North Korea: Is Strategic Patience the Correct Approach?

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War in itself does not suspend political intercourse or change it into something entirely different. In essentials that intercourse continues, irrespective of the means it employs. The main lines along which military events progress, and to which they are restricted, are political lines that continue throughout the war into the subsequent peace.

—Carl von Clausewitz¹

On 17 December, 2014, Presidents Barack Obama and Raul Castro announced that the United States and Cuba would restore diplomatic ties, including a prisoner swap; travelers’ use of U.S. credit and debit cards; banks’ handling of authorized transactions; and authorization of U.S. banks to facilitate banking transactions; permission of U.S. companies to invest in Cuban small businesses; allowing U.S. insurance companies to cover health, life, and travel insurance for individuals living in or visiting Cuba.² Relationships with this island nation ninety miles off the coast of the United States had been severed since 1961. In his 2014 State of the Union Address, President Barak Obama stated, “In Cuba, we are ending a policy that was long past its expiration date. When what you’re doing doesn’t work for fifty years, it’s time to try something new.”³ Arguably, using the President’s words, the U.S. policy for North Korea is “long past its expiration date.” Certainly the “when what you’re doing doesn’t work” applies to U.S. policy in North Korea, only even more so.

East Asian security is more volatile today than it has been in recent history, with the rise of China as a potential hegemon in the region, China’s dispute with Japan in the East China Sea, the disputed waters in the South China Sea, and many other conflicts.

North Korea is floundering from a deteriorating economy, political upheaval, and its destabilizing nuclear and missile program.⁴ However, a collapse of the North Korean regime is nevertheless not likely in the near future for many reasons. Given the
likelihood that the Kim regime will not collapse, U.S. leaders must address some hard realities: Sanctions against North Korea are ineffective; the Six Party Talks have been futile; China refuses to address the menace of North Korea's nuclear weapon program; so on and so forth. At the moment, the United States is holding a policy of “strategic patience” toward the North Korea.

Strategic patience essentially means that The United States, with close consultation with allies, waits for North Korea to take steps towards denuclearization and mend relationships with South Korea, while attempting to convince China to take a tougher line on North Korea — along with applying pressure on North Korea through arms interdictions and sanctions. All of these conditions must be met before the United States will return to the Six Party Talks. However, we do not want to “buy the same horse twice.”

This policy, however, is not making positive progress. To a great extent, this policy is allowing North Korea’s threat to regional stability to grow more ominous. It is time for U.S. leaders to consider a more proactive policy to deal with North Korea.

This Strategic Research Paper offers a background review of the history and culture of the Korean Peninsula to explain how we arrived to the current policy and strategy. It discusses the role of sanctions throughout modern history, showing how they tend to be less effective than they are intended. It also explains that human rights violations and incidents have had no known lasting effect on the North Korean people. It then discusses the results of the Six-Party talks and speculates on their likely outcome. Finally, it proposes policy options that hold greater promise that the current policy of strategic patience.
History

The Choson or Yi dynasty ruled Korea since 1392, despite repeated invasions by the Japanese between 1592 and 1598. This Hermit Kingdom, as it came to be known, faced another attack by the Manchus between 1627 and 1636. These attacks resulted in bringing Korea under the Qing China’s sphere of influence well into the late-nineteenth century. This relationship with China infused Koreans with Confucian ideology. As an extension of the Qing China’s self-imposed isolation, contacts with foreigners and foreign travel to Korea were strictly forbidden.

In 1840, Edmund Roberts, appointed by President Andrew Jackson as a special envoy to the Far East, attempted to open relations with Korea through a treaty with Japan. Nothing came of this attempt and the initiative was tabled. The first conflict between the United States and Korea occurred in August of 1866. President Grant ordered the General Sherman, an armed schooner, to sail to Korea to open trade between the two countries. Then the General Sherman’s crew were killed and their bodies were mutilated.

By the late 1800s, Japan tried to dominate all of Eastern Asia by defeating all enemies in the region. In 1876, Japan diplomatically exercised its influence in the region through the Kanghwa Treaty, which designated Korea as an independent state on an equal footing with Japan. This treaty was enforced at gunpoint after the Japanese fleet sailed into Kanghwa waters and threatened to bomb Seoul. After a number of conflicts between China and Japan (1895), and Russian and Japan (Russo-Japanese war of 1904-05), Japan annexed Korea in 1910.

