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Remarks Following a Meeting With Vice Chairman of the State Affairs Commission Kim Yong Chol North Korea and an Exchange With Reporters

June 1, 2018

The President. The meeting went very well. We'll be meeting on June 12 in Singapore. It went very well. It's really a get-to-know-you kind of a situation. Mike has spent 2 days doing this. We've gotten to know their people very well. And we will—you people are going to have to travel, because you'll be in Singapore on June 12.

And I think it'll be a process. It's not—I never said it goes in one meeting. I think it's going to be a process. But the relationships are building, and that's a very positive thing.

North Korea's Nuclear Weapons Program/The President's Upcoming Meeting With Chairman of the State Affairs Commission Kim Jong Un of North Korea

Q. Mr. President, what's your sense of what the North Koreans are willing to do on the issue of denuclearization? Are they looking at it all at once?

The President. Well, I think they want to do that. I know they want to do that. They want other things along the line. They want to develop as a country. That's going to happen. I have no doubt. Japan is involved, as you know. And South Korea is very much involved. We're involved in terms of getting everything. Everybody wants the United States. So we're going to help in the process very much. Without us, it wouldn't happen.

But I think that you see a lot of very positive things, including with China. I think you see a lot of very positive things happening with President Xi, who has helped me quite a bit with this. So we'll see where it leads.

But we're going to be—June 12, we'll be in Singapore. It will be a beginning. I don't say—and I've never said—it happens in one meeting. You're talking about years of hostility; years of problems; years of, really, hatred between so many different nations. But I think you're going to have a very positive result in the end. Not from one meeting, but you're going to have a very positive——

Q. What do you think——

Q. What is the United States offering, Mr. President?

The President's Upcoming Meeting With Chairman of the State Affairs Commission Kim Jong Un of North Korea

Q. You appeared to question their sincerity in your letter to Kim Jong Un last week. Have they gone far enough now? Do you believe they're sincere?

The President. Well, don't forget, my letter was a response to their letter. The media forgot that. You know, the media said, "Oh, you had a meeting, then you canceled." I didn't cancel the meeting. I canceled it in response to a very tough statement. And I think we're over that, totally over that. And now we're going to deal, and we're going to really start a process.

We're meeting with the Chairman on June 12. And I think it's probably going to be a very successful—ultimately, a successful process. We'll see.

[*At this point, several reporters began asking questions at once*.]

Remember what I say: We will see what we will see. But I think it's going to be a process that we deserve to have. I mean, we'd really deserve—they want it. We think it's important. And I think we would be making a big mistake if we didn't have it. I think we're going to have a relationship, and it will start on June 12.

The President's Meeting With Vice Chairman Kim

Q. What can you get done in one meeting? What can you get done on June 12? And why do you think they're open to denuclearization?

The President. Well, this was a very good meeting. Don't forget, this was a meeting where a letter was given to me by Kim Jong Un, and that letter was a very nice letter. Oh, would you like to see what was in that letter? Would you like it?

Letter to the President From Chairman of the State Affairs Commission Kim Jong Un of North Korea

Q. Can you tell us? Can you tell us what was in the letter?

The President. How much? [*Laughter*] How much? How much?

Q. Can you just give us a flavor of what the letter said?

The President. Ah, it was a very interesting letter. And at some point, I may be—it may be appropriate, and maybe I'll be able to give it to you. Maybe you'll be able to see it, and maybe fairly soon. And——

Q. Can you characterize it?

The President. But really, this was a letter presentation that ended up being a 2-hour conversation.

The President's Meeting With Vice Chairman Kim

Q. Why did it end up going so long, sir?

The President. Because we found the whole subject matter very interesting. And because I really think they want to do something. And if it's possible, so do we.

The President's Upcoming Meeting With Chairman of the State Affairs Commission Kim Jong Un of North Korea

Q. What did he ask you of you, sir?

The President. I think all we're going to do is be there on June 12, and we're going to see what happens. Mike has been dealing very well. They have a very good relationship with Mike Pompeo, our Secretary of State. It was actually very interesting, because this was literally going to be the delivery of a letter, and it ended up being a 2-hour conversation with the second most powerful man in North Korea.

