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T4

What Clinton and Trump say about fighting Islamic State

W5

Death of Thai King throws country into turmoil

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What Clinton and Trump say about fighting Islamic State

MOST Americans would probably agree that America needs to stay engaged in the Middle East. Its oil production keeps the global economy afloat; its often-weak states, if they fail completely, can become havens for extremist groups. But a bitter war in Iraq, a less disastrous but still unpopular intervention in Libya, and a failed democratic revolt in Egypt, a key ally, has made Americans leery about any new commitment of military force. That creates a dilemma for the next president, because the one thing Americans do want is the destruction of Islamic State, which holds swathes of Iraq and Syria and urges its followers to carry out terror attacks in the West. What do the presidential candidates believe should be done?

Hillary Clinton, a former secretary of state with long experience in crafting American foreign policy, favours a low risk plan little different from that pursued by Barack Obama: use air power to support Kurdish and Arab allies slowly moving in on IS strongholds and special forces would train local troops, preferably with origins in IS-held regions, to garrison the cities after they have been taken back. She vows an “intelligence surge” to hunt jihadi leaders, rules out any big commitment of American ground troops, and offers no timetable for success.

Mrs Clinton's cautious approach to IS is overshadowed by her record. In 2002, then a United States senator, she voted to authorise the invasion of Iraq in pursuit of weapons of mass destruction that turned out not to exist. In 2011, as secretary of state, she backed intervention in Libya to prevent Muammar Qaddafi from pounding rebellious cities. She claims in her book “Hard Choices” that she regrets having given George W. Bush the “benefit of the doubt” to start a war after it boasted of iron-clad intelligence on Iraq's weapons program. As for Libya, had NATO (with Arab League backing) not entered the month-old civil war to ensure Mr Qaddafi's defeat, she reportedly believes, it could have been “another Syria”—a far bloodier and arguably more intractable conflict. But “I had bad information” and “the counterfactuals

are worse” are not compelling politically. Mrs Clinton has also been on the interventionist side of recent debates on Syria, where she argued for a no-fly zone to protect civilians from regime air bombardment—a first step with the potential to drag America in deeper.

Mr Trump, meanwhile, a real estate developer who confuses Iran's Quds Force (a US adversary)

with the Kurds (mostly allies) and doesn't seem to care, has almost never met a Middle East problem that he hasn't at one point suggested could be solved by force. He denies it now, but he backed the Iraq and Libyan wars too. “We're gonna get rid of ISIS... fast,” he says. He'll “bomb the hell” out of it. Though Mr Trump now gravitates toward Bashar Assad, last year he said Mr Obama “lacked courage” for not hitting the Syrian leader with “tremendous force” after he used chemical weapons against rebels. He would have Iranian vessels that taunt American warships “shot out of the water.”

Mrs Clinton has tried to portray Mr Trump's bellicosity as the product of a volatile temperament that renders him unfit for the presidency. Mr Trump's defenders cast Mrs Clinton as a hawk, and the Republican as a leader of America First isolationism or even interest-based realpolitik. In fact, it seems to represent a relatively consistent worldview: not realism or isolationism but old-fashioned militarism, the pursuit of national prestige by exhibitions of might. Even though he now disowns the Iraq invasion, Mr Trump holds the belief that that drove it: that Washington can cow regional powers with sufficient shock and awe. Mr Trump rails against “nation-building” but chose a military adviser, Lieutenant-General Michael Flynn, who wants American forces to fight in as many battlegrounds as possible and taunt jihadists after each victory.

As president Mr Trump could easily be trapped by his own bluster. He panders to an audience that despises above all else the appearance of American weakness. The Middle East, however,

is full of states and insurgents with decades of experience in asymmetrical conflict and the humiliation of superpowers. Militias attack then fade back into a civilian population. Bombs bring down airliners but go unclaimed. Dictators hedge against regime change by ensuring that

the resulting power vacuum would be even worse. Unless Mr Trump can learn to walk away from a challenge, he is likely to land in one of the quagmires he claims he will avoid.

Mrs Clinton seems haunted not by the appearance of weakness but by indecision. Hundreds of thousands died in Balkan and central African conflicts during Bill Clinton's presidency; he says he could have saved 300,000 lives had he intervened in Rwanda. When action and inaction both carry dangers, Mrs Clinton's associates say, she'd rather be “caught trying”.