This annexation remained in place until the end of World War II in 1945. Many events occurred between 1945 and 1947. The United States issued General Order
number 1, which declared that U.S. forces would receive the Japanese surrender of Korea south of the 38th parallel, while the Soviet Union would take control to the north.\(^{13}\) The postwar planners intended that the division between North and South Korea would be temporary, but the U.S. planners failed to understand how the political systems worked in the region.\(^ {14}\) The United States, Great Britain, and the Soviet Union then met in Moscow to decide the fate of Korea. The U.S. negotiators advocated a four-power trusteeship for the Korean peninsula, but USSR representatives called for a U.S.-USSR commission to address the Korean situation.\(^{15}\) Then the United States decided to allow the Japanese to police South Korea. However, the U.S. way of government mystified the Koreans.\(^{16}\) Eventually, South Korea was ruled by a U.S. military government, led by Lieutenant General John Reed Hodge. The Truman Doctrine\(^{17}\) and Koreans’ desire to no longer be led by the United States or by the Japanese prompted U.S. leaders to petition the United Nations to oversee an election that would determine Korea’s future. The United Nations then established a United Nations Temporary Commission on Korea (UNTCOK); it agreed to oversee elections in the North and South in 1947 in the hopes that these elections would lead to the reunification of Korea under a democratically elected government.\(^{18}\) But the Soviet Union blocked the elections in the north, and UNTCOK reported to the General Assembly that it could not fulfill its mission. The chairman of UNTCOK optimistically remarked, “I feel that if the Koreas are left to themselves—not merely in name but in reality—they will work out their own salvation and establish their own democratic government”\(^{19}\) Nevertheless, UNTCOK returned to Korea and held an election 10 May, 1948. On 12 December, 1948, the United Nations recognized the Republic of Korea as “the only legal government”.\(^{20}\) The United States
and the United Nations eventually supported Syngman Rhee as the elected leader of the newly founded Republic of Korea (ROK).\textsuperscript{21}

In North Korea, the Soviet Union supported the Soviet trained Kim Il Sung as its inaugurated leader of the Democratic People’s Republic of Korea (DPRK) on 9 September, 1948.\textsuperscript{22}

Both Kim and Rhee were nationalists dedicated to the idea of reunification, although each ruled with a different ideological vision.\textsuperscript{23} The U.S. policy that accepted a divided North and South Korea also divided the people in South Korea who did not want a divided state. Between 1948 and 1950, there were several insurgencies inside South Korea. But with U.S. assistance, the Republic of Korea was able to quell these insurrections.\textsuperscript{24}

In 1949, under a United Nations agreement, both the Soviet Union and the United States withdrew their military forces from Korea. Then in June of 1950, North Korea invaded its southern neighbor, igniting the Korean War.

After the Armistice was signed in 1953, containment of the North Korean regime has been fairly successful. Even so, in the past 25 years the United States has made very little headway in ending the desires and aspirations of North Korea. President George H.W. Bush used what is sometimes called a carrot – and - stick technique. The carrot was a relaxation of U.S. sanctions, removal of nuclear weapons from South Korea, cancellation of U.S. and South Korea joint exercises, and normalized relationships through open dialogue with North Korea.\textsuperscript{25} The stick was North Korea’s acceptance of inspections and participation in a non-aggression pact with South Korea.
This policy seemed to be working, until 10 February, 1993, a month after Bill Clinton took office. North Korea then refused to allow inspections of certain sites. North Korea then withdrew from the treaty it had agreed to. So President Clinton launched a new series of negotiations with North Korea. In the end, the Clinton approach was similar to the previous commander in chief’s approach.

George W. Bush implemented a comprehensive approach that included “verifiable constraints on North Korean missile development, less-threatening conventional forces, and improved human rights conditions.” The entire policy towards North Korea changed after September 11, 2001. President George W. Bush made it clear in his “axis-of-evil” speech that North Korea was one of the most dangerous places on earth. The United States then assumed a more hawkish stance by developing a regional consensus-building in hopes of creating a coalition that would take down the regime if it continued to refuse to comply with international norms. This aggressive policy has recently given way to the current policy of smart power and strategic patience that involves consultations with allies and adversaries.

The Culture of the North Koreans under the Kim Dynasty

To understand the culture and the leadership in North Korea, one must understand the Juche ideology. Juche emphasizes national self-reliance, independence, and the worship of a supreme leader. Its legal reliance on Yeon-jwa-je—guilt by association—leads to massive imprisonment in political prisoner camps of up to three generations of those suspected of wrongdoing, wrong-knowledge, wrong-association, or wrong-class-background.

