Suzanne Scholte: Good afternoon, I'm Suzanne Scholte, President of the Defense Forum Foundation and it is my great honor to welcome you to our Congressional Defense and Foreign Policy Forum. As I know you all are quite busy, we are going to jump right into our program. For those attending for the first time these DFF forums were established in the 1980s to give Congressional staff an opportunity to hear from expert speakers on critical topics in a bipartisan collegial atmosphere. As we promise we have an expert speaker to address a very interesting and critical topic: “WHAT IS THE TRUMP DOCTRINE? What to expect from the current administration’s foreign policy.”

Fred Fleitz is here to answer that question for us as someone who has spent his entire life in national security positions as well as in the Trump administration. He served for 25 years with the CIA, DIA, Dept of State, and also on the House Intelligence Committee Staff. He served most recently as Deputy Assistant to President Trump and Chief of Staff to National Security Adviser John Bolton. He has appeared on many US and international TV and radio programs ranging from MSNBC to FOX News, and is the author of several books addressing foreign policy. Currently, he serves as the President of the Center for Security Policy. We are honored to have you Fred.
Fred Fleitz: I’d like to thank Suzanne Scholte and Ambassador Middendorf for inviting me here today, and it is a very special pleasure for me to speak here because I am a former Congressional staffer, and I know how hard it is to get out of the work that you are doing, and I know how important the work that you are doing is, that you are often running offices and nagging Members to work better, the more effective side of what you are doing, and I love to talk to you about that some time, if you want to hear someone who worked five years on the Hill and survived.

When we talk about ‘Trump Doctrine’, we are talking about Trump foreign policy. I have to say that Mr. Trump has had a pretty good run for foreign policy so far. Reestablishing the United States as a credible, powerful nation by standing up to rogue states, by fighting for trade deals that look out for the interests of the American people, this is all driven by a new approach by a President who really is an insurgent, someone who is throwing out that normal diplomatic rulebook, trying things in different ways as an outsider. I think the results in most has been extremely positive, but it is a big change. And it’s worth explaining what this policy is, and where it comes from. The President’s policy really stems from the motto he talked about during the presidential campaign – ‘America First’. ‘America First’ is a nationalism approach to national security, and it is also an approach which is defined as principled realism. Now, when I talk about nationalism, I am not talking about the ultra-nationalism of extremist groups. This is a benign nationalism that tries to look after the interests of American people – American workers, American economy, and US security — when the US government enters into an international agreement, or when we make a foreign policy decision. And it is a backlash to efforts by the foreign policy establishment. You know how the President hates the establishment. Well, there’s the foreign policy establishment. They are good people, but in the opinion of many conservatives, their approaches haven’t been working out too well. And the President’s trying to take a different approach to reject some of the things they’ve advocated. Such as international agreements people don’t support, nation building with indefinite US troop deployments, and international trade deals that leave the American workers out. This is very important to the President, and he summarized ‘America First’ during the campaign, when he said, “my foreign policy will always put the interests of the American people and American security above all else.” This is not isolationism; this is factoring in the interests of our people in our foreign policy. It is pretty clear that the President is prepared to use military force when necessary, but he is also taking the approach that factors in the interests of our nation. I think that it’s important to recognize, but his critics constantly misrepresent his strategy. ‘America First’ has been developed into a comprehensive US policy in the national security strategy that was announced in December of 2017. This was the result of two years of work, hundreds of people from a variety of agencies, put together a very impressive document that transforms ‘America First’ across the US government. And at the beginning of the strategy, there was another statement by the President that sorts of represents how this policy, this strategy, has been developed around the President. He said, “our government’s first duty is to its people, to our citizens, to serve their needs, to ensure their safety, to preserve their rights, and to defend their values.” You can see that’s a little more developed than the statement that he made during the campaign, and it represents the President, who has been in the office for two years and has used so many experts to come up with a way to employ this revolutionary strategy to US government foreign policy across the border.