The President's Meeting With Vice Chairman Kim

Q. Did he ask you anything about troop levels in South Korea?

The President. We talked about almost everything. We talked about a lot.

Q. Mr. President, have you had a conversation with——

The President. And we talked about sanctions.

The President's Upcoming Meeting With Chairman of the State Affairs Commission Kim Jong Un of North Korea

Q. Did they agreed to CVID?

Q. Have you spoken with Kim Jong Un yet?

The President. I don't want to say that.

Q. Did they agree to CVID, sir?

The President. Okay. We talked about a lot of things. We really did. But the big deal will be on June 12. And again, it's a process. It doesn't go—we're not going to sign a—we're not going to go in and sign something on June 12, and we never were. We're going to start a process. And I told them today: "Take your time. We can go fast. We can go slowly." But I think they'd like to see something happen. And if we can work that out, that will be good. But the process will begin on June 12 in Singapore.

North Korea's Nuclear Weapons Program

Q. Do you believe Kim is committed to denuclearization?

The President. Yes, I do think so. He'd like to see it happen. He wants to be careful. He wants to be, you know—he's not going to run and do things. But I told him, to be honest with you, look, we have sanctions on; they're very powerful sanctions. We would not take sanctions off unless they did that. But the sanctions are very powerful. You've seen how powerful in other ways. You're going to see how powerful sanctions are when it comes to Iran. You see what that's doing to Iran.

So we have sanctions on. And at a certain point, I'll tell you what, I look forward to the day when I can take the sanctions off of North Korea.

Human Rights in North Korea

Q. Did you talk about human rights today? And do you expect to talk about it on——

The President. We did not talk about human rights, no.

Q. Do you expect to talk about it on June 12?

The President. Could be. Yes. Could be. I think we probably will, and maybe in great detail. We did not talk about human rights.

U.S. Sanctions Against North Korea

Q. Did you talk about sanctions? Did they ask you to make any changes?

The President. Yes, we did. We talked about it. Yes, they asked about sanctions.

Q. Is maximum pressure over, sir?

The President. Excuse me?

U.S. Sanctions Against North Korea

Q. Is maximum pressure over, sir?

The President. It's going to remain what it is now. I don't even want to use the term "maximum pressure" anymore, because I don't want to use that term. Because we're getting along. You see the relationship. We're getting along.

So it's not a question of maximum pressure. It's staying essentially the way it is. At some point, hopefully, a deal—for the good of millions of people, a deal will be worked out.

North Korea-U.S. Relations

Q. Mr. President, how would you describe the state of relations now between the United States and North Korea after your meetings today?

The President. Well, I think they're okay. I mean, I think they're good. Is it like the relationships we have with a couple of other countries? Probably not. Right? But I think the relationship we have right now with North Korea is as good as it's been in a long time.

They had no relationship under the previous administration. It was—there was nothing. It was nothing. They were explaining, it was just a "nothing." Nothing was done. Hey, folks, this should not be up to me. This should have been handled long time ago. This got to a very critical point. This should have been handled many years ago—not only by President Obama, but by other Presidents that preceded me. This shouldn't be done now; this should have been done years ago.

Economic Aid to North Korea

Q. Do you plan to offer the North Koreans economic aid at the June 12 summit?

The President. Well, what's going to happen is South Korea will do that. No, I don't think the United States is going to have to spend. I think South Korea will do it. I think China—I think, frankly, China will help out. I think that Japan will help out. No, I don't see the United States spending a lot of money. You know, we have three hostages. How much money did I spend for the hostages?

And look, we're very far away. We are very far away. Those places are very close. That's their neighborhood. We're thousands—we're 6,000 miles away. So I've already told South Korea, I said, "You know, you're going to have to get ready." And Japan, also.

And I think they really want to see something great happen. Japan does, South Korea does, and I think China does. But that's their neighborhood; it's not our neighborhood.

Q. [*Inaudible*]—the South Korean war, Mr. President?

Chairman of the State Affairs Commission Kim Jong Un of North Korea's Meeting With Minister of Foreign Affairs Sergey Viktorovich Lavrov of Russia

Q. Mr. President, yesterday you were concerned about the meeting that Lavrov was having with Kim Jong Un.

The President. Yes, I didn't like it.

