markets given the economic importance of Seoul as well. And you'll hear this brand of analysis -- I guess most recently probably the biggest name to kind of promote something like this is has been, surprise, surprise, Lindsay Graham. But yeah it's ... It is a brand of analysis that I think is still popular for whatever reason. Even though it's pretty obvious how devastating it would be.

Lindsay: What does North Korea want out of this? What's their end game?

Ankit: So North Korea's end game is regime survival. And that's not ... I don't think that's something again that you have to be a genius to figure out. Right now the North Korean government since 2013 has been talking about this concept that's known as Pyong-jin. And what that means is that they effectively want to have their cake and eat it too.

What that means is they want to have their nuclear weapons and they also want to have economic prosperity. And it's kind of Kim Jong-un's motto, right? Like, if Trump's motto is America First and Obama's motto was Yes We Can, Kim Jong-un's motto is Pyong-jin.

Lindsay: Like butter and guns.

Ankit: Yeah butter and guns. Yeah absolutely. And his father's motto was Songbun, And that was the military first policy in North Korea, which lead to the famine in the late 1990's, right? So that was a devastating lesson for North Korea. And I think Kim Jong-un internalized that. I think he is modeling himself more after his grandfather, right? His grandfather, the great eternal leader of North Korea. Who came up with the concept of *juche*, which is self-reliance, that North Korea would be a self-reliant country in all aspects including its own security and it's economic fortunes. So North Korea enjoyed some relatively good days. Before South Korea's economic miracle during The Cold War, the two Koreas were neck and neck effectively. And I think some people tend to forget that.

But now Kim Jong-un knows that there is kind of legitimacy problem for North Korea when it's people are starving and poor across the country. He knows that this is ultimately going to be problematic for him. He's young, he's probably going to be in power for a while if his health keeps up and he can eat well and exercise. He'll probably be around on the scene for a while. So if he's thinking about his own survival and his regime's survival, he needs nuclear weapons so no one attacks him first. But he also needs to make sure that the economic legitimacy problem won't come back to bite him, right? There has been some great reporting, actually, using North Korean defectors, even some sources within North Korea lately, showing that the regime is making every so incremental steps towards -- I don't want to say 'liberalizing' because that's a misleading word -- but to kind of allowing market forces into the country. For example, the North Korean won has been ... At the black market exchange rate has started to gain traction in Pyongyang. Journalists have been reporting this as well, that the government exchanges are now starting to use that rate of currency. Purchasing property in Pyongyang is now something that I guess maybe, what you can reasonably describe as the middle class in the city, have a right to engage in. So there is this kind of recognition that North Korea needs to make these changes, right?

I mean one of the things that went unnoticed this spring was actually this street in Pyongyang called Ryomyong Street I think. I don't know if that pronunciation is right in Korean. But that's roughly how it sounds. And you look at the pictures that they released in the state media. These are tall high-rise apartment buildings with flashing lights. It's kind of based on what North Korea has probably seen out of pictures of cities like Shanghai, Seoul, Guangzhou, Shenzhen, all these great east Asian cities that are propped up. And North Korea wants to project that same degree of economic legitimacy to its people. And there is this kind of propaganda cat and mouse that goes on between North Korea and South Korea that North Koreans really hate. For example, South Korean activists will send in pamphlets, they'll send in SD cards, they'll send in kind of CD-ROMs, with movies of life in South Korea -- kind of just descriptions, pictures.

And North Korea really hates this, because when ordinary North Koreans will kind of receive these images. And what I'm going off here is defector accounts. They'll express a degree of envy. Like, you'll have defectors who left North Korea, and obviously they're defectors so they've left this country for a reason. But they'll tell you that whenever they would get these kind of South Korean pamphlets they will always look at them with envy, right? They'd be like "Why are we here?" I mean, this kind of common refrain that goes around that North Korean people are simply kind of brainwashed automatons, I mean that's ... I don't think that could be farther from the truth, right? I mean they're human beings like you and me. They have the ability to know what a good life is. And they know that maybe their government isn't providing that to them.

Lindsay: And does that mean that North Korea is vulnerable to enticements? That a carrot approach might work if they really want to be able to give all these things to their people. That they-

Ankit: Right-

Lindsay: Be willing to trade less nuclear development for more movies, and blankets, and food?

Ankit: So that's, I think, a great question -- this week particularly given that we've just seen an election in South Korea, right? And the new president Moon Jae-in. There's been a lot of kind of worry, I guess in The United States, that he's going to kind of go against the Trump approach and bring back the Sunshine Policy, which was first started by Kim Dae-jung in the early 2000s, carried on by Roh Moo-hyun. And Moon Jae-in the current president of South Korea worked closely with both of those leaders. So there is a school of thought in South Korea in particular that -- among South Korean liberals not conservatives -- that this kind of approach could work. And this is where you saw things like the Kaesong Industrial Complex, where South Korean companies worked with North Korean laborers, and they saw that as a way to create this special economic zone that would increase inter-Korean cooperation. So there is that line of thought in South Korea, that this could be a way to engender cooperation between the two countries. But really I think in recent years the situation has really changed, particularly given everything that North Korea has done -- the international sanctions regime has intensified so much that there are limits on far South Korea itself can go at approaching North Korea economically without infringing on sanctions and becoming a sanction breaker itself.

Lindsay: Ankit, that's all the time we have for today. Thank you so much for coming on the program.

Ankit: Absolutely, my pleasure, Lindsay. Thanks for having me.

Lindsay: On Sunday, North Korea successfully tested another missile, a Pukguksong-2 medium range ballistic missile, the same missile they tested in February. Whereupon, Kim Jong-Un made a big show of ordering the missiles into mass production. These missiles carry solid, rather than liquid fuel, making them easier to conceal and faster to launch.

This test comes on the heels of the successful May 14 test of a Hwasong-12, a mid-to-long-range ballistic missile capable of carrying a large nuclear payload. The missile survived re-entry into the atmosphere, which Western scientists described as a breakthrough for North Korea.

David Wright of the Union of Concerned Scientists estimates that Hwasong-12 has a range of about 2800 miles, or about 2000 miles short of what North Korea would need to hit the US West Coast.

And now it's time for recommended reading. Today's reading is by my buddy Dave Neiwert of the Southern Poverty Law Center. It's called "With DHS Position, Clarke Would Be The First Patriot Leader To Hold A Federal Post." Radical right wing sheriff and Fox news commentator David Clarke claims that he has accepted a secretarial level job at the Department of Homeland Security, overseeing partnerships with local law enforcement. DHS has not yet confirmed the appointment. Dave Neiwert observes that this would be the first time that anyone with ties to the anti-government Patriot movement has held high ranking posts in the federal government -- for obvious reasons.

As a so called constitutional sheriff, Clarke endorses a form of constitutional pseudo-scholarship that says that county sheriffs outrank their counterparts in federal law enforcement. He also believes that Black Lives Matter is a hate group and recently said he'd rather grab Democrats by the throat than work with them to solve the nation's problems.

Our second reading is by Radley Balko and it's called "A David Clarke Dossier." It runs down the horrible death toll in Clarke's jail, including four deaths in the last six months, which is three times the national average, and about ten more deaths between 2008 and 2013. That's it for recommend reading.

The Breach is produced by Rewire Radio. Our executive producer is Marc Faletti. Our theme music is Dark Alliance performed by Darcy James Argue's Secret Society. And I'm your host Lindsay Beyerstein. Tweet your suggestions, comments, and questions to @beyerstein b,e,y,e,r,s,t,e,i,n on Twitter. See you next week.