The national security policy has four pillars; 1) protect the homeland, American people and the American way of life, 2) promote American prosperity, 3) preserve peace through strength, and, 4) advance American influence. And it also is termed, in the strategy, as principled realism, and this is what the strategy says about why it is considered as principled realism, is because it’s clear-eyed about global competition. It acknowledges the central role of power in world affairs, and affirms that sovereign states are the best hope for a peaceful world, and clearly defines our national interest. It is principled, because it is grounded in the knowledge that promoting American values is the key to spreading peace and prosperity around the world.
There’s so much in this that I can get into, but this is a criticism of globalism, this is a criticism of the international elites who want to take American sovereignty and give it to organizations like the United Nations and The European Union that are hostile to the United States. It is stepping back from theories and approaches that have not been working, that have not been serving the interests of the American people. My friend Nile Gardiner, who is the director of the Heritage Foundation’s Thatcher Center for Freedom and Security, gave this summary of the national security strategy. According to Nile, it takes a clear cut view of the immense challenges facing the United States from an array of actors, from Russia, China, and North Korea, to transitional, largely Islamic, terrorist networks. In addition, the strategy emphatically rules out the idea of the extended hand of friendship to rogue regimes such as Iran. The document reveals the President is committed to pursuing a peace through strength military, and leaning forward in critical parts of the world where American vital interests are under assault. Peace through strength, this was the approach to national security taken by President Reagan. It also is the approach to national security taken by my organization, the Center for Security Policy, which it has been promoting since the Reagan administration. And I know that Heritage, and the Center for Security Policy, are just delighted that President Trump has moved towards this approach to national security that helped us defeat the Soviet Union, and I think it will help us defeat the enemies he faces today.

The economy is a big part of this. The President wants free and fair trade deals. He wants trade deals where the other nations don’t cheat. We don’t look the other way while the other nations cheat, and obviously here, I am talking about China, and I am going to get into that in a moment. And it goes without saying that the President takes a dim view of the foreign policy establishment, elitists in Europe and in the US who think that they run the world to promote their own liberal values and globalism. They promoted military operations to do nation building, cede US sovereignty to international organizations hostile to the US and Israel, and promote leftist ideologies, socialism and high taxes. Now this is why the United States pulled out of the UN Human Rights Council and UNESCO over the last couple of years, because of the hostility of these organizations towards the State of Israel. This hostility is unacceptable to the United States, and it is interesting that it is the second time that we withdrew from UNESCO, I think, the Obama administration rejoined it and I think it was again a principled thing to do.

Now what we are talking about here is in stark contrast to President Obama who might be the ultimate foreign policy establishment president. He ran a foreign policy of apology towards Middle East, leading from behind in the Middle East; strategic patience on North Korea; and red lines and ultimatums that were repeatedly set for the parties in the Middle East and Russia that were just made and ignored. You see, when the US does this we lose credibility. We’re emboldening and encouraging rogue states to engage in more belligerent and destabilizing behavior. The approach by President Trump leaves our enemies worried, leaves them guessing. I think it has led to some significant advances in promoting international security. If we have a credible and decisive US President, the world is more secure, and I think that’s something that President Trump is trying to prove every day.

The President does not like indefinite troop deployments, and we know this when we look at the situation in Syria as he tries to balance the interests of the United States and our allies. It’s his belief that US troops should not be in situations indefinitely, and if there are troops, the US should not carry all the burden. I think the President speaks for the vast majority of the American people when he says this. And his desire that other nations carry their weight obviously has been factored into his policy toward NATO. NATO States are supposed to spend 2 percent of their GDP on their military, and I think only five of them are doing so. And it’s not that the US can’t afford to do this, they made a commitment to do this. And when we ignore this commitment, we’re undermining our credibility. We want them to live up to their commitment, and they want us to live up to our commitment. So, this has been a big issue for the President, and he is making progress in getting NATO States to start to meet their commitment. I think they have until 2025 to meet that commitment and it’s been slow going but there’s been some progress on that.