In an undercover report on North Korea by National Geographic Explorer, great visual insight of Juche was documented. Posing as a medical coordinator, Lisa Ling
gained access to North Korea and gained a glimpse inside North Korea. Sanduk Ruit, a Nepalese doctor, was joined by a National Geographic crew to observe the optometrist perform surgery on thousands on North Koreans. Dr. Ruit can make a small incision in his patient's eye, remove the cloudy cataract impairing her vision and replace it with an inexpensive artificial lens. Every single time the surgeon removes the gauze pad and the patient can see, the patient immediately reverts to their Juche teachings and praise the Supreme Leader for giving them the power to see. One woman is quoted saying, “Great general, I will work harder at the salt mines, to get more salt to bring you happiness.” Lisa Ling incisively observes, "I wondered which people had genuine faith, and which were acting out of fear… (In North Korea), there may not be a difference between true belief and true fear.”

North Koreans have only known three leaders in the 67 years of existence as a separate state. Because of the Juche, the three Kim’s are regarded as God-like figures who have liberated North Korea and protected the people from United States and Republic of Korea aggression. In fact, following the death of Kim Il Sung in July of 1994 and the death of Kim Jung-il in December of 2011, there was a relatively smooth transition of power. It appears that the Kim regime will remain in power.

Sanctions

The actions that President Obama initiated with Cuba on 17 December, 2014 offers a subtle, yet strong admission that sanctions simply do not work. Even so, President Obama has relied heavily on sanctions and has been able to get other world leaders to follow. Carla Anna Robbins, an adjunct senior fellow at the Council on Foreign Relations, noted:
In a world bristling with bad actors, and especially at a time when the country is wary of another war, sanctions have an obvious appeal—and limited impact. Sanctions have failed to dissuade Iran from continuing to enrich uranium. They haven’t dislodged North Korea’s repressive and erratic leaders or forced a rollback of their nuclear and missile programs. For all the international pressure on Syria’s Assad, the regime is getting more ruthless, not less, and the policy debate in Washington has moved on to how much military support to provide the rebels.33

Iranian foreign ministry spokeswoman Marzieh Akfham claims that, "The defence by the Cuban government and people of their revolutionary ideals over the past 50 years shows that policies of isolation and sanctions imposed by the major powers against the wishes of independent nations are ineffective,"34

Bruce Klingner, a senior research fellow for Northeast Asia at The Heritage Foundation’s Asian Studies Center, disagrees. He asserts that sanctions in fact do work, if applied properly and in conjunction with all the elements of nation power. Both the United Nations and the United States have warned that North Korea’s escalating nuclear and missile capabilities are a “clear threat to international peace and security.” Yet both have pursued a policy of timid incrementalism in applying targeted financial measures.35

Nonetheless, sanctions in North Korea have had a devastating effect on the people of North Korea. The latest rounds of sanction against North Korea will most likely, as Ted Galen Carpenter, a senior fellow at the Cato Institute puts it, “to join previous measures on the ash heap of failure.”36 Economic sanctions have not had the impact on the North Korean regime that the United States was seeking.37

It is estimated that about two-thirds of all sanctions have failed. To a person that sees the glass as one-thirds full, it is important to list the successful sanctions in recent history. Economic sanctions were instrumental in ending apartheid in South Africa. The
sanctions caused political unrest, economic pressures, and impetus for the anti-apartheid movement. Sanctions were also effective in Liberia, The former Yugoslavia, and Libya.

Sanctions are failing in North Korea principally because China continues to trade with North Korea and provide aid to the country. Even as China agrees to follow United Nations sanctions against North Korea, it accounts for three-quarters of the Hermit State’s total trade. Sanctioning North Korea is unlikely to be productive as long as North Korea retains China’s support. There is also a growing black market in North Korea. The United Nations has little ability to sanction non-state actors who are controlling the black market.

The bottom line is that sanctions alone will not have a lasting effect on North Korea. The state will continue to survive even with the current sanctions. The culture in North Korea, especially the Juche ideology, will make it difficult for any North Korea to change or reform internally. China will continue to openly support the regime with food and finances, even though they will publicly object to its ally’s nuclear proliferation policy.