Should she win in November, the obvious humanitarian disaster in which to be caught trying would be Syria, where Mr Assad has stepped up bombardment of rebel-held parts of Aleppo city. But intervention would probably mean no a no-fly zone enforced by airpower alone, if that. It's too risky now to tip the military balance too much toward the rebels, as Russia, whose forces back Mr Assad, would likely push back. Rebel advances could also result in atrocities against regime supporters and minorities. Even a no-fly zone would be hard to implement, because the military is uncomfortable with open-ended missions that involve playing chicken with Russian aircraft. A safer option for Mrs Clinton might be stepped up support to a UN-backed unity government in Libya, which is struggling to gain legitimacy as its allies mop up an IS enclave. Either choice would be a departure from the risk-averse policies of Mr Obama.

Mr Trump's statements on Syria have usually been neutral or even pro-Assad. At the second presidential debate on October 9th, he said Mr Assad and his Russian backers were "killing ISIS," and that it would be "would be great if we got along with Russia because we could fight ISIS together." This puts him at odds with many traditional Republicans, who feel that a recent Russian-Syrian offensive has made a mockery of America's ceasefire efforts and put its prestige on the line. Even Mr Trump's own running mate, Mike Pence, said during the vice-presidential debate on October 6th that America should be ready to strike Mr Assad's army since “provocations by Russia need to be met with American strength.” Mr Trump said he hadn't discussed Syria with Mr Pence and disagreed with him. But, in the unlikely event that Mr Trump is elected president, it's questionable how long he would fend off accusations of weakness before reverting to his preference for flexing American muscle.

The death of the Thai king throws the country into turmoil

THAILAND'S constitutional monarch, Bhumibol Adulyadej, spent much of the past seven years living in an infirmary in the royal heart of the capital, Bangkok. During that time the palace pumped out nearly 40 updates about the 88-year-old sovereign's treatment—but normally only after each health scare had passed. So when authorities announced on October 9th that the king's condition was "not stable", his subjects knew what was coming. By the evening of October 12th a large crowd of well-wishers had gathered to pray in the central courtyard of Siriraj hospital; many came dressed in yellow and pink, two auspicious hues. The next day they were told that the world's longest-reigning monarch had died.

King Bhumibol's passing is an important moment for many Thais, most of whom have known no other monarch. The staunchest royalists revere the monarch with a quasi-religious fervour. The king's portrait is displayed outside public buildings, and at the entrance to myriad villages. Millions of homes, and almost all hotel rooms, contain a picture of him too.

The country's many constitutions have been vague about the palace's proper role in public life, but few doubt that the succession is a milestone in Thailand's fractious politics. In particular, esteem for the monarchy has made it easier for Thailand's meddlesome army to excuse its frequent coups. It is widely assumed that the succession could tilt the balance in a deep feud

which has roiled Thailand's politics for ten years—a sporadically violent class war of sorts that has pitted middle-class urbanites against the rural poor, and which in 2014 brought a particularly oppressive junta to power. The question on everyone's lips is, in which direction?

The mourning after

In a statement read on television Prayuth Chan-Ocha, the junta leader, declared a mourning period of one year, during which time civil servants will be expected to wear sombre clothes. He asked the public to refrain from any celebrations for a month, which could mean some entertainment venues may be closed. Many businesses will hope to avoid lengthy enforced shutdowns (jitters over the succession have already bitten a chunk out of the stockmarket, which fell by 8% over the four trading sessions to October 13th). Some multinationals and international organisations have been preparing in case their staff must spend the next few weeks working from home.

Mr Prayuth also confirmed that crown prince, 64-year-old Maha Vajiralongkorn (pictured), would step into his father's shoes. That clears up one uncertainty, which analysts had worried might cause friction. Though the prince's claim to the throne is clear he is unpopular among commoners and widely loathed by the elites. For years it was rumoured that after King Bhumibol's death bigwigs might decide to delay the succession in the hope of elevating a better-loved royal instead.

Fears about how Thailand will change under the crown prince go a long way to explaining why Bangkok's powerful conservative establishment—a loose clique of soldiers, bureaucrats, rich businessmen and royals—have been dreading the royal handover. Thailand's stuffy aristocrats find him shamelessly unregal. He has married and divorced three times, including twice to commoners. He has chosen to spend much of his time living outside Thailand, generally in the countryside around Munich in Germany. In July a German tabloid published startling photos of the prince about to board a plane there, wearing a too-small vest which exposed his back, which sported what looked like lurid temporary tattoos.