This President has carried out a number of fairly significant foreign policy initiatives, some of which the
foreign policy establishment opposes. But I think he has been very successful, and they have been moves of great principle. The two that come to mind immediately were the President’s decision to move the US Embassy to Jerusalem and to recognize Israeli sovereignty over the Golan Heights. Now numerous Presidents said they were going to move, numerous presidential candidates said they would move the US Embassy to Jerusalem, but they never did so because the foreign policy establishment and the State Department opposed this because it would be too disruptive with Arab states; it would make it harder to get a peace treaty with Palestinians. The problem is, the time is up. The time is up with the Palestinians to make a peace treaty if they’re going to say “well, we’re not going to deal with you if you move the US Embassy to Jerusalem.” This should have been done a long time ago, and I think the President just decided it’s time. It’s the same for the Golan Heights which Israel annexed in 1981. This is a part of Israel. If we had given, or if the Golan Heights had been given back to Syria, and parts of it were supposed to be given back under peace plans discussed over the last 20 years, think of the threats Israel would face today. This high ground would be used by Iran and Hezbollah to rain down rockets and missiles on the State of Israel. This territory is obviously never going back to Syria. I mean, is there really a Syria today? The Syria of today is a shadow of what it was a few years ago. This is something that is in Israel’s interests, this is not going to interfere with the peace plan, so we can move forward with the peace plan. It is a matter of principle for the President to do this, and I congratulate him for doing that.

I’ve worked closely with Ambassador Bolton on the nuclear deal with Iran. I believe the nuclear pact with Iran is a fraud, that Iran has been cheating on it from the day that it was announced. There has been significant information lately that the Israelis have produced an archive of Iranian documents that Iran has been cheating on this agreement and has continued to engage in nuclear weapons related activities since it was announced. This agreement also allows Iran to continue to advance its nuclear program by letting it enrich uranium with 5,000 centrifuges while the deal is in place, to develop advanced centrifuges. Iran was supposed to be given a heavy water reactor. It disabled one it was building, but one would be built for it. Now, although this reactor would produce less plutonium, it would produce a quarter of a weapon’s worth of plutonium a year. Iran should not have any plutonium. Iran has violated its nuclear treaty obligations repeatedly and we know this from revelations from the MEK during the George W. Bush administration. It has pursued every possible avenue in secret to develop nuclear fuel. Now we know Iran’s allowed to develop nuclear fuel, but when it does it in secret, that’s not a peaceful purpose, and these were not declared with the IAEA. It broke its treaty obligations, and I think the US position should be Iran should not have nuclear technology, we should cut it off with strong sanctions. So about a year ago, the President withdrew from the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action, the nuclear deal with Iran that was announced in 2015. Now this is a deal that was negotiated so it would not be a treaty. That way the Senate didn’t get a chance to vote on it. These treaties needed a two-thirds vote to ratify them. There was a vote in the Senate, but opponents had to get two-thirds. There was this bizarre mechanism that I hope no staffers in this room have to deal with where the House and Senate could reject the treaty if there was two-thirds in opposition. Andy McCarthy at National Review said “this has turned the Constitution on its head. It’s not the way our government is supposed to operate.” But this was negotiated deliberately to get around the representatives of the American people; a majority of the Congress voted against this deal, a large majority of the American people were against this deal, and I think pulling out of it was the right decision. But it was hard, because not only were there people on the left who wanted to stay in this deal, but there were those mistaken on the right who thought it could be fixed. That is a myth. This deal was not fixable, it was so fatally flawed. Not only does it allow the problems I just announced, it did not include missiles, it did not include Iran’s sponsorship of terrorism, its meddling in the Middle East. It was a disaster. It was absolutely unfixable. Now you know that some of the President’s advisors fought with him and tried to keep him in the deal. When the President let them go and brought in Ambassador Bolton, he made the right call and got out of this disastrous deal. So I congratulate the President for, again, an important act of leadership.

The same thing was true of the Paris Climate Accord. This is an agreement that would cost the US $3.5 trillion dollars by 2035. Thousands of US jobs would be lost, US electricity bills would go up 15 to 30
percent, and it would do almost nothing to affect the climate. Some experts think it would have no effect at all but it would be a big benefit to the economies of India, China and Europe. This agreement was also negotiated, so it would not be ratified by the Senate. The Obama administration signed it and the Senate didn’t have a chance to ratify it even though there were other governments that did ratify it. Other legislators, I might add the Iran deal was ratified by the Iranian Parliament, but it was not ratified by our Senate. This was an obvious effort to get around the US Constitution by the last administration. It was an effort by the elites who think they know better than the American people. These factors had a role in the election of Mr. Trump. The American people were tired of the foreign policy establishment thinking, people who think they know better than us, going around the US Congress, going around the US Constitution, to impose agreements like the Paris Climate Accord and the Iran nuclear agreement on the American people. There’s an effort right now to address NAFTA and TPP, the Trans-Pacific Partnership, to agreements which the President backed out of. The USMCA is an alternative to NAFTA, which we’re hoping that the Congress will sign on to too. In the President’s view, this is an agreement that left American workers behind, and was just too good a deal for other nations who do not represent the interests of the American people.

