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Breaking the Cycle: Recognizing Past Success and Making U.S.- North Korean Reconciliation a Reality

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Isolated from normalized relations with the global community, backwards in nearly every sense of the term, stricken with poverty, and frozen in a 'state of war' limbo for sixty years the Democratic People's Republic of Korea (DPRK), commonly known as North Korea, represents not only one of the most perplexing regimes but also one of the most challenging hurdles to international peace in the world today. North Korea's challenge to international peace has been intimately tied to the nuclear question, initially in its pursuit of nuclear technology and then with it becoming the newest nuclear armed state. The gambit for nuclear power status surfaced at the end of the Cold War spurring the global community, led by the United States, into action to

prevent proliferation north of the Korean peninsula's demilitarized zone (DMZ). However, the adoption of a new approach in Washington ultimately led to North Korea officially testing its first nuclear bomb in October of 2006. The conversation has now become one of denuclearization. The early half of 2013 is currently witnessing a return to tensions with North Korea, as its young new leader Kim Jong-Un attempts to establish himself among his father and grandfather's legacies, and had begun engaging in increasingly threatening rhetoric in the period surrounding the 101st anniversary of Kim Il-Sung's birth. With the charged atmosphere in the region there is a very real danger of misperceptions occurring over the slightest incident and cascading into all out conflict. It is a situation that is reminiscent of the 1960s Cuban Missile Crisis, where a moment of crisis increased the probability of inadvertent nuclear conflict, and led Robert McNamara to remark on how "the indefinite combination of human fallibility and nuclear weapons will destroy nations."¹ Today we are striving towards an understanding of determining what the most effective approach will be in managing a nuclear armed North Korea and, hopeful possibility of convincing it to renounce the need for nuclear weapons.

Within this context the following paper will assert that President Obama needs to pursue a heightened level of sustained engagement with the DPRK, emphasizing the importance of a bilateral approach that is closely tied to multilateral frameworks with regional neighbors, in an effort to build confidence with the DPRK and demonstrate that they will be secure from foreign intervention without nuclear weapons. In order to support this position for engagement, research will be presented over three sections. First, the history of U.S. policy approaches towards North Korea will be examined over the course of the administrations of Presidents Clinton and George W. Bush, the second section will shed light on North Korea and emphasize the importance of understanding the other side, and the third section will focus on the way forward within the contemporary context under President Obama through engagement and an eventual path to rapprochement.

¹ James G. Blight and Janet M. Lang. *The Armageddon Letters: Kennedy/Khrushchev/Castro in the Cuban Missile Crisis*, (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield Publishing Group, Inc, 2012), pp. 7 and 9-10.

*Lowercase Janet is intentional spelling by author.

Research along these parameters will help us understand better ways of managing the tensions on the Korean peninsula, along with possible lessons in managing and hopefully reversing nuclear capabilities in states beyond those who already have them. The significance of this research, on the management of relations with North Korea over nuclear weapons development, lies in its aim of providing insight into the best courses of action with respect to other states that have designs on acquiring nuclear weapons, such as Iran. Although these two states are different and should be tactically addressed through individually tailored policies, the fundamental strategy of sustained engagement is applicable to both. Thereupon, by investigating U.S. approaches towards the DPRK and demonstrating the importance of sustained engagement we can gain a clearer understanding of how to successfully avoid nuclear proliferation and conflict.

Two Administrations, Two Approaches

Considering recently heightened tensions on the Korean Peninsula, resulting from the DPRK carrying out its third nuclear test in February 2013, threatening war rhetoric and the restart of its Yongbyon nuclear complex, pursuing a solution now is a much more challenging task than before. However, past approaches by the United States for addressing the DPRK's ambitions and behaviour are still quite relevant for application in the contemporary environment, as the fundamental lessons are universal in conflict avoidance. The only difference is in how much more sustained commitment is going to be required by all parties so as to recover the negotiation process, which has continued to descend down the well in the absence of a comprehensive framework. It must also be noted that earlier cases in U.S. approaches to North Korean relations might prove less useful due to their context in a bipolar environment of American-Soviet Cold War relations and will therefore not be emphasized in this examination.

Under Clinton the bilateral process seems to have had made moderate progress in slowing down the regime's nuclear program and thereby preventing the development of nuclear weapons, but a lack of foreign policy resources and quite possibly the lack of broader regional participation had made the road of engagement a bumpier one. In contrast, during the Bush administration success was mixed, the

perceived threatening U.S. posture with the invasion of Iraq in 2003 and its hard-line policy approach to North Korea was detrimental to the gains and approach of engagement that Clinton constructed. The Bush administration's struggle to build an effective approach to North Korea was evident in its full policy reversal, during its second term, to a multilateral framework and enhanced engagement. But, by this time it was already too late to stop the North's development of a bomb. This section will examine these general observations by detailing some critical moments in the administrations' North Korean policies so as to provide the reader with a foundation for the sections to follow.