The junta tried to stop the images spreading (including by briefly detaining the Thai wife of Andrew MacGregor Marshall, a Scottish journalist banned from Thailand who had published

them on social media). But it was only the latest in a long string of embarrassing stories which Thais—censored by an archaic *lèse-majesté* law which allows long jail terms for people who speak ill of the royals—may share only in a whisper. In 2007 leaked video footage showed the crown prince and his then-consort, who was wearing nothing but a G-string and heels, holding a lavish party. The only guest appeared to be Foo Foo, the prince's elaborately groomed poodle, which until its death last year held the rank of air chief marshal.

Opponents murmur that the prince is not just eccentric but vengeful. Certainly his family life has looked chaotic. Shortly before he divorced her in 2014, half a dozen of his third wife's relations were arrested and accused of having abused their royal connections for personal gain (her parents were jailed for two-and-a-half years in early 2015). His four grown-up children by his second wife now live in America, not Thailand, in apparent exile.

The risk for Bangkok's bigwigs is not only that sinecures and other such rewards will soon be diverted to the crown prince's favourites, but also that the new king's reign might fatally damage the prestige of the institution from which such goodies flow. The rumour that has most blackened the crown prince's reputation, at least among the capital's sophisticates, is that he rubs along well with Thaksin Shinawatra, a divisive former prime minister who was toppled by a coup in 2006 and whom the ruling junta blames for the deep divisions that have destabilised Thailand ever since.

Mr Thaksin won a big victory at the ballot box in 2001 after garnering broad support from impecunious Thais in the country's rural north and north-east. But his populist and authoritarian administration appalled richer middle-class urbanites, who argued that he had used vast wealth earned from telecoms and media businesses to buy the votes of rubes. Many joined a protest movement agitating for Mr Thaksin's removal, which the army eventually gratified. Since then the generals and their supporters have been obsessed with stamping out Mr Thaksin's parties, which continue to win elections by wide margins. The coup which brought the present junta to power in 2014 was launched against Mr Thaksin's sister Yingluck, who took over his political movement after he left the country and who in 2011 was elected prime minister as his proxy.

At least some of Mr Thaksin's supporters believe that the new king is well disposed to their cause (this is probably wishful thinking, and their disappointment could yet become a source of unrest). Mr Thaksin has stayed away from Thailand in part because a corruption trial which concluded after he left the country handed him a jail sentence. In principle the new king could wipe the slate clean by pardoning Mr Thaksin, allowing him to return.

These myriad worries explain why for years it was rumoured that at the time of the succession members of Bangkok's elite would seek to keep the crown prince from the throne. One idea was that they might instead secure the succession for his sister, Princess Maha Chakri Sirindhorn, who is a more plausible example of the virtues of devotion and abstemiousness which Thailand's monarch is supposed to personify. Yet among other obstacles this plan would have required defying King Bhumibol's apparent preference for his only son to succeed him.

Such inflammatory tinkering always seemed destined to create more problems than it solved.

That has certainly appeared to be the opinion of the ruling junta. Ostensibly its coup was launched to end months of middle-class protests against the government of Ms Yingluck. But it was doubtless also motivated by fears that the succession could be disorderly—and by the keenness of army leaders to make sure their own positions were secure under any new regime.

The junta has been preparing for the succession by whipping up royalist sentiment, including by building colossal statues of historical kings on army land not far from Bangkok. The military courts have handed sentences as long as 30 years to unfortunates accused of bad-mouthing the monarch, queen or prince. They have seemed to want to scrub the crown prince's reputation, including by involving him in two star-studded charity bike rides. The prince's face has appeared, often alongside his father's, on more and more roadside billboards.

Regal eagles

The conclusion many people draw from this is that the generals and the crown prince have come to some kind of accommodation about what Thailand should look like now that King Bhumibol has left the scene. If so, the chance of friction between the new powers in the palace and the wider Bangkok establishment is minimal. Whether that changes in the long run

depends on whether the crown prince ends up being a largely silent sovereign, or an active one—and if the latter, quite what form his interventions will take.

Which advisers get elevated to the new king's Privy Council will be one of the first clues. Another focus will be looming changes at the Crown Property Bureau, the unusual conglomerate which invests much of the palace's vast wealth (a reshuffle of senior management was expected even before the swift deterioration of King Bhumibol's health became known). Its affairs are opaque but involve broad swathes of Thailand's economy; by some calculations its holdings are worth more than $40 billion. The firm's board is appointed by the king, and in theory its proceeds are the monarch's to spend as he pleases. Under King Bhumibol the company ploughed cash into endless royal development projects, and leased out an enormous bank of prime Bangkok property, often at less than the market rate. Any change in leadership and strategy could affect many Thai firms.