Now turning to other issues, the President promised to destroy ISIS. Now, destroying a terrorist movement completely is difficult, and I think radical Islam is a movement that is not simply linked to a terrorist group with a presence on the ground. But ISIS has lost its presence on the ground, and that’s because the President put out a policy where the White House was no longer micromanaging the US forces fighting in Syria and we were allowed to do the airstrikes and operations on the ground that were necessary to defeat ISIS. ISIS is still around, but ISIS’s presence in holding territory, that has ended. And that is because of the policy of Mr. Trump. The President recognizes the threat from radical Islam, and this was reflected in last year’s national counterterrorism strategy that for the first time cites radical Islam as a driver of terrorism. This was a big change from the Obama years where you weren’t allowed to use the term ‘radical Islam,’ and a whole sort of other words that were on a blacklist of things that we could not say. We can’t defeat an enemy that we won’t name, that we won’t admit that it exists. The President has advised to understand that this exists, and it’s something he’s been focusing on.

There’s a lot of talks about trade deals with China. This has also been a big focus of the President’s America First strategy, to get free and fair deals, to stop the Chinese in engaging in predatory trade, and to stop stealing intellectual property. There’s been significant movement in these talks, a positive movement. We’re not to a deal yet, but our economy is surging, and China’s economy is in trouble. And with a credible US President who, as we know, will walk away if other parties are not negotiating in good faith. I think it has led to a situation where it’s looking like we’re going to get a good deal, but still, we have to get there.

Border enforcement is also another important part of America First. Strict border enforcement and tougher rules on immigration. This is something, as you know, the President talks about frequently. He believes this is an important issue of homeland security, to protect our economy and our security. And it’s what the American people want. When the American people see thousands of people trying to illegally immigrate to the United States across our southern border, I think they’re with the President on this. This is not something we should be permitting, and it’s a shame that just a few short years ago, Hillary Clinton, Barak Obama and Dianne Feinstein, they all agreed that we had to stop illegal immigration across our southern border. This is something the President is taking a tough stand on, and it’s unpopular and politically incorrect, but that’s the way this President is, and that’s what America First does. It doesn’t really worry about the conventional view of issues like this.

We really need to talk about Russia, especially this week now that the Mueller report came out and threw out this idea that there was some collusion between the Trump campaign and Russia, that I’m not going to talk about today. The President thinks we should have a working relationship with Russia. This is not very different than the Obama administration; Russia has the largest nuclear arsenal on earth, has a large military. We have to be able to talk to the Russians, and that’s been the President’s support from the beginning. But what the media is not telling you is that the President has been much tougher on Russia than the Obama
administration. Very tough measures have been imposed to sanction individuals who meddled in our 2016 election. And on a related point, and I was involved in this at the NSC, some very good and tough measures have been engaged and passed to protect the integrity of future elections. There’s no mention of that at all on TV. I’ve been in the interagency meetings. This is a serious matter to Ambassador Bolton, there’s comprehensive measures to protect our election, so next time you watch MSNBC and CNN and they whine on and on that this administration has done nothing to protect our elections, it’s not true. It isn’t true, and I think these pundits, they know it isn’t true. But I’ve seen these policies and they’re comprehensive, and it’s something that Bolton takes very, very seriously. Over 100 Russians and entities have been sanctioned for meddling in Ukraine, and unlike the Obama administration, which sent non-lethal military equipment into Ukraine, this administration sent lethal military aid to Ukraine.