Policy towards the DPRK under Clinton involved the provision of certain political and economic benefits in return for the dismantling of the regime's nuclear program, promoting the goal of a "soft-landing," where a program of gradual reform and opening would be participated in by the North.² This policy was not arrived at from the outset of the administration, but rather evolved as a result of experiences in the crises of 1994 and 1998. In 1994 the DPRK's behaviour was remarkably similar to recent experiences and the fears of war on the peninsula were extremely high, just as they are in the present 2013 context. Over the three years leading up to the 1994 crisis the U.S. had pursued a "crime and punishment" strategy to coerce the North into stopping its pursuit of nuclear weapons and the new administration, not wanting to seem dovish or promoters of appeasement, was reluctant to engage in talks or abandon this sanctions strategy.³ By 1993 the DPRK announced its intention to withdraw from the Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT) in response to international inspectors finding evidence spent fuel reprocessing at its nuclear facilities, however, ensuing talks collapsed and the discussion turned to sanctions.⁴ Under threat of sanctions and stalemated negotiations, the DPRK removed an estimated 20-30 kilograms of plutonium

² Harry Harding, "Change and Continuity in the Bush Administration's Asia Policy," in Robert M. Hathaway and Wilson Lee (ed.), *George W. Bush and East Asia: A First Term Assessment*, (Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars, 2005), p. 36.

³ Leon V. Sigal, "Jimmy Carter Makes a Deal," *Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists*, 54, 1 (1998), retrieved on 10 April 2013, para. 4, 11, 13, 15, and 78, <http://go.galegroup.com.proxy.lib.uwaterloo.ca/ps/i.do?id=GALE%7CA54574531&v=2.1&u=wate34930&it=r&p=EAIM&sw=w>.

⁴ *Ibid.*, para. 3-6.

from the fuel of its Yongbyon gas-graphite reactor in 1994 marking the height of tensions during the crisis.⁵

Fortunately the crisis was brought back from the brink with the application of Track II diplomacy carried out by former President Jimmy Carter. The former president's astute negotiating sensibilities brought North Korea and the U.S. back to the negotiating table, where Clinton took advantage of this opportunity and achieved the Agreed Framework.⁶ The Agreed Framework was an important success achieved through cooperation with the North, it halted the DPRK's plutonium program with the agreement to give up its gas-graphite reactor in return for light water reactors from the U.S., Japan, and South Korea, additionally operations at the Yongbyon complex and construction on two new large reactors was halted.⁷

As the decade wore on, the Agreed Framework began to show some limitations. Each side had differing conceptions of the agreement, the U.S. saw it as primarily non-proliferation while the DPRK saw it as a way to normalize bilateral political and economic relations, additionally the U.S. fell behind delivering on the light water reactor program and Congress refused to appropriate funds to the agreement.⁸ Consequently, under these issues, the death of Kim Il-Sung, and several natural disasters, North Korea tested a rocket over Japan in 1998 touching off a second crisis.⁹ Fortunately, an adherence to engagement led to the Perry Process, which resulted in a deal where the DPRK would agree to a "moratorium on tests of long-range missile and space-launch vehicles" that Joel Wit and Jenny Town point out only required the U.S. to promise they would continue diplomatic dialogue.¹⁰ This moratorium lasted seven years, underlining the importance that dialogue with the U.S. had to the regime. The Perry Process also laid the ground for a high level meeting in 2000, where each agreed

⁵ Siegfried S. Hecker, "Lessons Learned from the North Korean Nuclear Crisis," *Daedalus*, 139, 1(2010), pp. 45-46.

⁶ Sigal (1998), para. 79-80.

⁷ Hecker, p. 46.

⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 49.

⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 49.

¹⁰ Joel Wit and Jenny Town, "How to Talk Kim Jong Un Off the Ledge," *Foreign Policy*, (12 April 2013), retrieved on 13 April 2013, para. 7, http://www.foreignpolicy.com/articles/2013/04/12/how_to_talk_kim_jong_un_off_the_ledge_kerry_diplomacy.

to a pledge against hostile intent towards each other, which conveyed to North Korea, for the first time, the United States' recognition of its right to exist and heralded in a pathway for the final resolution of the nuclear crisis.¹¹

With the election of George W. Bush, policy towards North Korea underwent an adjustment, a rejection of engagement and 'carrots' was undertaken for a hardnosed 'stick' approach based on moral justifications. This approach was arrived at after an internal debate in the administration between pragmatists, who saw value in building on Clinton's Agreed Framework and hard-liners who advocated sanctions to induce the regime to collapse (hard-landing), the latter eventually won out.¹² During this internal debate public pronouncements were made on a willingness to talk, but many senior officials, the hard-liners, opposed this under the premise that the DPRK was evil and dishonest, which led to the North claiming U.S. policy was hostile and Bush declaring the DPRK was part of an "axis of evil."¹³ Additionally, a new focus on multilateralism to address the North was advocated to induce concerted pressure from the region, embodied in the Six-Party Talks, and bilateral negotiations were consequently abandoned.¹⁴ Tensions and anti-Americanism also grew with South Korea, which was in part a result of the rift between the new U.S. hard-line policy towards the North and the progressive South Korean Sunshine policy.¹⁵ These strained relations with a key regional partner certainly were not helpful and over the next four years the new approach, of increased sanctions and a lack of earnest talks, failed to bear fruit. The ground was set for the 2006 test of the DPRK's first nuclear bomb and its withdrawal from the NPT, the game would change and the North would end up declaring that as a nuclear power it wanted to talk arms control with the U.S., not denuclearization.¹⁶

The administration quickly responded with bilateral meetings between U.S. negotiator Christopher Hill and his DPRK counterpart that reinitiated the previously

¹¹ Hecker, pp. 49-50.

¹² Michael J. Mazarr, "The Long Road to Pyongyang: A Case Study in Policymaking without Direction," *Foreign Affairs*, 86, 5 (2007), pp. 79-80.

