The State of Nuclear Weapons in 2019: Conversations with Experts at the Carnegie International Nuclear Policy Conference

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ABSTRACT

Research Center for Nuclear Weapons Abolition, Nagasaki University (RECNA) conducted a series of interviews with nuclear experts on the sidelines of the 2019 Carnegie International Nuclear Policy Conference held in Washington, DC on March 11 and 12, 2019. In the interviews, which are transcribed below with some edits, Dr. Fumihiko Yoshida and Dr. Tatsujiro Suzuki of RECNA interviewed five experts from China, Germany, Russia, and the United States. Dr. George Perkovich (United States) gives an overview of recent developments in nuclear issues. Ambassador Igor Ivanov (Russia) reflects on the deteriorating Russia–US relationship. Dr. Harald Müller (Germany) gives his thoughts about the world after the INF treaty and about the Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons. Dr. Li Bin (China) explains China’s attitudes on the development of intermediate-range missiles and on missile defense. And finally, Dr. Jeffrey Lewis (United States) shares his opinions about North Korea’s nuclear program and the prospects for denuclearization.

An Interview with Dr. George Perkovich

https://www.facebook.com/recna20120401/videos/2280653472201510/

Fumihiko Yoshida: Good morning. This is Fumihiko Yoshida of Nagasaki University. Today we have a guest, wonderful guest. He’s George, Dr. George Perkovich, vice president of the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace. Thank you so much for joining us, George.

George Perkovich: My pleasure.

FY: My first question is your view on the current situation of this nuclear world.

GP: Well, situation is trending in a negative direction unfortunately in the sense that you have obviously the concerns about North Korea and its nuclear weapon program where we had the positive news of the diplomacy and the negotiations between Trump and Kim. But that’s stopped for now and there’s a concern about what will happen in
the future there. You have Russia building six new types of nuclear weapons. The United States also planning to build new types of nuclear weapons, modernize its nuclear forces.

GP: Russia violated the INF treaty which eliminated medium range nuclear missiles from Europe. The US has now withdrawn from that treaty. Russia is now saying it’s withdrawing from that treaty. So the restraints that for decades we have had on nuclear weapons appear to be coming off and there’s a concern that you could have a renewed competition in nuclear arms.

FY: And in addition to that we have this new sort of crisis in south Asia.

GP: Yeah. I mean people were very nervous about that over the last couple of weeks because as you mentioned there was an attack that killed 40 Indian paramilitary personnel in Kashmir and it started to escalate. I mean my own view is that it was clear from the beginning that both of those governments, the Indian and the Pakistani government were very mindful of wanting to avoid escalation that could lead to nuclear threats. So on the one hand there’s an inherent danger when two nuclear arms states start to crash. But at the same time, the prospect of that kind of nuclear crisis makes the leaders extra careful and I think they were in this case.

FY: Let’s move to the issues about US-Russian relations. How to deal with this serious situation?

GP: Not the way we’re dealing with it. In other words, look, there are a whole bunch of complications and problems. So Russia has announced that it’s developing these new nuclear weapons systems that they started developing after the United States withdrew from the antiballistic missile (ABM) treaty in 2002. All right. So Russia was worried that the US might develop missile defenses that could deny Russia’s deterrent and so started developing weapons that are designed to be able to get around missile defenses. All right. So that’s one element of the whole thing.

GP: The political relationship has been bad and getting worse for a number of reasons. One of the big reasons is the annexation of Crimea by Russia. And then the hybrid war in Ukraine which caused the west to put sanctions on Russia. Russia wants the sanctions off but no one knows how to deal with that issue because Russia did take territory, did invade Ukraine. So if you relieve the sanctions it’s like saying ok, that was ok and move on. So we’re kind of stuck in this competitive relationship. And one of the ways that they’re expressing the competition is through nuclear arms.

FY: Well, then tell me your view on the future of New START.