Q. Where are you on that today?

The President. I didn't like it, but it could be very positive too. I didn't like the Russian meeting yesterday. I said, "What's the purpose of that?" But it could be a positive meeting. If it's a positive meeting, I love it. If it's a negative meeting, I'm not happy. And it could very well be a positive meeting.

Korean War

Q. Are you willing to end the South Korean war on June 12, during the summit?

The President. Well, we could—that could happen. That could happen. We talked about it.

Q. Tell us more.

The President. We talked about ending the war. And you know, this war has been going on—it's got to be the longest war—almost 70 years, right?

Q. Sixty-five years now, sir.

The President. And there is a possibility of something like that. That's more of a signing of a document that it's very important in one way. Historically, it's very important. But we'll see.

And we did discuss that—the ending of the Korean war. Can you believe that we're talking about the ending of the Korean war? You're talking about 70 years.

Q. Is that document—has that document been prepared? Or is it being prepared?

The President. Well, we're going to discuss it prior to the meeting. That's something that could come out of the meeting. I think, really, there's something that maybe could come out of the meeting.

China/Korean War

Q. Where's China on that?

The President. I think China would like to see a very positive result. I have a lot of good relations with, as you know, Chairman Xi. He's a great—he's really a very wonderful guy. He's a man that loves China. However, he wants to do what's best for China. I think China and President Xi would love to see something happen here.

Security of North Korea's Government

Q. When you say you're going to guarantee Kim's security, and the North Korean regime's security, how will you do that? How would the United States do that?

The President. Well, we're going to make sure it's secure. We're going to make sure when this is over, it's over. It's not going to be starting up again.

And they have a potential to be a great country. And I think South Korea is going to help a lot. Japan is going to help a lot. I think China is going to help a lot.

Q. How do you envision that working though?

The President. Well, that's a very complicated question, frankly, but you'll see that over a period of time.

The President's Upcoming Meeting With Chairman of the State Affairs Commission Kim Jong Un of North Korea

Q. When you gave your speech in Seoul last November, you talked about the bright promise if North Korea should choose to join the company of nations. But if you leave Kim in place, can you really have a transformation?

The President. I really think you can. And I think it's going to be very successful. They're incredible people. I think it's going to be a very great success. So we'll see what happens.

But we'll see you—we will see you on June 12, but I'm sure we'll see you a little bit before that. In the meantime, how is Sarah doing? Okay? [*Laughter*]

North Korea-U.S. Relations/U.S. Sanctions Against North Korea

Q. Have you discussed dates for a second or a third summit?

The President. The—which one?

Q. Did you discuss dates for a second or a third meeting?

The President. I told them, I think that you're going to have, probably, others. Hey, wouldn't it be wonderful if we walked out and everything was settled all of a sudden from sitting down for a couple of hours? No, I don't see that happening. But I see over a period of time.

And frankly, I said: "Take your time. Take your time. It's going to remain as is, but take your time."

One thing I did do, and it was very important, we had hundreds of new sanctions ready to go on. And he did not—the director did not ask, but I said I'm not going to put them on until such time as the talks break down.

We have very significant sanctions on now. But we had hundreds—we have hundreds that are ready to go. But I said, "I'm not going to." But why would I do that when we're talking so nicely? So——

The President's Meeting With Vice Chairman Kim

Q. Is this first meeting more of a personal diplomacy, part of your "getting to know you"——

The President. I think it's a "getting to know you" meeting, plus. And that can be a very positive thing.

Letter to the President From Chairman of the State Affairs Commission Kim Jong Un of North Korea

Q. Mr. President, what was your response to the letter? Did you send anything back?

The President. No, I didn't. I haven't seen the letter yet. I purposely didn't open the letter. I haven't opened it. I didn't open it in front of the director.

I said, "Would you want me to open it?" He said, "You can read it later." I may be in for a big surprise, folks. [*Laughter*] So long, everybody.