¹³ Mazarr, p. 81.

¹⁴ Harding, p. 36. Six-Party Talks include: China, Japan, U.S., Russia, South Korea, and the DPRK; Heckler, p. 50.

¹⁵ Gi-Wook Shin, "Identity Politics and Policy Disputes in U.S.-Korea Relations," *Political Science Quarterly*, 127, 2 (2012), p. 290.

¹⁶ Hecker, p. 50.

stalled Six-Party Talks, and halted the North's plutonium program that later led to a pledge to disable its Yongbyon facilities in return for energy aid, removal from the list of state sponsors of terrorism, and removal of sanctions under the Trading with the Enemy Act.¹⁷ This new agreement was finalized in February of 2007 proving the importance of the bilateral dialogue that had been steadfastly rejected up until late-2005 by President Bush.¹⁸ Nate Adler has summarized the Bush approach as a "truly bi-polar North Korea policy" and one of the most dramatic U.S. foreign policy reversals.¹⁹ Such sentiments on Bush's contradictory policy are shared by Michael Mazarr pointing to how engagement was abandoned for moralism, which in turn ended up being discarded anyhow, he asserts that the administration lacked a strategy at all, which he claims is tied to "key policymakers' thinking in principled rather than strategic terms."²⁰

Approaches and experiences among these two administrations in managing the nuclear issue in North Korea highlight the merits of engagement and the positive developments that result, compared to the alternative coercion and isolation approach. A contrast in bilateral and multilateral focus between administrations with the Bush administration eventually acknowledging its importance is also instructive and will be returned to within section two. The next two sections will act to reinforce these conclusions and address the applicability of earnest and sustained engagement in the contemporary context of the North Korea issue.

Understanding the Northerners

A prevalent notion that exists in the discourse on North Korea is that, it is a regime characterized by erratic, suicidal, and unpredictable behavior that is therefore extremely untrustworthy and impossible to reason with or enter into agreements of good faith with. Such notions have helped to fuel the calls for taking a tough stand with the regime, amounting to bids for force or sanctions and writing off the value of talking

¹⁷ Leon V. Sigal, "Can Washington and Seoul Try Dealing with Pyongyang for a Change?" *Arms Control Today*, 40, 9 (2010), p. 17.

¹⁸ Mazarr, p. 91.

¹⁹ Nate Adler, "Bush's Bipolar Foreign Policy in North Korea," *Harvard Kennedy School Review*, vol. 9 (2009), p. 103.

²⁰ Mazarr, pp. 92 and 94.

with the state. These knee-jerk sensibilities have existed during most if not all of the crises with North Korea, they were notable at the policymaking level in the previously discussed Bush administration, and are only exasperated when the regime becomes even more isolated. A lack of information on North Korean decision makers and rationales is arguably the most critical hindrances to resolving the nuclear problem and it is why engagement is so fundamental to the solution. Confidence building cannot be achieved through isolation or patiently waiting for the other side to come around, active and genuine effort must be employed to dispel misperceptions on both sides and slowly rebuild amicable relations. The key is creating a forum for both sides to recognize how each perceives the others' actions and how each defines their insecurity. The aim of this section will be to shed some light on who North Korea is and what it is that leads them to pursue nuclear weapons and act so provocative towards the international community.

A vexing topic has been on the internal functions and interests that influence North Korean policies and actions. The danger has been in the reliance of policymakers in the international community, with the U.S. at the fore, on assessments that are essentially speculative and superficial and based off little to no firsthand experience with DPRK officials and society. In 1994 former President Carter, in preparations for negotiations, had taken issue with intelligence assessments on the psyche of North Koreans, in predicting their reaction to sections and the internal workings of the regime, in saying, "Have you ever been to North Korea? How do you know?"²¹ A solution to this deficiency has become even more elusive as isolation has increased.

Instructively, scholarly research does exist on the subject and attempts to provide a glimpse into the DPRK's inner workings. Patrick McEachern notes that during the period of Kim Il-Sung the bureaucracies, the National Defence Commission (NDC) and the cabinet, were seen as "an enemy to the good," resulting in the placement of members of the Korean Workers Party (KWP), with an ideological knowledge, in senior leadership positions to centralize power through the Party.²² Following Sung's death in 1994, his son, Kim Jong-Il, began to change this structure by empowering deputies over

²¹ Sigal (1998), para. 21-22.

²² Patrick McEachern, "Interest Groups in North Korean Politics," *Journal of East Asian Studies*, 8, 2 (2008), p. 240.

Party members in an effort to rebalance the NDC, cabinet, and KWP as peer organizations, while creating specialists and technical expertise that would provide him with "pragmatic policy choices."²³ The result was the increased social and political stature of the military/NDC and the expansion of the cabinet, but their influence was curtailed to prevent any challenges; one way to do this was through the three internal security divisions that kept each of the main bodies in check.²⁴ Overall, McEachern concludes that personalistic and totalitarian models of power are a closer reflection of an earlier North Korea and even though centralization is still high, under Kim Jong-Il a more pluralistic interaction in the bureaucracies has taken root.²⁵ Even in a post-Kim Jong-Il period this analysis provides a good foundation and there is a good chance that in the two years after his death the power structures he built are likely, even purposefully, still in place under his son Kim Jong-Un. The message is that rational mechanisms have taken precedence over ideological ones and, even though they are risk prone, a balanced plurality of interests indicates a more pragmatic than suicidal tendency.