GP: New START is a little bit like oxygen to somebody who is having a heart attack. You really need it. And the competition, the fear about kind of a new nuclear arms race can be threatening like a heart attack. And so we need that kind of oxygen. New START is the one treaty that’s left. It’s the one formal limitation on the long range nuclear weapons that the US and Russia have. Both sides are abiding by it fundamentally. And it may be extended without having to go back to congress or Duma. The two presidents can extend it for five years so that’s one of the easier things that’s available to in a sense
kind of restore the health or begin to restore the health of basically of nuclear security between states.

FY: In case we cannot reach to that conclusion, extension of the treaty, what’s going to be our alternative?

GP: This is one of the great questions to which I don’t think there’s an answer coming from the people who are saying well, we’re not sure we want to extend it or maybe we don’t extend it. I don’t think they have an answer to what comes next other than a) a very expensive and destabilizing nuclear arms race or b) on the US side their answer might be well, ultimately the Russians will remember what happened to the Soviet Union and they can’t afford an arms race with us. So in the end they’ll make some concessions if we kind of threaten them all the way to a point where there are no controls. Then they’ll make concessions.

FY: This bilateral relationship between the US and Russia, how does – how can it influence on the situation in North east Asia including North Korean issues?

GP: Well, the good news is that neither the United States nor Russia nor China nor anyone else wants North Korea to have nuclear weapons in the first place. Now that they have them, everybody agrees they don’t want North Korea to test more, to produce more nuclear weapons, to expand their capabilities. We all agree on that. Everybody agrees they’d like North Korea to move in the opposite direction to stop expanding and start kind of rolling back. So a lot of agreement on that, all of which is very positive.

GP: I think where the disagreements might start arising is near the very end of the denuclearization process. And where Russia is a little worried about transparency and inspections because it might reveal things that Russia was providing to North Korea. But that’s a problem we should wish to have because things would already have gotten a lot better at that point. We can cooperate on that set of issues.

FY: When the INF treaty is dead then it might invite new nuclear arms race in Northeast Asia, between China and the US. How is it going to have an affect on the North Korean issues?

GP: I think the question about the INF treaty and the operational question is would the US then move to deploy intermediate range missiles that are now forbidden in East Asia. I don’t think the US is going to do that in part because I don’t think that Japan is going to welcome basing on Japanese territory. And other countries also aren’t going to welcome that. So I don’t think it’s going to happen but if it were to happen, if it looked like it were happening, I think the biggest problem would be in relations with China.

GP: I don’t think it would affect the North Korean diplomacy that much because China and the US—even if they were competing with each other with these missiles—still want North Korea not to be the problem that it could be. So I think you could still cooperate on that even if you’re competing in your worries about a missile race between the US and China.

FY: This is the final question. It is about the nuclear weapons ban treaty and also how it’s going to affect on the discussion of the 2020 NPT review conference.
GP: Well, no one knows. I mean the treaty to prohibit nuclear weapons reflects the clear frustration of much of the world that instead of disarmament which has been promised under the nonproliferation we seem to be having rearmament and more threats. And so people are understandably frustrated with that. And so they’ve, they’re trying a shortcut, another approach which is say just prohibit these weapons which is not going to happen. The states that have nuclear weapons, almost all of their allies aren’t going to join that so it’s kind of a moral protest. So that will be part of the discourse in the backdrop for the nonproliferation treaty review process.

GP: And I think in order to make the nonproliferation treaty process continue, the weapon states are going to have to demonstrate more respect for the positions of the non-weapon states and extend New START at a minimum but also demonstrate they’re willing to revive a reductions process. If they don’t do that, I think it will just continue the protest that’s reflected in the prohibition treaty review process.

FY: If we fail to adopt some good document in 2020 NPT review conference, what’s going to be a consequence you see?

GP: Well, I mean we don’t know. And it won’t be good. On the other hand if one of the big worries about the nonproliferation treaty is additional states may seek nuclear weapons, I still don’t see which additional state right now is likely to try to acquire nuclear weapons. Some people say it might be Saudi Arabia. I have my doubts.