Security in Bangkok and the capital will probably remain tight for weeks. It is unlikely that Mr Thaksin's supporters would see anything to gain from making trouble during national mourning (and their ranks include plenty of proud royalists, too). A more reasonable concern is that ethnic-Malay separatists from Thailand's southern-most states might seek to disrupt the coming pageantry. One particular separatist faction is now widely accepted to have been responsible for a string of small bombs which detonated in August in seaside towns far beyond their usual stomping grounds. Security forces recently said they had received warning of plots to bring car bombs to the capital.

National elections—the first since the coup of 2014—are supposed to take place next year. But it is very likely that these will be put off while the new regime beds in. The promised polls had anyway started to look meaningless, given that they will be governed by a new constitution scribbled by the junta which will keep the hands of elected politicians firmly tied.

Quite where the succession will lead Thailand in the long term is less clear. To outsiders it seems inevitable that after King Bhumibol's departure esteem for the palace will slowly shrink. That in turn implies a gradual weakening of the institutions which draw upon the monarchy's prestige, particularly Thailand's army. In particular, under the crown prince the colossal prison

sentences presently being handed to those convicted of *lèse-majesté*—a law which in practice is used to chill discussion of all sorts of taboo topics—will only look more abhorrent and absurd. The question is whether the junta and the rest of the country's conservative establishment will recognise this, or whether, feeling vulnerable, they will choose to crack down on dissenters even harder. It is up to Thais to decide whether the succession will drag the country into renewed conflict, or force its warring factions to reach a compromise.

Climate change: 'Monumental' deal to cut HFCs, fastest growing greenhouse gases

Hydrofluorocarbons (HFCs) are widely used in fridges, air conditioning and aerosol sprays.

Delegates meeting in Rwanda accepted a complex amendment to the Montreal Protocol that will see richer countries cut back their HFC use from 2019.

But some critics say the compromise may have less impact than expected.

Three-way deal

US Secretary of State John Kerry, who helped forge the deal in a series of meetings in the Rwandan capital, said it was a major victory for the Earth.

"It's a monumental step forward, that addresses the needs of individual nations but it will give us the opportunity to reduce the warming of the planet by an entire half a degree centigrade," he told BBC News.

The new agreement will see three separate pathways for different countries.

Richer economies like the European Union, the US and others will start to limit their use of HFCs within a few years and make a cut of at least 10% from 2019.

Some developing countries like China, nations in Latin America and island states will freeze their use of HFCs from 2024.

Other developing countries, specifically India, Pakistan, Iran, Iraq and the Gulf states will not freeze their use until 2028.

China, the world's largest producer of HFCs, will not actually start to cut their production or use until 2029.

India, will start even later, making its first 10% cut in use in 2032.

"Absolutely it's a historic day," said Durwood Zaelke, from the Institute for Government and Sustainable Development (IGSD), a long time participant in the Montreal Protocol talks.

"We came to get a half a degree of warming out of the system and we are going to walk away with about 90% from the Kigali amendment."

Certainly if the agreement is implemented in full it will make a big difference to global warming. Experts estimate it will remove the equivalent of about 70 billion tonnes of carbon dioxide from the atmosphere by 2050.

"HFCs posed an immediate threat to a safe climate due to their increasing use and high global warming potential, thousands of times more potent than carbon dioxide," said Christian Aid's Senior Policy Advisor, Benson Ireri.

"By agreeing to an early HFC phase down schedule, we've bought ourselves a bit more time to shift to a global low carbon economy and protect the world's most vulnerable people."

But some observers questioned the concessions made to India and China, suggesting they had weakened the overall impact. The target of cutting global warming by 0.5 degrees may not be realised.

"They needed an agreement here as it's seen as an Obama legacy, so the US delegation has been pretty aggressive in making China and India get to an agreement," said Paula Tejon Carbajal from Greenpeace International.

"It's an incremental step towards 0.5 degrees but its not there yet, they say that the market will work to get us there, but we are not there yet."

The US Secretary of State believes that the science underpinning the deal is sound. He is confident that it will have a huge impact on warming.