Additionally, North Korea harbours an insecurity and understanding of vulnerability in relation to the more powerful U.S., which has been seen as hostile, especially in the last decade, and as the puppet-master of South Korea and Japan. Therefore, North Korea feels that the U.S. is the only one who can resolve its fears. Expanding on this point, Bruce Cumings indicates that the U.S. has threatened North Korea with nuclear attack throughout the forty years before 1994, conveying an intention to "exterminate" them, which makes the DPRK's nuclear program seem like "a logical trump card."²⁶ Along the same lines, William Pfaff asserts that the North only wants nuclear weapons for deterrence as there is nothing to gain from their use.²⁷ Adding to this, Hecker echoes Pfaff on how nuclear weapons reinforce the power and prestige of the DPRK, but they have little inherent war-fighting utility and instead find

²³ McEachern, p. 242-244.

²⁴ McEachern, p. 246-249.

²⁵ McEachern, p. 255-256.

²⁶ Bruce Cumings, "A Monstrous Idea," *Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists*, 50, 5 (1994), retrieved on 10 April 2013, para. 13-14, "Exterminate" was used in reference to the DPRK by Senator John McCain, <http://go.galegroup.com.proxy.lib.uwaterloo.ca/ps/i.do?id=GALE%7CA15756436&v=2.1&u=wate34930&it=r&p=EAIM&sw=w>.

²⁷ William Pfaff, "Double Standards: Why the North got the Bomb," *Commonweal*, 133, 19 (2006), para. 10.

more utility as a "diplomatic equalizer."²⁸ Under Kim Jong-Un, it is possible that the rhetoric surrounding the use of nuclear weapons is to reassert to the world that he is not going to be a push over and, additionally, to reinforce his position at home, by focusing on his ability to divert the attention of the world and gain the state respect from those more powerful.

Underlying assumptions by the U.S. and its allies on the utility of these scare tactics and other similar tactics through the conduct of military/naval exercises and shows of strength, the B-2 fly over being the latest,²⁹ display a misreading of how the DPRK will interpret them and respond. Many similarities can be seen with Fidel Castro during the Cuban missile crisis, where fear and anxiety over a U.S. invasion and continuous American sorties into Cuban airspace caused paranoia in Fidel Castro, which led him to see the placing of nukes in Cuba as the only way to secure the country from American aggression. Absolutely convinced that removal of nuclear missiles would usher in the U.S. invasion in light of historic American hostilities, Castro stressed the independence of his island state and the lack of respect that the two superpowers had towards it reinforced this notion.³⁰ In North Korea there is a similar mentality, which is engrained in the identity of the state, it is called Juche, the spirit of self-sufficiency.³¹ As such, in the case of the DPRK it is essential that the U.S. understands the regime's fears and works to alleviate the underlying rationales for possessing the Bomb, while at the same time remaining in a multilateral dialogue in the region to build confidence towards alleviating fears of North Korean hostility.

Such steps were taken under Clinton, as mentioned in the previous section, which culminated in the 2000 pledge that recognized the North's right to exist, which was a significant step in showing good-faith in a continued engagement process and in addressing one of the North's most fundamental sticking points. Furthermore, allaying these fears allowed for positive developments within North Korea to take root, which showed that the North does want to be a part of the international community and is

²⁸ Hecker, pp. 52-53.

²⁹ Foster Klug, "NKorea Orders Rocket Prep After US B-2 Drill," *Associated Press*, (28 March 2013), retrieved on 15 April 2013, http://www.google.com/hostednews/ap/article/ALeqM5iaPfr8g3PfeIeNIX3aDU3vzAOT_Q?docId=d29a96ee66014a7d8bc7aad3271d3ec.

³⁰ Blight and Lang, pp. 148-151.

³¹ Erich Weingartner, "Understanding North Korea: Perception vs. Reality," *Behind the Headlines*, 60, 1 (2002), p. 1.

open to gradual sectoral reform. The instance referred to developed after 1998 with the establishment of special economic zones/Special Administrative Regions (SAR) for foreign investment, the introduction of economic liberalization that increased prices fifty fold and average working wages increased by 100 fold, and increased privatization initiatives, not to mention improved cooperation with South Korea and Japan.³² Through these special economic zones and the liberalization of prices, the DPRK had shown real steps towards trying to implement similar reforms to those that were carried out in China and Vietnam.³³ So the potential is not only real, it has been done before with North Korea. By bringing North Korea into the fold and allowing its society to grow, even if it is initially selective, suspicion can be decreased and the potential for denuclearization becomes more of a reality. The only question is if the patience to see this through exists with the international community, the U.S. in particular?

Another item of importance to the DPRK arose in the 1994 negotiations by Carter, where the importance of high level meetings to Kim Il-Sung was shown, a preference that his son had seemingly carried over during his time with the emphasis on bilateral talks with the U.S. The gesture of meeting with a former president was taken as "a token of American respect" and, additionally, in facilitating a meeting with the President of South Korea, Kim Il-Sung had remarked that he thought it important for high level officials to "meet at the summit first and then let lower-level officials work out the details," because if done the other way "you [would] never get to have one."³⁴ The power of high level negotiators to convey genuine commitment to negotiations and diplomatic respect should not be underestimated or discarded instinctively as a reward. Such a scenario, however, should be initially built up to occur, but could at least be offered as a step in the reconciliation process and it would likely even benefit from a Track II equivalent before an official U.S. high level representative visited the DRPK.