GP: But beyond that it’s not clear to me what the next big problem or threat would be. I think Japan will see that its interests still are not in acquiring nuclear weapons. I think South Korea will see the same thing. We hope. And so the material risk of the nonproliferation treaty weakening I think is not as great as the political and moral risk over time.

FY: One possibility is some or many countries could withdraw from NPT to show their frustration.

GP: And I think that’s the political moral risk. In other words, they may withdraw which doesn’t mean they’re going to acquire nuclear weapons which would be a big physical threat to security. But it creates the sense that order in the world is eroding, collapsing, that states aren’t willing to cooperate. If they withdraw from the treaty, they may not acquire nuclear weapons. But they also may not share an intelligence export controls, other things that are necessary to keep people feeling secure from nuclear dangers.

FY: Thank you very much.

An Interview with Ambassador Igor Ivanov

https://www.facebook.com/recna20120401/videos/264492984427376/

Fumihiko Yoshida: Hello. My name is Fumihiko Yoshida with Nagasaki University. This is from Carnegie International Nuclear Policy Conference and this is a live interview through Facebook Live. And now we have a special guest from Russian Federation. Here we have Ambassador Ivanov. As we all know, he’s a former foreign minister of Russia. Thank you very much for joining us.
Ambassador Igor Ivanov: Thank you for inviting me.

FY: My first question is about bilateral relations between Russia and the United States right now. In the last session of this conference you said that the bilateral relation is worse than in the Cold War time. Could you elaborate what you mean?

II: Well, it’s true that unfortunately bilateral relations today we can compare with the worst period of the Cold War. I think that there is no simple answer why we are where we are. I think that each side will give you its own argument. American side they consider that Russian committed something. Russia will blame the United States. We then closed dialogue on strategic stability.

II: And even with differences – and we had and we will have differences but we are great countries and nuclear countries, members of security council of UN. And we have to speak. We need to keep dialogue and to give example to other countries that even with differences we are dealing with difficult problems in modern world. And we have more and more problems, not only Russia and the United States but other countries too. That’s why for different reasons we lost that dialogue and today we see that consequences are quite negative.

FY: I see.

II: That’s why the first step and we were discussing here in conference is to renew that dialogue on strategic issue. Maybe from very urgent problems such for example how to avoid incidents and not to provoke Syria’s confrontation and then enlarge the agenda.

FY: So there’s no way at this moment to save the INF treaty?

II: Unfortunately, I think that we lost the possibilities to save INF treaty. And now all attention has to be to save, New START because I think it will be very important not only for Russia and for the United States but for international community to understand that we are again speaking about important questions of security and that our work on saving New START treaty has to give us New START for discussing other security problems.

FY: In the (Carnegie) conference you said not only extending the New START but also the two countries need to start discuss about other emerging threats including cyber or maybe other newly emerging threats.

II: Today it’s the common opinion of the international experts that we have more and more problems. Today it’s not enough negotiations and agreements on nuclear weapons but on other not less dangerous weapons and cyber weapon or biological and then artificial intelligence and some others. That’s why speaking about nuclear weapons we also have to enlarge as I said the agenda and to include other topics because today we cannot speak about security only dealing with nuclear weapons. I understand the importance of nuclear weapons but today it’s not enough.

FY: The technology now which are emerging are sort of a threat to nuclear weapon systems.
II: Well, new technologies as any other new technical discovers may be used in civil interests or in military. And by themselves they don’t create problems but it depends how they will be used, the new technologies. That’s why it’s very important not to wait but to start dialogue now before the technologies are used in military sphere.

FY: Yes.

II: To put some red lines and to avoid misunderstandings, complications or even incidents.

FY: Ok. I see. One big question is how we can invite or let China engage in these much larger talks.