North American Free Trade Agreement

Q. Are you—what's the next move on NAFTA, sir?

The President. Well, NAFTA—look, it's been a terrible deal for the United States. People are starting to see it. We lose over a hundred billion dollars a year with Mexico. We lose many, many, many billions of dollars with Canada. Canada doesn't take—I mean, they're very restrictive as to taking our agricultural product and other things.

And you know, all of these countries, including the European Union, they charge five times the tariff. We don't charge tariffs, essentially. They charge five times what we charge for tariffs. And I believe in the word "reciprocal." You're going to charge five times? We're going to charge five times. That hasn't been done. No other President ever brought it up. And it's going to be done now.

So we're negotiating numerous deals. We're talking about NAFTA. To be honest with you, I wouldn't see NAFTA—I wouldn't mind seeing NAFTA, where you'd go by a different name, where you make a separate deal with Canada and a separate deal with Mexico, because you're talking about a very different two countries.

But I wouldn't mind seeing a separate deal with Canada, where you have one type of product, so to speak, and a separate deal with Mexico. These are two very difficult countries. It's been a lousy deal for the United States from day one. We lose a lot of money with Canada, and we lose a fortune with Mexico. And it's not going to happen like that anymore.

Q. What do you see——

The President. I mean, Mexico has taken our car companies, a big percentage of them. And we can't do that. And look, the American worker agrees with me. Obviously, the stock market agrees, because when you look at what's going on with the stocks, they're starting to see I'm right.

But if you take the European Union and you see the kind of tariff they charge, and then we don't, that's called "not fair trade." I want fair trade. I like free trade, but I want fair trade. At a minimum, I want fair trade.

And we're going to have it for our workers and for our companies. And you know what? The other side understands it. To be honest with you, they cannot believe that they've gotten away with this for so many decades.

Canada/Mexico/Trade

Q. Canada, the U.K., some of our closest allies are complaining long and loud about these new tariffs. What do you say to them?

The President. They're our allies, but they take advantage of us economically. And so I agree—I love Canada. I love Mexico. I love them. But Mexico is making over a hundred billion dollars a year, and they're not helping us with our border because they have strong laws and we have horrible laws. We have horrible border laws. They have strong—they could solve our border problem if they wanted, but they don't want to. And when they want to, then I'll be happy.

But I think we have a good chance of doing some great trade deals, and we'll make America great again. Right? That's what we're doing. But America has picked up—we've made about $8 trillion in value since—you know, we're double the size of the economy of China. We've picked up a lot of value, a lot of wealth, since I've been President. More than $8 trillion. And that's a very low number, because we're talking stock market wealth. I'm talking about beyond that.

Our companies are doing great, we're doing great, our military is rebuilding. We have a lot of great things going. We're going to straighten out trade. The trade is going to be easy.

And other countries understand. You know, when then—when I talk to them, they look at me—and this is in closed doors, not for you people—and they essentially say, "We can't believe we've gotten away with this for so long." It's, like, you guys can't believe you've gotten away with it for so long.

Q. What is on the agenda for Camp David?

U.S. Economy

Q. [*Inaudible*]—job numbers this morning—[*inaudible*]?

The President. I want everyone to watch. Because I'll tell you what, we have such a great country. Right now, at this level, I don't think we've ever been, on an economic scale—you look at the numbers: 3.8 percent. We have the lowest numbers of unemployment that we've had—is it 50 years? I think it's 50. Fifty years, right? So we have the best—we have some of the best economic numbers we've ever had as a nation. And that goes a long way. And we're building something very special. Just remember, we're twice the size—our economy—twice the size of China.

Good meeting today. I think it's a great start.

Q. What's on the agenda for Camp David?

The President. Just a little relaxation and a lot of work. [*Laughter*] We have a lot of calls set up. I'm calling a lot of the foreign leaders.

Q. You're setting up for Singapore?

The President. I'm negotiating trade deals. I'm working. I'm working hard for you people.

Have a good time. Thank you.

NOTE: The President spoke at 2:41 p.m. on the South Lawn at the White House. In his remarks, he referred to Kim Hak-song, Tony Kim, and Kim Dong-chul, U.S. citizens formerly detained by North Korean officials who returned to the U.S. on May 10; and White House Press Secretary Sarah Huckabee Sanders. A portion of these remarks could not be verified because the audio was incomplete.

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