In one final point, the failure of the Six-Party Talks seems to stem from the possibility that it was seen by the Bush administration as a way to disengage from the process and dump the issue onto regional neighbors, where instead the U.S. should

³² Weingartner, pp. 9-11.

³³ Michael O'Hanlon and Mike Mochizuki, "Toward a Grand Bargain with North Korea," *The Washington Quarterly*, 26, 4 (2003), p. 12.

³⁴ Sigal, para. 15 and 70.

have taken the leading role through a bilateral framework supported by the Six-Party partners, as it was the only one who could alleviate these fundamental DPRK concerns. Initially, the U.S. failed to receive DPRK attempts for engagement and when the Agreed Framework collapsed North Korea used the Six-Party Talks as a forum for putting the blame on the U.S.³⁵ However, efforts at bringing China into the dialogue, initially reluctant but now fully embracing of this security mechanism, was a keen move, which if the U.S. had not failed to complement this increased regional participation with its own active participation, more may have been accomplished.³⁶

If the talks do resume under President Obama such lessons should be heeded, as practicing the administration's policy of 'leading from behind' in North Korea will not work, the U.S needs to understand its centrality in the DPRK's eyes. Others, such as Thomas Christiansen, argue for the benefits of the security mechanism, especially for China's role "in helping remove the obstacles that North Korea has created along the way."³⁷ China's role is indeed valuable in such respects, but it works best as a supporting tactic and Christiansen inappropriately matches Six-Party Talk failures all on the DPRK, which fails to account for the mechanism's own inherent weaknesses and in understanding what the North wants.

Bringing regional powers into the dialogue presents complexities and hurdles, as Mikyong Kim points out in an analysis of community reaction to the Cheonan incident, "dramatic divisions" exist among Japan, South Korea, and China while North Korea is dismissed as not being a "legitimate party to the discourse."³⁸ Managing regional partners is an added task that makes resolving the North Korea issue even more problematic in the Six-Party Talks and would likely cause the DPRK to feel ganged up on, not to mention having what it feels is important get ferreted around the divided discourse of the community. The security mechanism would work better as a functional

³⁵ Joel S. Wit, "Enhancing U.S. Engagement with North Korea," *The Washington Quarterly*, 30, 2 (2007), p. 55.

³⁶ Ramon Pacheco Pardo, "China and Northeast Asia's Regional Security Architecture: The Six-Party Talks as a Case of Chinese Regime-Building?" *East Asia: An International Quarterly*, 29, 4 (2012), pp. 341 and 346.

³⁷ Thomas J. Christiansen, "Shaping the Choices of a Rising China: Recent Lessons for the Obama Administration," *The Washington Quarterly*, 32, 3 (2009), pp. 93-94.

³⁸ Mikyoung Kim, "The Cheonan Incident and East Asian Community Debate: North Korea's Place in the Region," *East Asia: An International Quarterly*, 28, 4 (2011), p. 288.

place to ensure the fulfillment of agreements that were reached in a bilateral context with the U.S.

Over the course of this section what has been discussed reinforces the importance of understanding the reasons behind North Korea's nuclear program, what it values in order to determine how to improve cooperation, and the rise of pragmatism in their pluralistic internal policy process. Understanding how the North perceives events and issues, in addition to sharing how the international community perceives those same events and issues, through a process of engagement, will allow for real progress to be made towards reconciliation. In the final section contemporary relations with North Korea will be examined to reinforce the need of incorporating what has been covered and determine how it might be effectively accomplished by President Obama and his successors.

Pathfinder: The Road to Rapprochement

In the shadow of the above information, the purpose of this section will be to explore the current approach of the United States under the Obama administration towards the issue of North Korea, to emphasize and reinforce the timely relevance of the lessons that have been discussed. Under the new leader, Kim Jong-Un, speculation has arisen as to how he will act and if he can consolidate his power from hypothesized internal factions. Actions up until the present have cast doubt on what those in the international community and America had hoped would be a gentler leader. However, as discussed in the previous section, the internal structure of North Korea has facilitated the growth of a specialist bureaucracy that is likely to be advising their new leader to take the most pragmatic approach they see possible, which would be similar to the behavior of the last two decades. There is a similar carryover of broad foreign policy trends between U.S. administrations, the finer details will matter but the point is that no avenue to or receptiveness for the approach of engagement, that has seen past success, has been cut off.

A good place to begin the contemporary discussion is by characterizing the contemporary voices on the issue that advocate for the misguided and unfounded path

of coercion and isolation. In a recent article by Joshua Stanton and Sung-Yoon Lee, the authors urge Obama to adopt more stringent sanctions against the DPRK's finances to essentially bankrupt the state and send it into collapse.³⁹ They categorically misread the historic attempts of engagement and why they failed, a topic in which this paper has already discussed. Additionally, those identified with the conservative foreign policy circle, John Bolton and Nicholas Eberstadt among others, echo these sentiments and point to the regime as the real reason for failure.⁴⁰