II: I think that for many reasons the first step, they have to make Russia and the United States. If Russia and the United States don’t have dialogue it will be very difficult to engage China or other countries. But if we start such a dialogue, I think that China and the other nuclear, non-nuclear states, they also have the security interests. And when they see that this is in their own interests, security interests, I’m sure that they will take part in such a dialogue. But I repeat without dialogue between Russia and the United States it’s very difficult to engage other countries.

FY: I see. President Reagan and Secretary Gorbachev in 1985 in their joint statement after the summit meeting, they declared nuclear war cannot be won and so must never be fought. This is, Senator Nunn said this is a game changer. Do you think that is still true?

II: I think it will be very important if presidents of Russia and the United States today make the same statement and it will be very good signal to the international community that we understand that it’s impossible to gain nuclear war and it will be not used.

FY: You don’t think a limited nuclear war is possible or realistic?

II: Well, as you know Russia and the United States, they have around 90 percent of nuclear weapons. And if they say they will not use nuclear weapon because it’s impossible to gain nuclear war, it means that it will be very important signal to other nuclear, non-nuclear states.

FY: And this is the final question. Now both sides have strategic nuclear weapons around 1,500. Then what could be our next other step, lower then 1,000 and then you can invite China to the next step?

II: I think that today as we said with new circumstances, new threats and new kind of weapons it’s not the main objective numbers of warheads and missiles. It’s necessary to have the whole picture and nuclear weapon is one of the elements important but one element of the whole picture of security risks. And we have to keep them in mind to discuss as a whole picture.

FY: This is the really final one. How about the arms race in space, outer space?

II: It’s very dangerous and it’s necessary to avoid because it will be very new, very dangerous threat. And it will be more complications to negotiate other issues.
FY: Thank you very much, Sir. Thank you very much for your time.

II: Thank you.

An Interview with Dr. Harald Müller

https://www.facebook.com/recna20120401/videos/407372046505029/

Fumihiko Yoshida: Good morning. My name is Fumihiko Yoshida with Nagasaki University. We’re doing a Facebook Live interview at the Carnegie International Nuclear Policy Conference. And today we have a guest from Germany, Dr. Harald Müller. Thank you very much for joining this interview.

Harald Müller: My pleasure.

FY: We have about ten minutes so let me ask you the question about the INF treaty. By the collapse of the INF treaty how do you see the influence on NATO allies, and also the German national security?

HM: The INF treaty if I can be frank was a German baby because it was triggered by a famous speech of then Chancellor Helmut Schmidt. Germany was not at the negotiation table but we were involved by consultation throughout the process. And we saved the treaty in 1989 when we turned around and made a decision to install short range nuclear weapons instead of the Pershings (one type of INF). So had a concern about Mr. Bolton’s announcement that the US would leave the treaty without in depth prior consultation was very great and Germany is profoundly unhappy about that decision and still tries to save the treaty.

FY: You’re saying Germany trying to, still trying to save the treaty. What are the specific policies or measures Germany is taking?

HM: Our foreign minister himself is engaging in a kind of shadow diplomacy talking a lot to Moscow, to other European allies to try to get some procedure by which the INF treaty could be preserved which of course would mean concessions from the Russian side in the first place.

FY: You are thinking some possible replacement treaty instead of INF treaty?

HM: That would also be a possibility. I mean the treaty is now more than 30 years old. There are new owners of intermediate range missiles who should in some way be covered. And of course some of the technologies we are talking about have developed further. It might be a way to amend the treaty if the good will on both sides, the American and the Russian one is there.

FY: But there are plenty of medium range missiles in the Asian side of the continent. When we think about future arms control on these INFs deployed in Asia do you have an idea to cover these missiles?

HM: Of course we have to distinguish between those missiles that are in South Asia on Pakistan and India and those in East Asia owned by North Korea and China. In particular in the Chinese strategy, these missiles appear to play a larger role in
countering the approaching US aircraft carrier groups and that has to be sorted out.
I think the United States must anyway go into very deep discussions with the
Chinese about the future strategic stability in East Asia of course under consultation
with the Korean and Japanese allies. The question is whether one can keep those
separate from the European theater or whether you need some global forum in
which the question is addressed.