"I feel very positive about where we are, we ran all the numbers and everybody feels confident that the integrity of the substance of this is there," he told the BBC.

Supporters argue that this agreement in Kigali will build on the foundations laid by the Paris climate agreement, signed by over 190 countries last December, and which becomes operational early in November.

They also point to the past history of the Montreal Protocol - over 100 fluorinated gases have been eliminated in the agreement's 30 year history. Once the regulation has been passed, industry rapidly develops alternatives.

"The market is going to wash over India, and will sweep them along, they will make the transition a lot faster than the number they put up," said Durwood Zaelke.

"Phase-outs have always driven the market transition so the laggards will be moved along by the market."

There was a sense of quiet jubilation among delegates here when the deal was finally gavelled through in the early hours of Saturday morning.

'It's a big deal," one observer said, "but it could have been bigger."

China's Shenzhou 11 blasts off on space station mission

China has launched two men into orbit in a project designed to develop its ability to explore space.

The astronauts took off from the Jiuquan Satellite Launch Centre in northern China.

They will dock with the experimental Tiangong 2 space lab and spend 30 days there, the longest stay in space by Chinese astronauts.

This and previous launches are seen as pointers to possible crewed missions to the Moon or Mars.

An earlier Tiangong - or Heavenly Palace - space station was decommissioned earlier this year after docking with three rockets.

The astronauts on this latest mission were Jing Haipeng, 49, who has already been to space twice, and 37-year-old Chen Dong.

From a remote launching station in Inner Mongolia, I watched the rocket tear through the sky.

It will take the astronauts about two days to reach the orbiting laboratory where they will live for a month. They will spend this time analysing plant growth in space and giving themselves ultrasounds to scan their bodies' performance.

Only a handful of foreign journalists were allowed into the high-security base to view the launch. But why let any of us in?

Well for one this country is proud of its space programme. At a time when Beijing is being criticised for flexing its ever-growing muscles, especially in the South China Sea, this is something different.

China can portray itself not only as a powerful nation, but one which is contributing to the body

of knowledge.

Along the road into the launch centre are several huge billboards featuring President Xi Jinping giving himself a little clap as a "Long March" rocket sends yet another team into space.

He knows that China's ambitions in the stars may play well overseas but that means nothing to him compared to the credit he can take for them back at home.

In a pre-mission interview with online portal China News, Mr Jin said: "There is definitely some pressure with this mission. I've even been dreaming about it at night."

"I'm not thinking about the bouquets, the applause or the glory. What I've been thinking more about is whether I have grasped all the knowledge and skills, whether I have addressed the weak areas."

In a congratulatory statement to the astronauts carried by state media, President Xi Jinping said he hoped they "vigorously advance the spirit of space travel".

He added that the mission would "enable China to take larger and further steps in space exploration, and make new contributions to building up China as a space power".

China has poured significant funding and efforts into its space programme, and plans to launch at least 20 space missions this year.

It is only the third country - after Russia and the US - to carry out its own crewed missions. In 2013 it successfully landed its un-crewed Yutu, or Jade Rabbit, rover on the Moon.

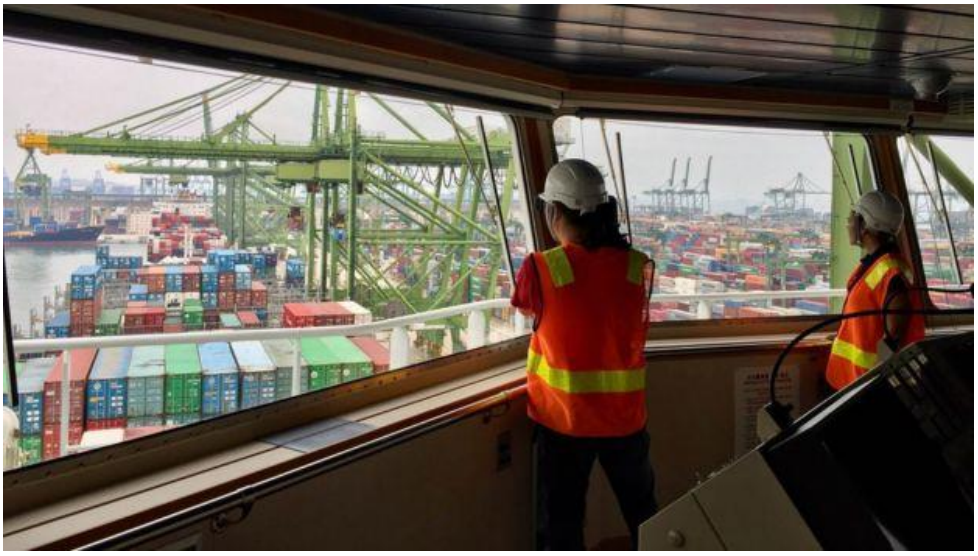
It was excluded from the International Space Station due to concerns over the military nature of its space ambitions.