Their assumptions that collapse is a better outcome than working with the current regime ignores the history of the Korean peninsula. Under the Japanese occupation of Chosen, the unified Korea at the time, in the beginning of the twentieth century any semblance of local governance or education was wiped from the landscape and replaced with Imperial influence; by the end of the Second World War the people and society were in complete shambles and democracy was not something locals could comprehend, not to mention the lack of any basis for it to grow from, a hurdle that American officials were unprepared for.⁴¹ South Korea lived under the autocratic Syngman Rhee for a long period until democracy really took hold, for the North there are no indigenous democrats and in light of domestic propaganda it is unlikely that anything that would arise from the ashes could be more receptive to the outside world. Furthermore, in reference to North Korea's human rights issues, arguments for facilitating internal society's split with the regime in comparison to what was done and occurred in Soviet Eastern Europe should be avoided, as they are different in ways that relate to the previous sentence, there are no civil society groups to carry this out as there were in Poland, etc.⁴²

³⁹ Joshua Stanton and Sung-Yoon Lee, "Don't Engage Kim Jong Un -- Bankrupt Him," *Foreign Policy*, (09 January 2013), retrieved on 10 April 2013, http://www.foreignpolicy.com/articles/2013/01/09/dont_engage_kim_jong_un_bankrupt_him?wpisrc=obinsite.

⁴⁰ Jamie Weinstein, "What a Conservative Policy Towards North Korea Would Look Like," *The Daily Caller*, (14 February 2013), retrieved on 10 April 2013, para. 11-14, <http://dailycaller.com/2013/02/14/what-a-conservative-foreign-policy-towards-north-korea-would-look-like/>.

⁴¹ T.R. Fehrenbach, *This Kind of War: The Classic Korean War History*, (Dulles, VA: Potomac Books, Inc, 2008), pp. 15-17 and 21-33.

⁴² John Feffer, "The Forgotten Lessons of Helsinki: Human Rights and U.S.-North Korea Relations," *World Policy Journal*, 21, 3 (2004), p. 38.

Recently, U.S. Secretary of State John Kerry commented on how North Korea needs to be serious about denuclearization if talks are to resume.⁴³ Although there is no disagreement with the premise of denuclearization, the fault instead lies in putting the terms of conversation at such a high price right off the bat. Denuclearization would be best recognized as a strategic goal that is at the end of a process, by requiring action or, in the least, pledges on this topic before even talking, the U.S. will find itself patiently waiting while North Korea continues down its current path convinced the U.S. is not serious about resolving anything substantial. However, the administration seems to be making an effort to break from its predecessor's early failures, but few positions have altered compared to Bush's later years. Obama's policy formed around a 'strategic patience', but this was a misreading of what it would take to resolve the issue while also falling into the same failed policy of isolation.⁴⁴ The patience should instead be applied to the process of active engagement rather than waiting for the North to come to the table. By patiently doing nothing substantial the administration has squandered the potential to start a process on a strategic roadmap earlier and possibly avoid the current circumstances.

If there is any positive hope for the adoption of an engagement approach, as put forth in this paper, it may rest in Obama's newly appointed foreign policy team. Chuck Hagel, the new Secretary of Defence, had in his previous capacity as a Republican U.S. Senator voiced support for engagement with North Korea.⁴⁵ Additionally, Secretary of State Kerry, despite the above comments, had during his presidential run advocated for pursuing bilateral relations.⁴⁶ In this light, the Obama administration should focus on

⁴³ Howard LaFranchi, "North Korea Crisis: Can John Kerry Persuade China to Lean Harder on Kim?" *Christian Science Monitor*, (12 April 2013), retrieved on 12 April 2013, para. 20, http://www.csmonitor.com/USA/Foreign-Policy/2013/0412/North-Korea-crisis-Can-John-Kerry-persuade-China-to-lean-harder-on-Kim?utm_source=feedburner&utm_medium=feed&utm_campaign=Feed%3A+feeds%2Fcsmonitor+Science+Monitor+All+Stories%29.

⁴⁴ Matt Spetalnick and Anna Yukhananov, "Analysis: North Korea Tests Obama's 'Strategic Patience'," *Reuters*, (09 April 2013), retrieved on 16 April 2013, para. 3 and 22, <http://www.reuters.com/article/2013/04/09/us-korea-north-obama-idUSBRE9380YR20130409>.

⁴⁵ Wit (2007), p. 67.

⁴⁶ James A. Leach, "A Congressional Perspective on Asia and the Pacific," in Robert M. Hathaway and Wilson Lee (ed.), *George W. Bush and East Asia: A First Term Assessment*, (Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars, 2005), p. 199.

three main ideas: that genuine U.S.-DPRK bilateral engagement is key, a strategic roadmap must be built, and expectations should be moderated and measured on a long term progression.

Bilateralism is Key

As emphasized in the previous section bilateral engagement between the U.S. and DPRK is key, due to the viewpoint and insecurity of the North. Obama must, in the words of Yurim Yi, "be careful not to embarrass or criticize the North Korean regime," and guarantee its security from attack throughout the engagement process.⁴⁷ There will obviously be differences among the two but as long as they are aired respectfully in private negotiations and not used to publically scorn them a derailment can be avoided. In a more specific tactic of the bilateral approach, Wit addresses the utility of having a special representative to the president, saying that they "should not be hesitant to deal directly with Pyongyang at whatever level is necessary."⁴⁸ In going one step further, the U.S. should establish the post of a permanent envoy to North Korea, which should not be based domestically, but rather in South Korea or even in the Swedish embassy which acts as the protectorate of U.S. interests in the country. Such moves will demonstrate commitment to a dialogue and facilitate regular interactions, allowing each to gain a clearer perspective of how the other side feels about certain issues and proposals.