FY: That makes situations very complex and negotiations could be very tough.

HM: Absolutely. But I mean that’s the age in which we are living now. The time of the
bilateral nuclear arms race is over. And we are in the age of a multilateral nuclear arms
race in which China and by corollary India and Pakistan are all involved. We need new
forums to deal with that and we have to do it quickly and with determination before the
race is out of control.

FY: So how do you see the possible collaboration between European countries and East
Asian countries?

HM: I think at least we should consult because these things are now going over our
heads, over Japanese and German heads, over Korean and Dutch heads and so on. We
should talk to each other what we want to see. Otherwise it could be that when the
interests of one of us are preserved and recognized, the interests of the other suffer.

FY: Let’s move to the next question. It is about nuclear weapons ban treaty. How do you
see the prospect of this treaty?

HM: I think that the treaty will enter into force someday. I do not dare to make
prediction when. Maybe before the next review conference of the NPT. Maybe not.
I think that the impact will be there but it will remain limited because very important
countries will not enter the ban, nor will my country, nor will Japan. We know that. It
will be very tough for the countries that are in the treaty to pay for the organizations
and conferences that are planned because all the big donors are outside.

HM: But of course a treaty makes an impact by its statement. 120 states are against
nuclear weapons in principle. And the countries that remain outside have to behave
towards this statement. I do not believe that the ban treaty is really hurting the NPT if
we all behave reasonable.

FY: My worry is that the nuclear weapon states try to make this new treaty a kind of
a dividing factor so that they can justify their status (in NPT).

HM: That means confusing cause and effect. The treaty is the effect of a deeply divided
community. And the divisions do not come from the ban treaty, but they come from
the deep frustration of the majority of NPT non-nuclear weapon states about the dismal
state of nuclear disarmament that has produced the treaty. Now the treaty is there and
we all liking it or not have to behave towards it and have to see to it that the existence of
that treaty does not hurt the existence of the NPT. That’s our duty.

FY: Then what would be the roles of US allies like Japan and Germany towards this new
treaty?
HM: I think that we should try to work on our partners and allies to behave relaxed towards the ban treaty. The ban treaty as I said is not hurting the NPT if we treat it rightly. We can also not wish it away. We have to recognize its existence and we have to recognize, and our big allies have to recognize that this is a statement by a large number of countries to which we have to behave respectful even though many of us don’t like it.

FY: This is the final question. It is about 2020 NPT review conference. How is it?

HM: At the moment the factors look for very, very bad conference. You have a deep division among the P5. You have a deep division between the Russians and the Americans who always manage to approach the conference in a positive mood. You have also a deep division in the treaty community, a breakdown of nuclear arms control which makes for a bad mood and the uncertain role the ban treaty will play. That doesn’t look very fructuous for successful conference.

HM: On the other hand, I’ve seen conferences with an almost equally dark outlook which were in the end successful. For example, the conference in 2000. So let’s wait and see. It’s not a matter of natural law. It’s a matter of the behavior of the key parties. If they really seek a consensus and a compromise in the conference, they can manage it. But my prediction would be probably not.

FY: Can you find any positive phenomenon or symptom looking at the 2020 which can improve the situation?

HM: If we have a North Korean agreement until then which is not completely impossible. I think that would give a much better environment to progress with a successful conference. But we need such a positive trigger. Either that or let’s say an understanding with Iran, something like that, that really gives a highlight briefly before the conference. Whether we will see that, God knows alone.

FY: Thank you very much sir.

HM: You’re welcome.