Six Party Talks

The Six Party Talks were established in August, 2003 as a result of Pyongyang’s withdrawal from the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT). They were established through a “negotiated process involving China, the United States, North and South Korea, Japan, and Russia.” The Brookings institute states the six-party process has several mutually reinforced and mutually supported goals: (1) completing the denuclearization of the Korean peninsula; (2) formally ending the Korean War with a peace treaty; and (3) building a regional (beyond Northeast Asia) mechanism for
maintaining peace, stability and prosperity in the 21st century. Several rounds of these deliberations have not produced the results any of the parties have sought. For a historic perspective, from 2001 to 2005, the George W. Bush administration, set as a precondition to negotiations with North Korea the “complete, verifiable, irreversible dismantlement” of its nuclear program. North Korea rejected this stipulation and launched its weapons program.

The first rounds of talks occurred on 27 August, 2003 in Beijing. The initial North Korean position called for a normalization of relations and a non-aggression pact with the United States, without which, Pyongyang maintained, a dismantling of its nuclear program would be out of the question. The United States had previously rejected a proposed non-aggression pact earlier that summer and remained firm on that point during the talks. So this stumbling block precluded any substantive agreement.

The second round of talks began 25 February, 2004. North Korea offered to destroy its nuclear weapons program, but would not discontinue its peaceful nuclear activities. China and Russia supported this concession, but the United States, Japan, and South Korea insisted that the North eliminate all of its nuclear facilities and programs. U.S. officials believed that the North Korean civil nuclear program was economically impractical, so it and was likely a front for other nefarious activities.

At the third round of the Six Party Talks, held from 23-26 June, 2004, the parties stressed "the need for words for words and actions for actions." The parties "agreed in principle" that the fourth round of talks would take place in September 2004.

In early February 2005, North Korea announced that it now possessed nuclear weapons, so it would not attend future six-party talks. After talks between Christopher
Hill, a former American ambassador to South Korea who had recently become the lead United States negotiator to the Six Party talks, and Kim Kye Gwan, North Korea's deputy foreign minister, the two sides agreed on 9 July, 2005 to return to the Six Party talks.\textsuperscript{50}

After the fourth round of talks, The Bush administration issued a Six Party Joint Statement in September 2005 that provided for negotiations by “coordinated steps … in a phased manner in line with the principle of ‘commitment for commitment, action for action’.”\textsuperscript{51}

Following the fourth round of talks between China, North and South Korea, Japan, Russia, and the US, the six parties signed a statement in which North Korea promised to abandon its nuclear programs and to abide by the Nonproliferation Treaty and IAEA safeguards. Since this agreement, North Korea has not followed the landmark 2005 joint statement of principles.\textsuperscript{52} But at almost the same time, U.S. froze about $25 million of deposits Pyongyang maintained in a Macao bank for the next 20 months. After North Korea failed to live up to the joint statement of principles, The United Nations approved two sanctions against North Korea. Both United Nations Resolution 1695 and United Nations Security Council Resolution 1718 were unanimously adopted. Resolution 1695 blocks shipment of missile parts to North Korea and demands that the country halt its missile program.\textsuperscript{53} Resolution 1718 bans the transfer or sale of missiles, combat aircraft, tanks, warships, and nuclear-related products to the government of North Korea and mandates inspections of cargo going into and out of North Korea.\textsuperscript{54}

Many factors have led to the failure of the Six Party talks, but the main reason is the five parties besides North Korea all have different perspectives and goals.\textsuperscript{55} Each
country has a different approach, but the alliances most likely join Russia, China, and North Korea on one side, with Japan, South Korea, and the United States on the other side.

**The United States**

The U.S. policy towards North Korea had been announced by Secretary of State Hillary Clinton; it was called “strategic patience”; it had been tested since this new approached was laid out. Since Hillary Clinton first mention of this policy in October of 2009, North Korea has launched missiles, conducted a second nuclear test, seized a pair of U.S. journalists, sunk a South Korean warship, killing 46 sailors, performed a cyber-attack on Sony, and has executed opposing members of its own regime.

Glyn Davies, Special Representative for North Korea Policy reaffirmed the policy, “We seek a solution to the North Korea nuclear challenge through peaceful, persistent, multilateral diplomacy.” Indeed, many political pundits think President Obama is working a deal behind closed doors with both Iran and North Korea. After the release of political prisoner Jeffrey E. Fowle, it appeared as though either bilateral talks or multilateral talks were possible. Then, more sanctions were issued against North Korea after the Sony cyber-attack; North Korea responded by testing a new precision-guided missile.