There is also the challenge of bringing Japan on side, but this is also one reason why a bilateral approach will be more effective than Six-Party Talks.⁴⁹ The recent election of the conservative Liberal Democratic Party although less likely to be conciliatory towards North Korea, values U.S. relations more than the ousted Democratic Party of Japan and therefore is more likely to follow a U.S. lead.⁵⁰ Similar challenges exist in coordinating with South Korea, but when it and the American

⁴⁷ Yurim Yi, "How to Negotiate with North Korea," *Asian Politics & Policy*, 1, 4 (2009), 774.

⁴⁸ Joel S. Wit, "Dealing with North Korea: 'Diplomatic Warfare' Ahead," *Arms Control Today*, 39, 1 (2009), pp. 15-16.

⁴⁹ Glyn Ford, "North Korea in Transition," *Soundings*, 43, 1 (2009), pp. 133-134. With regards to the challenge.

⁵⁰ Taku Tamaki, "'Surrounding Areas' and The Recalibration of Japan's Threat Perception," *East Asia: An International Quarterly*, 29, 2 (2012), pp. 187-188.

approach are synchronized as was the case in 2000 and 2007 the potential for progress on North Korea increase.⁵¹ Currently the ball is in Obama's court to undertake this synchronization with South Korea, as their new president, Park Geun-hye, has already signaled her willingness to reengage with the DPRK.⁵² The key, as mentioned before, is to manage these aspects separate from direct talks with the North. This bilateralism supported by regionalism approach not only will facilitate engagement with North Korea, but also will likely assist in carrying out the functional aspects of what is agreed upon so each party can meet the terms laid out, avoiding the previously mentioned difficulty that the Clinton administration encountered leading up to 1997.

Building a Strategic Roadmap

A second instructive item for the Obama administration to heed is the creation of a strategic roadmap that accounts for a long term vision, is tailored to ensure continuity across administrations, and ensures tactics of engagement are exercised with diligence through the bilateralism supported by regionalism approach. Part of this roadmap should include the necessity of introducing the previously successful process of economic reform coupled with reciprocal agreements in pursuit of conventional force reductions that would aid economic reforms.⁵³ The Bush administration's failure in constructing a coherent and sustainable strategy had much to do with its emphasis on the morality of the regime, as was addressed earlier. Flowing from this, Obama must avoid the temptation of using moral terminology and rationale in approaches to the DPRK, to break the cycle a strategy portraying a willingness to live with the regime is needed.⁵⁴

There have also been instances in the current administration to learn from, with regards to building a strategy. In a 2010 underreported diplomatic overture from North Korea, officials had repeatedly called for a peace treaty to "formally terminate the Korean War," but were rebuffed as denuclearization had to be on the table and it had to

⁵¹ Sigal (2010), pp. 18 and 21.

⁵² Wit and Town, para. 10.

⁵³ O'Hanlon and Mochizuki, p. 16.

⁵⁴ Mazarr, pp. 92-93.

show actions of its sincerity, of which were not specified to the DPRK.⁵⁵ By making denuclearization the first and only issue on the table for engagement to begin, the international community is bungling any chance at making progress, the goal of denuclearization should be seen as a process in a strategy that builds confidence and good-faith towards this goal.

This strategic roadmap also must take heed of the minimal utility of sanctions as a tactic. The crisis events of 1994 prove to be important once again in providing us lessons for today, in this case it is sanctions. The coercion of sanctions was shown to be ineffective at getting full inspections or stoppage of the nuclear program from North Korea and were closer to provoking war instead.⁵⁶ Recognizing this Jimmy Carter had remarked that, "threat of sanctions had no effect on them whatsoever, except as a pending insult, branding North Korea as an outlaw nation and their revered leader as a liar and criminal."⁵⁷ Sanctions would seem to have carried more weight as a result of domestic considerations in the U.S. context, where being branded as 'appeasers' could be politically damaging. Obama must recognize the pitfalls of sanctions by accepting that they are not the tools that political opponents make them out to be, as states such as the DPRK will be un-phased and only retrench their behaviours.

Moderation of Expectations

In a third and final item of recognition, President Obama and his North Korea team must accept the undeniable amount of work and time that will be required to recover lost ground towards rapprochement and moderate not just their own expectations, but also those within the American political discourse. The process will take "patience and flexibility," but the "best hope is a long strategy" towards North Korea.⁵⁸ When considering the long term strategy we must also remember that it will take time once a return to the economic reforms of the late-1990s starts allowing domestic North Korean society to grow and pressure their government effectively. Much work remains to be done to achieve this, Obama must abandon the idea that this

⁵⁵ Clemens, pp. 329-330.

⁵⁶ Sigal, para. p. 78.

⁵⁷ Sigal, para. p. 51.

⁵⁸ Wit (2009), p. 16; Hecker, p. 53.

may happen through isolation instead of through actively opening the regime up to the world and voice the approach domestically. This means creating structures that commit succeeding Presidents to continuation of the process, a mountain of a task but it is the linchpin for successful rapprochement.