There has been strong opposition by this administration to the Nord Stream 2 pipeline in Europe, which would yield hundreds of millions of dollars in revenue for the Russians, but also would link Europe too closely to Russian gas. And for this reason, we’ve fought pretty hard about that, and the President has made progress in trying to stop this from moving forward. And I think most importantly, we closed multiple Russian consulates in the US, and kicked out a number of Russian diplomats whom we know to be intelligence officers, after a horrendous incidents in the UK of Russian intelligence trying to assassinate a former Russian intelligence agent with chemical weapons staged in the United Kingdom. We worked with our allies on that. It was the right thing to do, and I think we’ll see more actions like that in the future. There actually are many, many examples of this administration being tough on Russia, and you don’t hear any of them in the press. And I think they are very significant, and it’s something that this President just isn’t getting any credit for.

I’ve done a lot of work on North Korea, and North Korea certainly is something that needs to be discussed here. The President has ended, at least had North Korea suspend, its missile launches. The North Koreans tested at least 80 missiles during the Clinton years, tested 4 nuclear weapons. There was a test of what may have been a hydrogen bomb, tested in September 2017. All these ended in late 2017, and it ended for a number of reasons. First of all, the President managed to get other nations to start enforcing the UN sanctions against North Korea. There was massive cheating, especially by China, against these sanctions. The President twisted some arms, called people out. I don’t think certain nations like being the focus of a Presidential tweet that they’re cheating on sanctions, and the President’s not shy about calling people out. I think that this has had a good effect.

And in addition, the President was pretty clear in his rhetoric against North Korea, including threatening at the UN General Assembly to totally destroy North Korea if it threatened our allies. And you remember how angry all the pundits were, and the New York Times was, when he said that. The President threatened military action in an organization of peace. But the President calls it like it is, and I think that threat stunned the North Koreans, and really put them off-balance, and led them to decide in early 2018 that it was time to talk. Now these talks have not gotten where we want them to get. The North Koreans have agreed to things in principle. There recently were talks in Vietnam, the President walked out of them because Kim Jon-un was asking more than we were prepared to offer. But the tensions between the two nations are significantly better. There has been dialogue, a lot more dialogue, behind the scenes than what’s generally known. I think we’re close to getting an agreement where there will be inspections of North Korea’s nuclear test site and a missile assembly facility. I know that the South Korean President is travelling to Washington soon to see what he can do to get the negotiations moving. We have a lot of work to do here, and I think that we’re going to need Secretary Pompeo and Ambassador Bolton to keep grinding away to get an agreement with the North. But the President, as Bolton likes to say, opened the door to a peaceful solution with the United States. Kim has not yet chosen to walk through that door. That doesn’t mean he’s not going to walk through it. But this is hard for the North Koreans, and I’m hopeful that the President’s personal diplomacy with Kim, and the diplomatic opportunities we’ve seen over the last year, will eventually lead to an agreement.

And the final international issue I want to talk about is Venezuela. The US recognized Juan Guaido as the
interim president of Venezuela early this year after he was recognized as the acting president of Venezuela. This was a bold move because getting Maduro to leave the power is going to be difficult. Working with our allies, and we’ve organized an international coalition backing Guaido, the next step is to get the states who were supporting the Maduro regime – Russia, China, and Cuba to stop doing so. And I think that the use of force is available. I don’t know how, or when, it would be used, but we are upping the pressure on Maduro. The whole region is against Maduro. Europe, which did not want to back the President’s approach, gave Maduro an opportunity for talks, which we weren’t happy about, but fortunately Maduro turned that down too. So we now have Europe behind this initiative that was started by the United States. It’s a gamble, but I think it is the best approach to try to deal with the situation, the terrible humanitarian situation that the Venezuelan people are suffering under right now.

So in terms of looking forward, we have a strong and decisive American President, and I think that has made the world safer. We know that a strong and decisive president keeps our enemies off-balance and guessing. That keeps the world safer, too. There’s a reason why Iran has stopped harassing American shipping in the Persian Gulf, and their Hootie rebel proxies have stopped firing missiles at ships in the Red Sea — because they don’t know what President Trump would do if that happened. That’s leadership, that’s how we keep the world safer. A strong and decisive United States, a strong and decisive President, is good for national security, and is good for global security.