An Interview with Dr. Li Bin

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Tatsu Suzuki: Yes. Hello. This is Tatsu Suzuki of Nagasaki University. Welcome to join the live interview at the Carnegie Center. We welcome Dr. Li Bin, professor of Tsinghua University. Thank you very much for joining us. My first question is of course the impact of the collapse of INF treaty on the Chinese nuclear strategy also on the regional security of Northeast Asia.

Li Bin: It is very bad that we will not have the INF treaty. This treaty was designed for Europe between the United States and the Soviet Union. But I would say it is a good treaty, the idea of the treaty is good. That is to reduce the tension between the two groups.

TS: I see.
LB: Yeah. NATO and the Warsaw Pact. Right? To reduce the immediate confrontation. The idea is very good but we will not have that in the future so that is very bad. I think in general China worries about the future.

TS: Does it mean that China will change its nuclear strategy or are you going to encourage arms race in the region?

LB: No. Firstly, I do not believe that China is going to change its nuclear strategy. And secondly, I’m reluctant to say that there will be an arms race. Because the treaty does not apply to other players.

TS: I see.

LB: China, India, Pakistan and others. So what I want to say that there will be a lot more uncertainty, a lot more chaos. But not necessarily arms race because even United States and Russia, they have a lot of intermediate range missiles. But they’re not land based. They’re sea based and air based.

TS: That’s good to hear but Trump administration sited one of the reasons to withdraw from INF treaty is the Chinese increased forces, nuclear forces in the region. Does it matter to China?

LB: I think Trump, President Trump and some people in his administration they said that China has many land based missiles. Nuclear and conventional. But I don’t think that is a reason for the Trump administration to withdraw from the Treaty.

TS: Right.

LB: I think the more basic reason is that they do not like arms control. I don’t think China could persuade the United States to come back to the treaty.

TS: Using China as an excuse for the United States to expand their production of nuclear weapons. Is that what you’re saying?

LB: Yeah. They just do not like arms control. I’m not sure United States is going to deploy land based intermediate range missiles.

TS: It’s not likely.

LB: They may do that but not immediately.

TS: I see.

LB: So they try to say that their withdrawal from the treaty is good, is legitimate. But I don’t think they have an immediate plan to deploy in the medium range land-based missiles.

TS: How about more global scale, how does the Nuclear Posture Review compare with that of the Obama administration? Trump tries to increase the role of nuclear weapons and introducing smaller load nuclear weapons. How does it affect the Chinese nuclear strategy?
LB: I think I see some change. In the new Nuclear Posture Review of the United States. One change is that they revive the notion of limited nuclear war. The low yield nuclear warhead for that purpose to fight limited nuclear war. So that is very bad.

TS: Yeah.

LB: The reason is that they believe limited nuclear war would kill fewer people. So they could launch limited nuclear war in more cases, in more situations. That is very dangerous. Another change is that they believe that nuclear weapons are a way for power competition.

TS: Right.

LB: For the competition of influence. Again, that is dangerous. If you use nuclear weapons for your vital security interests that makes more sense. If you use nuclear weapons for influence because influence is everywhere.

TS: Right.

LB: That means that you want to use your nuclear weapons everywhere. That is dangerous. But again I do not see any evidence that China is going to change its nuclear strategy.

TS: Oh I see.

LB: To respond to that. I don’t think that China should use its nuclear weapons to compete for influence. And I don’t think that China should use its nuclear weapons to fight limited nuclear war. Neither is good for China.

TS: But US is also deploying missile defense saying that that is – right now it’s only for the North Korea. But China has already expressed concern about the missile defense deployed either in South Korea or in Japan. How did it affect the Chinese nuclear strategy also?

LB: According to the missile defense review report, United States has two kinds of missile defense teams. One is homeland missile defense. The other is regional missile defense. The homeland missile defense team is not designed to deal with Chinese missiles. But the regional missile defense teams is. So China needs to worry about the two different kinds of situations. Regional missile defense and homeland missile defense. In very different ways.