Furthermore, regime change should not a sticking point, successful rapprochement with China and Vietnam through enhanced engagement sustained over a extended period with the existing regimes underline the misguided nature of this policy.⁵⁹ Improvements in relations and conformity to global norms did not occur overnight with these states and North Korea should not be thought of being any different. Related to this point, a black and white demonized characterization of the DPRK must be avoided, although it perpetuates abhorrent conditions within its borders, the same was true with China, Vietnam, and the USSR but cooperation beyond the black and white was where most progress occurred and in turn it opened the door to reforms.⁶⁰

Applicability of Lessons for Iran

Before ending this section there is one last issue to briefly address and that is the applicability of these experiences in approaches towards North Korea in solving the issue of Iran's ambitions for a nuclear program. Interestingly when we examine what it is that drives Iran we find that they too seek to be recognized with the respect that any other nation receives, this includes recognition of past transgressions against them such as U.S. support for Iraq in the Iran-Iraq War, and they find U.S. threats through sanctions, the 2003 invasion of Iraq, and hostility of what it considers regional 'puppets' as sources of insecurity.⁶¹ Furthermore, Iran differs from North Korea with Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, Iran's Supreme Leader, publically saying nuclear weapons are a "sin"

⁵⁹ O'Hanlon and Mochizuki, p. 15.

⁶⁰ Clemens, p. 332.

⁶¹ Nasser Hadian and Shani Hormozi, "Iran's New Security Environment Imperatives: Counter Containment or Engagement with the US," *Iranian Review of Foreign Affairs*, 1, 4 (2011), pp. 33, 35, and 42.

and un-Islamic.⁶² Although scepticism of the official rejection of nuclear weapons is understandable, it may also be an indication that Iran just wants the ability that every other state has under the NPT to produce its own nuclear power. However, an over reliance on sanctions and an escalation of tensions on both sides may embolden hardliners even more inside Iran, acting to reinforce Iran's logic for having a nuclear program and its subsequent hostile rhetoric towards America. Nasser Hadian describes the failed U.S. approaches to Iran as pushing it "into the zealous pursuit of a reactive, costly anti-U.S. Counter Containment survival strategy."⁶³

New openings for engagement with the U.S. arose during President Khomeni's tenure that included the important acknowledgement by the U.S. that actions in 1953 were "regrettable" and support for Iraq in the Iran-Iraq War was "short-sighted" and was coupled with the 1998 wrestling match between the two countries.⁶⁴ But, just as with North Korea, the Bush administration's approach failed to take advantage of previous gains towards reconciliation.

With the election of President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad the window to reconciliation closed as the president's firebrand rhetoric and harder stance to the West made U.S.-Iran relations even more difficult to recover. Recently, negotiations with Iran through the P5+1 (United States, Russia, China, Britain, France, and Germany) have seen potential in focusing on technical issues that Scot Peterson describes as being aimed at "turning recent diplomatic progress into concrete measures," certainly a realization that sanctions do not produce the gains they are purported to.⁶⁵ Additionally, Washington must take note of the upcoming elections in June of 2013 and if another window to reconciliation and engagement is on the horizon in the form of a new Iranian president the administration must not let the opportunity pass by. Failure to do so may mean that Iran will go down the same path as North Korea if relations

⁶² Scott Peterson, "Can Iran, World Powers Build on Recent Progress in Nuclear Talks?" *Christian Science Monitor*, (17 March 2013), retrieved on 22 April 2013, para. 19, <http://www.csmonitor.com/World/Middle-East/2013/0317/Can-Iran-world-powers-build-on-recent-progress-in-nuclear-talks?nav=87-frontpage-entryNineItem>.

⁶³ Hadian and Hormozi, p. 49.

⁶⁴ Ali M. Ansari, *Confronting Iran: the failure of American foreign policy and the next great crisis in the Middle East*, (New York: Basic Books, 2006), pp. 176-177.

⁶⁵ Peterson, para. 1-4.

continue to sour, a prospect that will be all the more challenging but will also require the focus on engagement that has been discussed throughout this paper.

The similarities as to the effects of hard-power tactics, such as sanctions and military might, and isolation of the state underscore the detrimental effect they have on resolving frayed relations and in pushing these states to coalesce around the notion that nuclear weapons are the one way they can assure their security, respect, and inclusion in the international discourse. It is in these ways that sustained and good-faith engagement strategies must be employed in both situations in ways that reflect North Korea and Iran's unique and separate progressions down the road of nuclear program development. The path ahead for each will be difficult as past actions have created distrust and the road itself will be a long one of patience and commitment, but patterns will need to break and societies will need to start talking.

Conclusion

If there is one main concept to remember in managing the risk of nuclear proliferation, as based off of the North Korean case, it is this, isolation begets nukes and coercive hard power tactics only exacerbate animosities creating a cycle of tensions and crisis. America along with the entire international community must embark on a path to break this cycle by actively pursuing sincere and sustained engagement through a bilateral regionally supported approach that entails a long-term strategic roadmap built to carry across succeeding administrations. Obama's second term provides the political space to pursue this approach, which is likely to be less impactful on electoral impressions than current domestic issues, however, the administration must be the first to frame it. As under Clinton, the policy focus is largest at issues close to home and this could end up working to Obama's advantage in dealing with North Korea.

Additionally, regional inclusion is a good initiative by the current administration and provides long-term strategic foresight for impending global power shifts. However, those in the administration must also realize how important bilateral relations are to North Korea, it is the path forward and not a concession. These same principals should be applied to Iran as well, the approaches deserve tailored roadmaps and knowledge of

their respective circumstances but the path forward is essentially the same. At the end of the day the international community and the Obama administration must realize, as Clemens points out, "that successful diplomacy is not a zero-sum struggle but a quest for mutual gain" and that if cruel dictatorships are willing to negotiate to "make war less likely" we should not hold back in engaging with them.⁶⁶

⁶⁶ Clemens, p. 332.

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