The Obama administration has taken a soft power approach, and has shown some willingness to participate in Six Party Talks. In December 2014, John Kerry optimistically reported, “We hope that the dynamics can develop in the next weeks, months perhaps, where we could get back to (Six Party) talks…and the United States is absolutely prepared to do that.” But the current position is clear: There will be no return to negotiations unless Pyongyang commits to relinquishing its nuclear arsenal. As
recently as February, 2015, the Obama administration stressed the goal of
denuclearization. “No threat poses as grave a danger to our security and well-being as
the potential use of nuclear weapons and materials by irresponsible states or terrorists.
We therefore seek the peace and security of a world without nuclear weapons” \(^{58}\). Then,
the National Security Strategy specifically names North Korea and its nuclear ambitions,
“Our commitment to the denuclearization of the Korean Peninsula is rooted in the
profound risks posed by North Korean weapons development and proliferation” \(^{59}\). Given
such strong statements, it is doubtful the United States will change the policy in North
Korea for the remainder of the Obama administration. North Korea’s resolve to its
nuclear weapons has become a non sequitur.

**Russia**

Russia supports a strategy that will leave things as they are. Russia hopes the
Six Party Talks will eventually evolve into a multiparty security and cooperation system
that includes a peaceful North Korea. \(^{60}\) However, Russia believes that North Korea’s
development of nuclear weapons “deals a severe blow to the nuclear nonproliferation
regime, which can have dangerous consequences for Russian security both in the Far
East and quite distant areas.” \(^{61}\) But Russia not oppose light water construction. Like
China, Russia is also concerned about regime change because of the potential for a
massive flow of North Korean refugees into their county. These refugees would
“threaten their internal security, and possibly threaten their own political stability.” \(^{62}\)
Russia also wants to reassert its political influence in Northeast Asia. For years, Russia
has invested time and toil in the region. So Russia must balance its focus on
denuclearization and avoiding regime change. Of these two choices, Russian would
most likely accept North Korea as a nuclear power. Although it has traditionally been
against harsh sanctions, based on fears of regime collapse, Russian ultimately backed United Nations sanctions against North Korea.63 “In Northeast Asia, even a nuclear-armed North Korea may not be totally unpalatable as long as Russia is able to retain influence over the regime.”64 Finally, Russia supports a normalization between North Korea and the United States and the other six party nations.65

China

China is North Korea's most important ally, its biggest trading partner, and its main source of food, arms, and energy.66 For these reasons, it is doubtful that China will turn its back on North Korea. What is in doubt, though, is to what level China will support North Korea in a war of aggression that North Korea has started. Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi has warned its ally: "We oppose provocative words and actions from any party in the region and do not allow trouble making on China's doorstep."67

North Korea and China are joined in a pact called “The 1961 Sino-North Korean Treaty of Friendship, Cooperation, and Mutual Assistance.” This agreement obligates China to defend North Korea against unprovoked aggression.68 But Jaewoo Choo, assistant professor of Chinese foreign policy at Kyung Hee University in South Korea, has observed in Asian Survey that "China conceives itself to have the right to make an authoritative interpretation of the principle for intervention…China now places more value on national interest, over alliances blinded by ideology."69

China supports many of the same things that Russia supports and often for the same reasons. China has the same fear of a massive influx of refugees caused by a war, regime collapse, or regime change. "For the Chinese, stability and the avoidance of
war are the top priorities,” asserts Daniel Sneider, the associate director for research at Stanford’s Asia-Pacific Research Center.70

Geographically, North Korea serves as a buffer between China and the U.S. forces stationed in South Korea. A united Korea would most likely result in a Korea that supports the United States. Despite their close relationship, China still supported the latest United Nation sanctions against North Korea. (United Nations Resolution 1695 and United Nations Security Council Resolution 1718).

Japan

Japan’s strategy in the region and its position in the Six Party Talks is simple: Transform North Korea through a regime change. Japanese leaders seek a united Korea under South Korean. Japan wants to accomplish this end through tougher sanctions. Japan thus advocates a "comprehensive solution to issues of nuclear arms, missiles, and abductions."71

Japan believes that North Korea’s missile launches could potentially reach Japan; it also views the Six Party Talks as a forum for negotiating a resolution to the abduction of Japanese citizens by North Korean spies in the 1970s and 1980s. This issue remains a divisive point in U.S.-Japan relations, as Tokyo has urged wanted Washington not to remove North Korea from its State Sponsors of Terrorism list until the issue has been resolved.72

Japan became even more concerned about its own security after the North Korean test of a Taepondong missile that actually flew over or near Japan.73 Japan’s also fears that a nuclear-armed North Korea will increase its aggressive posture. North Korea has already fired a missile over Japan, taken Japanese citizens as hostages,
aggressively entered Japanese waterways aggressively, and committed other aggressive actions.