The President is trying to rebuild and strengthen the key alliances, especially with Israel. I think I’m most proud of what the President has tried to do, to work with Israel. He has made it clear to the Israeli government that if there’s a nuclear deal with Iran, a new deal, we’re going to talk to the Israelis. We’re not going to throw it at them and say this is what we agreed to. After all, Israel, Saudi Arabia and the Gulf States, they are more affected by the threat from Iran than we are. But in this terrible nuclear deal, they had no say and they didn’t know what we were agreeing to before the agreement was announced. The Clinton administration negotiated something called the Agreed Framework on North Korea’s nuclear program. It was a terrible agreement, but at least the South Korean and Japanese governments were at the table. We consulted with them before we made a deal. We didn’t consult with the Israelis, or Saudis, or Gulf States, at all before we agreed to this monstrosity with Iran. And I think the states in the region, they appreciate that. They know that the President wants to work with them. So I think the President has a very good relationship with our Middle East friends and allies, with Canada, and you know we do have a good relationship with Europe, although they would prefer we get back into the Iran deal. It’s interesting that the European leaders said there’s no point in the Trump Administration pulling out of Iran deals because we’re going to say in it, the sanctions are going to stay in place. But the thing is, that for European multinationals, if they have to choose between doing business with the United States and Iran, Iran whose economy is broken, they tend not to pay their debts and if you executives go over there, they may get arrested, it’s not a hard call. And European companies are leaving Iran by the droves because they want to do business with the United States. And they are worried about the sanctions that will be imposed on them if they keep dealing with Iran. Now there’s a work around by the European states to try to allow European companies to do business with Iran despite our sanctions. This was almost a year late, and frankly, it’s not going to work. So, I know that has been talked about in the Western press recently, and, frankly, that’s not going to get anywhere.

So the Trump doctrine is America First. It is a principled realism. It is a benign nationalism that looks out for the interest of the American people – the American worker, American security, American prosperity. And I think it’s a new strategy that’s working. And I think it has created a lot of potential, and hope, for our national security in the future, so I’ve been proud to be part of it. And also, it’s been a work in progress. And we’ve been seeing such in the national security strategy. We know what the President announced during the campaign, and we’ve seen as the administration progressed, and as experts worked on it, how this strategy has been developed into a comprehensive approach to deal with national security problems.

So I’d like to thank all of you for coming here today, and I’d be happy to take your questions.
Q: From your experience in CIA and the State Department, what will the military intervention look like in Venezuela?

A: I don’t think that President Trump has any interest in invading Venezuela. I think that’s pretty clear. But Ambassador Bolton has made it clear that if American citizens are put at risk, that is a different matter. There are at least a thousand American citizens in Venezuela. But in terms of a military presence to forcibly remove the Maduro regime, that is not something, as far as I know, that the President is going to do. So I imagine if there are scenarios where we’re going to invade, I’m not aware of them, and if I did know, I don’t think I could tell you.

Q: Pressuring our adversaries based on strength, South Korea’s goal toward North Korea has long been, for decades, it has been free, based on freedom for North Korea people and the unification based on freedom and democracy. And they failed, but they were pursuing that. Actually North Korea was a part of the whole Republic of Korea based on South Korea’s own constitution. Anyway, I have noticed that after all these years of strategic patience and so on, Trump came up and what he did, in my view, what he did was that gave up the liberation of North Korea, gave up freedom for North Korea, and then started respecting North Korean dictator, and then he started negotiating instead of pressuring, and then actually North Korea’s livelihood, existence is depending on the US and for the first time in history, President Trump promised not to touch. That was a part of the negotiation, a regime guarantee, that kind of thing. So I am very disappointed about what he has been doing. He went to Singapore under the persuasion of South Korean president, leftist president, and he went to Hanoi, again pressured by South Korean president, leftist president. Fortunately, lucky part is that he kicked out of Hanoi. But now it looks like he is going back with the kind of friendship with North Korean dictator again. I’m sure South Korea’s Moon Jae-in will keep persuading – he’s coming here again, that few days to persuade Trump again to get together with Kim Jong-un and so on. So could you try to convince me that Trump is not propping up North Korean dictator?