TS: But how does it affect the Chinese? Do you think that China will respond to the missile defense and increase their nuclear weapons capability or –

LB: For homeland missile defense that would undermine China’s nuclear development.

TS: Right, right.

LB: China would have to improve the availability and reliability of its nuclear force to respond to US homeland missile defense. For regional missile defense somehow that is relevant to China’s nuclear capability. But it’s more about conventional problem.
TS: So how about the DPRK issue affect the regional security? What is your assessment about the Hanoi summit?

LB: Very unfortunately Chairman Kim and President Trump failed to reach an agreement. There’s some different reasons there. I hope that they could overcome their difficulties and resume their frustrations and eventually reach an agreement. I hope I think there are opportunities.

TS: Still there.

LB: Yeah, still there.

TS: What is the goal, the final goal? Do you think that do you believe that North Korea will eventually give up all their nuclear weapons?

LB: I think – I believe that this is open ended process. We make effort for the first step. We move closer and closer to zero nuclear.

TS: To zero. Ok. Finally, you may know that RECNA, Nagasaki University are proposing the comprehensive approach for establishing Nuclear Weapon Free Zone in Northeast Asia. Could you make a comment for us?

LB: Yeah. I support the idea of nuclear weapon free zone in this region. I think that is very useful and very important. And I encourage the Chinese government to explore every details of this proposal, and make a positive response.

TS: Thank you very much.

LB: Thank you.

An Interview with Dr. Jeffrey Lewis

https://www.facebook.com/recna20120401/videos/252462848852677/

Tatsu Suzuki: Hi. This is Tatsu Suzuki of Nagasaki University. Welcome to join a live interview at the Carnegie conference. Welcome Jeff Lewis. Thank you very much.

Jeff Lewis: It’s a pleasure to talk to you.

TS: Great. Let me start with a question about what is your assessment of the current DPRK nuclear program?

JL: Well, I think the DPRK nuclear program is quite advanced. North Korea has conducted six nuclear tests. The last nuclear test was really quite powerful. And so I believe that they have thermonuclear weapons.

TS: You do?

JL: Yes. I think they are small enough to fit on missiles.

TS: My goodness.

JL: And at the end of 2017 North Korea tested once and only once a new missile that could carry a weapon like that all the way to Florida.
TS: My goodness. Very serious.

JL: It’s a new capability and it’s been tested only a small number of times. But the underlying technology I think is quite advanced.

TS: So how many, do you think how many nuclear warheads do they have?

JL: I think it’s really hard to tell. The highest estimate which assume the most sophisticated devices which make the most efficient use of material. You get many, many bombs out of a small amount of material. I have seen estimates as high as 60. I think it is less than that.

JL: But –

TS: Still quite significant.

JL: A few dozen.

TS: Yeah.

JL: Which is, would really be a catastrophe if they were to ever use them.

TS: Sure. What about the current, their commitment to stop missile testing and nuclear testing? Do you think they continue to stop all of these activities or –

JL: I think they’re probably done with nuclear testing at least for a while. Six nuclear tests is the same number that India and Pakistan conducted and those countries haven’t tested in 20 years but of course they still have nuclear weapons. So I think north Korea can live without testing.

TS: Without testing. I see.

JL: As an advocate of banning testing – I think we can all live without testing.

TS: Sure. Sure.

JL: Because North Korea only tested its large ICBM once. And so –

TS: They may test again.

JL: I think if negotiations really, truly break down – I think that’s a significant risk.

TS: Then what is your evaluation of the Hanoi summit? A success or failure?

JL: I feel like it was a disappointing lost opportunity. Going in North Korea was offering to close its Yongbyon nuclear facility which is where North Korea made all of the plutonium for its nuclear weapons.

TS: Right. Right.

JL: And so while Yongbyon is not North Korea’s only facility, it is certainly a very important one. And I’m really quite disappointed that we lost the opportunity to address that. And possibly then the opportunity later to address other facilities.
TS: Yes. But we listen to the dialogue at the Carnegie meeting, and we are disappointed to hear that it’s not moving very well. And there is a debate over the process so called “step by step approach” versus “a complete denuclearization first”. What is your view on this?