China has since embarked on plans to create its own permanent space station, expanding Tiangong 2 over the next few years by sending up additional modules. It is expected to be fully operational by 2022.

Authorities said last month that its predecessor, Tiangong 1, was due to crash back to Earth in 2017.

'We don't have a future' - Hanjin crews return to uncertain fate

"Hanjin is like a family," says the first officer, slowly choosing his words. "But now," he hesitates, "it looks like we've lost our family."



We are standing on board one of Hanjin's vessels. It's a huge ship, and the officer is second-in-command.

He stares past me, for a moment lost in thought, an empty gaze across the hundreds of metres of containers and steel hull below.

He quickly snaps out of it. "Come this way please."

We step inside, onto the bridge. If the engine room down below is the heart of this container giant, then up here is where its brains are. Powered down though, long rows of pale grey screens and control boards leave a silence interrupted only by our footsteps.
The ship is docked in Singapore, finally. It's the first time in weeks it has been towed up alongside a pier. Hanjin Shipping went bankrupt in August and since then its vessels have been stranded at sea, not allowed to call at any port.

It's the biggest bust the shipping industry has ever seen. Only once the company came under bankruptcy protection were the vessels (around 100 of them) eventually allowed to go into ports around the globe.

Here in Singapore, a few of them have been trickling in over the past few days.

No names, no faces

We were able to make contact with one of them via another Hanjin captain back in South Korea. He got in touch with the first officer, who then talked the captain into allowing us on board - albeit reluctantly.

There was one condition though: no disclosure of the ship's name, no photos, and no names of the crew members.

As we get on board, it's the same young officer who greets us, no-one else is to be seen.

Throughout the hour we spend on the ship, we never get to see the captain to ask him why he didn't want to let us on. After a few minutes with the first officer though, I'm beginning to see what might have been the reason.

He is shy. In fact, there's a sense of suppressed embarrassment, shame almost, as we start talking to him. They are, after all, "the company that went bust".

For years, the seamen have been proud to work for their company - only to suddenly find Hanjin now reduced to being the posterboy for their troubled industry.

'We don't have a future'

For most of us it is difficult to imagine what life in the shipping industry is like. After all, workers are often hundreds of miles away, out at sea.

Here, following the officer down the silent linoleum corridors of this Hanjin vessel, the troubles facing him and his colleagues are very real.

After the sudden shock of learning of their company's bankruptcy, and the weeks spent out at sea, the sailors now face even more uncertainty.

"We don't have a future," the first officer says quietly. "When we arrive in Korea, we will stay maybe somewhere outside a port at sea. If the owner of the ship changes, then we will have to

deliver this vessel. Then, we don't know what will happen to us."

A prestigious career

Our first officer politely guides us through the ship. We see the pantry, the kitchen, and the recreation room with its worn-out couches, a TV and PlayStation, and coffeemaker in the

corner.

Long corridors lie empty, bar a few pairs of shoes neatly placed in front of the doors to some private cabins.

There are at least 10 floors, from deep down below deck to the bridge at the very top - where there's a stunning view of countless containers that look like oversized Lego blocks, laid out from right below us to the very front of the ship.

From the pier, two gigantic cranes are slowly but steadily at work, picking up containers, lifting them as though they're made of cardboard.

Not only do the crew know they will almost certainly be out of a job when they get to South Korea - it's also clear that getting another job in the industry will be very difficult.

Like all the senior crew, the first officer has studied for four years at a maritime university. He has always been with Hanjin, starting out as a third officer and working his way up the ranks; the next step would have been captain. Captain of a proud vessel, with a prestigious company - a sought-after career.

Analysts I speak to tell me the shipping industry takes a very long-term perspective. It has always been a cyclical industry and therefore will eventually pick up again, they say.

But that is unlikely to be much consolation to the crew of this Hanjin ship as they embark on their journey back home towards an uncertain future.

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UNDER THE MACROSCOPE

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