A: The President hasn’t given anything to North Korea. They’ve been given a bilateral meeting with the President, but there’s not going to be a deal until North Korea agrees to negotiate in earnest. It’s been a concern of this administration that the President Moon wants to move too fast to give concessions to the North before the North gives anything. And I think the North thought in Vietnam that they could convince us to lift sanctions for very little in return from the US. We’ve seen this over and over again with North Korea that North Korans get us involved in negotiations. We gave them concessions and they either give us nothing or whatever they agree to, they backtrack on later. Ambassador Bolton and Secretary Pompeo, they are aware of that. And North Korea has an opportunity to do the right thing and negotiate with us in earnest, but if they don’t, we’re going to resume the pressure we had put on the state before. I understand it is difficult to watch US officials interacting with such a ruthless dictator. I find it difficult to watch, too. But I also see a state that’s developing a hydrogen bomb, and is developing missiles that could possible hit the east coast of the United States. This is a significant threat. Now if we’re not going to bomb or attack, the US isn’t going to do that, the solution is, we have to find a diplomatic solution, but it has to be a diplomatic solution on our terms. So I know it is hard to watch, and I wish there was another way to do it, but realistically, I think this is a way of approaching it. The President has done some interesting things with Kim that haven’t been noticed. The first meeting with Kim was in Singapore. That got Kim out of the bubble he lives in Pyongyang and got him away from his advisors. It gave him an opportunity to see the prosperity of Singapore. It gave us an opportunity to talk to him and explain about what North Korea could become if it agreed to a peace deal. It was a typical Trumpian approach; it threw out the diplomatic rulebook. No one would have thought that he was showing a movie that depicted how North Korea could thrive if it normalized relations to the United States. I don’t know that it is going to work. I think we are in a better position than we were, but I share your concern that we could make a deal without North Korea actually coming across with the concessions that they are supposed to. I know there are people in the State Department, they are pushing for bad deals. And I know Bolton and Pompeo are trying to keep them under control. So that’s the best I can offer you, but I appreciate your question, sir.
Q: One of the things just have been stunning about the last two and a half years or so is the reaction of what, one of a better term you might call, foreign policy establishment to the President’s proposals, and to the point where suggesting that NATO should be reformed for the 21st century was seen as proof that the President was a Russian spy, and needed to be removed, defeated or removed from the office by any means necessary. I worry that after the President leaves the office, that will snap back into the old ways of thinking simply because so many people who are in these dominant positions in think tanks and academia and in the government, State Department are of this mindset which in my personal opinion, I consider extremist and ignorant, but nevertheless they’re in there. And do you have anything you can offer as hope that might not be the case, that we might be getting some reforms and some smarter people in key positions?

A: I think we’re slowly getting reforms. I think what you said about NATO was right; we’re reforming it and it’s slow going because there’s some resistance from foreign policy professionals. They’re good people, they just have a different view. They brought up some different approaches to these issues. I’ve done some work with UN organizations. They’re very cushy jobs, and, frankly, they like to go out to lunch and have cocktails, and some of them, I don’t know what they do. And the President’s aware of that. We need to staff the government, frankly. There’s a lot of key jobs vacant in this government at the State Department. And the President has this ambitious agenda, but can’t it carry out if he doesn’t fill all the jobs. I was just talking with some of the folks at this table beforehand, they’re all aware of this and I understand there will be some changes made to try to remove the obstacles to filling them, but the time is running out. And I hope there’ll be filled quickly to do these things.

Q: I just wanted to ask about the North Korean strategy when it comes to human rights as well as denuclearization. Will a final deal, what will a final deal include in terms of pressuring the regime on their human rights abuses.

A: I think that’s a good question. I don’t know how that’s going to be addressed. I think our priority right now is to address the missile and nuclear threat. I know this has been discussed in the talks. I would like to see major achievements made in this and not simply the oppression of the North Koreans, but the abduction of Japanese citizens by the North Korean government, which I think is a real concern to Japan. And I know that the President has raised this repeatedly, including with Prime Minister Abe. I think it has to be part of the talks, but it’s a difficult issue because we’re so concerned about the nuclear threat, but I hope it isn’t left on side.

Q: Just on the point of filling positions, my understanding is that the debate rule in the Senate has been changed from 30 hours per nominee to 2 hours.

A: That’s great.

Q: I don’t know if that was as of yesterday that I saw that in a message to Cuccinelli. So I just thought I would mention that.