JL: Well, for viewers, we listened to the remarks of Steve Biegun who is the main negotiator. For the United States. And it was really quite jarring to me. I wondered if John Bolton had shaved off his moustache. He took a very hard line, insisting that North Korea must completely denuclearize and defined denuclearize to include missiles. And chemical weapons and biological weapons. Really quite a strong demand. I’m quite skeptical – that North Korea is ever going to abandon its nuclear weapons.

TS: I see.

JL: But I also don’t think that we need immediate disarmament in order to pursue peace. And so I very much favor a step by step approach. Because even if we never get to complete denuclearization, I think we can reduce tension and really reduce the risk of a nuclear war which I think is a substantial risk if we keep doing things the way we have.

TS: Good. So then as you may know, our university RECNA is working on the so called comprehensive approach to establishing nuclear weapon free zone in northeast Asia. How does this sound to you?

JL: Well, I’m a tremendous fan of nuclear weapons free zones.

TS: Good.

JL: I mean we have the nonproliferation treaty which is a global agreement prohibiting nuclear weapons and now we have a ban treaty coming. But the special thing about nuclear weapons free zones to me is that they reinforce what I call the good neighbor bargain. They remind states that nonproliferation isn’t just a – it’s not a thing that non-nuclear weapon states do as a favor for nuclear weapon states and disarmament.

JL: It’s not a favor that nuclear weapon states do for non-nuclear weapon states. We all want all these things. And so when we pursue nuclear weapons free zones on a regional basis I think it’s a really strong way of reminding everyone in Northeast Asia that we share an interest in eliminating nuclear weapons.

TS: Great. Do you think that the United States will be in favor of this?

JL: Well, after Steve Biegun’s remarks I’m not feeling terribly hopeful. That this administration is going to come around to that. But I do think that the general idea is a powerful and a compelling one. And so I suspect that over the long run, yes, I do think that you will see US administrations come to realize that if we’re going to pursue a North Korea that does not possess nuclear arms and if we’re going to settle some of the tension that exists in the region, having a regional nuclear weapons free zone is a really good idea.

TS: Very good. You mentioned about ban treaty. Let me ask you the question of relationship between the regional and global nuclear regime. What’s the impact of the collapse of INF treaty in this region, Northeast Asia?

JL: Well, I think this is a very serious challenge because we are entering an era where there are very few if any constraints on the United States and Russia.
TS: Right.

JL: And so we are in a situation where Russia is building intermediate range nuclear forces. The United States is discussing building intermediate range nuclear forces. China has intermediate range nuclear forces. And to be honest it's not just North Korea which has nuclear weapons and long range missiles but South Korea and Taiwan.

TS: Sure. Sure.

JL: Both have their own missile programs. And I'm quite concerned that there are individuals in Japan who would like to buy US long range missiles. We could really have quite an arms race if we don't make different choices.

TS: So would it be the appropriate framework for seeing the regional security and peace in northeast Asia. We don't have such a framework at this moment.

JL: Yeah. Well, I mean I think that fundamentally there needs to be an approach that tries to settle the security situation on the Korean peninsula. The relationship between the United States, Taiwan and China is a problem. And that's something that also needs to be addressed.

TS: I see.

JL: But I think at the core of the tension in northeast Asia dating back to the Korean War. The tension between the United States and Japan and South Korea on one side and North Korea and China on the other is really over the unresolved status of the Korean peninsula. So if we can work toward a peace agreement for the peninsula. And marry that with a regional nuclear weapons free zone. I think that's a very compelling vision for the future.

TS: Great. Thank you very much. I think we will end the conversation today. Thank you very much for joining and thank you very much joining the conversation. Please follow up the live streaming afterwards. Thank you very much.

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No potential conflict of interest was reported by the authors.

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