A: That’s good news. It’s pretty clear that too many good nominees are being blocked for no apparent reasons and hopefully that’ll be fixed.

SCHOLTE: One more question? Actually can we take two more questions?

A: Sure.

Q: Do you have any suggestions for how to resolve this North Korean nuclear problem after post Hanoi? For example, to increase South Korean involvement, or what is your assessment of the situation and how would you go about it from now on, moving forward? And is Kim Jong-un cheating like Iran did in your opinion?

A: To first question, I’d like to see all players to stick together. I want to see China and South Korea and
Japan not move forward with any type of agreements or lessening trade sanctions on North Korea until there’s a deal, because they’re just going to remove or reduce the leverage we have to get a good deal. I think Kim saw how determined the President is that he is not going to agree to a partial deal, he’s not going to drop sanctions for very little in return from the North. He’s looking for a comprehensive deal. I think that was a good signal being sent in Vietnam. It is very hard for diplomats to walk away. And you know there was actually preparations for some type of celebration at Vietnam for a big agreement. And in my experience, I love the State Department, but they love these signing ceremonies. Say, oh we got an agreement, there’s a big picture taken of everybody who negotiated, State people love that. And to walk away and do not do that, that’s hard and people are disappointed, all the preparations have to be cancelled, but I mean I’m convinced the President wants a good deal, I know Bolton and Pompeo want a good deal, and I think we sent a message to the North, that’s what we’re working on now.

Now concerning reports that North Korea is cheating, it seems that every month there’s a think tank in Washington says “we have a satellite imagery that North Koreans are building missiles or they’re preparing to test a nuclear weapon.” It’s hard to know what the North Koreans are doing. I have to tell you, these think tanks often don’t know what they are talking about. It’s very difficult to interpret satellite data, the North Koreans are always moving equipment around nuclear sites because they know we’re watching. Sometimes they just want to freak us out and they’re not doing anything. The CIA and our imagery agencies, they know what’s going on. But when CSIS and other organizations put out another urgent report, “we have satellite imagery, we caught the North Koreans cheating.” They don’t know anything that government doesn’t already know, and I can tell you the government knows a lot more than they know. So, as I said, it’s complicated and I don’t doubt that North Korea is continuing nuclear missile activities, but we need to get a declaration from them of what they’re doing, and a firm commitment that they will stop what they are doing right now. We’re not to that point yet, so I think the story is more complicated than some of the press reports that you may have heard.

Q: In your talk you touched upon the US-China relations and the trade talks, and you also said that the President, his doctrine is to defend American values. So in this view in China relations, I’m just wondering how do you see these issues like human rights issue, rule of law, where is his position in this overall relations?

A: I think human rights in China is a very serious issue. There have been reports in Washington Post lately about the Uygur Muslims and the unbelievable oppression of them. We know what’s going on in Tibet, we know how many journalists have been arrested. We know the terrible oppression in China, and it is an issue that we raised with the Chinese diplomatic channels. The President is trying to work out a relationship so that both nations can get along, not just in the economic sphere but in the security sphere. He’s trying to build and work on this relationship with President Xi. But there are real human rights issues here, very serious ones you don’t hear about in the press very often. And I think that our officials are raising them at the right levels but it’s complicated because on one hand we want to get a trade deals so the Chinese will stop damaging the US economy, on the other hand we know what’s going on in parts of China where people are subjected to pretty brutal oppression. So I hope our US officials work on this, they’ll speak up on this more often. And I know Center for Security Policy tries to, before I go, Center for Security Policy is a non-profit national security organization. We have a website, securefreedom.org (https://www.centerforsecuritypolicy.org/), I hope you’ll check it out. Lately we are focusing on the US-Israel relationship and what we think as a sharp rise in anti-Semitism on the left and we’re trying to take a stand on that. I don’t want to get into that today, but we’re so happy to work with Suzanne and Defense Forum Foundation and I hope you check out our website securefreedom.org

SCHOLTE: Thank you and regarding North Korea all your questions will be answered at our next DFF Forum which will be during North Korea Freedom Week which will be held April 28-May 4. The theme is listen to the defectors, than you will know the truth. The DFF Forum will be Friday, May 3rd and North Korean defectors will discuss the latest information coming out of North Korea.