This on-going threat makes it difficult for Japan to take any other position except regime change. Japan, Russia, China, and South Korea all share close proximity to North Korea, but Japan gains some security from the buffer of the Sea of Japan, or the East Sea. The Korean Peninsula is separated by 120 miles from Japan, across the Korean Straits. This creates a natural buffer between the two lands; it reduces the threat of Korean refugees flowing into Japan. Their cultural separation is far greater: Nothing could be more alien to modern Japanese democracy than North Korea’s Juche ideology. With its fear of a more aggressive North Korea, it is unlikely Japan will change its policy of regime change and transforming North Korea into a unified Korea.

**South Korea**

The goal of South Korea at the Six-Party talks is the denuclearization and reunification of the Korean peninsula. South Korea also wants to liberalize North Korea’s decrepit economy through greater financial engagement in order to offset anticipated cost of reunification.74

Arguably, the most powerful U.S. ally in the region is South Korea. For years, U.S. Forces have been stationed on the peninsula along the demilitarization zone that serves as a buffer between the two countries. In 2008, South Korea adopted a tougher stance against North Korea, and it has maintained a hard-line approach against North Korea. In 2008, South Korean believed the Kim regime was vulnerable, so a hard-line approach would trigger North Korea to change and it would spark an internal regime change.75 However, this hard-line approach has done little to deter North Korea: It has continued to develop capabilities; it has cyber-attacked it has killed South Korean
tourists; it sank a South Korean warship; it has cyber-attacked one the world’s largest companies, Sony.

There was a time, however, when South Korea attempted to create what was called a Korean Economic Community and pursue the “Sunshine Policy”. These two initiatives were crafted to provide economic cooperation and to set the conditions for reunification. Despite the failures of these South Korean initiatives for greater engagement with the North, Chung-In Moon argues South Korea needs to restore the Sunshine Policy up again. In *The Sunshine Policy: In Defense of Engagement as a Path to Peace in Korea*, Moon defends “the logic of the sunshine policy” and calls for its revival. Moon additionally demonstrates that “every other option — military pressure, containment, and waiting for the regime in Pyongyang to collapse — has failed.” In fact, since the end of the Sunshine Policy, North Korea has behaved even more aggressively towards South Korea. On 26 March, 2010 North Korea sunk the ROK Navy ship *Cheonan* as it was conducting a routine mission in the vicinity of Baengnyeong Island. North Korea denies its involvement, but an investigation conducted by South Korean, U.S., Swedish, British and Australian officials concluded that it was the work of North Korea.

John Hemmings, a fellow at the Pacific Forum, CSIS, in Honolulu believes that a return to the “Sunshine Policy” failed for two reasons. First, the Sunshine Policy never linked warmer relations to nuclear proliferation or human rights. “While Seoul operated under Kim and Roh’s liberal policies, the North continued to build up its military, withdrew from the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (2003), tested a nuclear device (2006), continued research and development on its short-range and long-range missile
program, and withdrew from the Six-Party Talks (2007).” Second, the Sunshine Policy assumes that market reforms will be followed by political liberalization:

Those who wish to rely on the liberal assumption are overlooking not only the unintended consequences, but also the fundamental nature of the regime. The Kim family derives its support from a uniquely Korean nationalist ideology, Juche (Self-reliance), adopted and upheld by the military. According to North Korea’s highest-ranking defector, Hwang Jang-yop, the regime derives its support from the military, with the implicit promise that the state’s ultimate purpose is to unify Korea. Would the regime jettison this belief simply because there was more money in the bank?

Without doubt a regime change would likely trigger a huge influx of refugees into South Korea, which would certainly impact the South Korean economy. With China’s agreement with North Korea to return refugees to North Korea, the flow would be redirected from the north to the south.

In the end, South Korea has to most to gain from a unified North Korea. The economic burden of maintaining a ready military along with the reality that Seoul is the main target of any attack that North Korea would launch makes South Korea the region’s greatest stakeholder.

Options

If the United States continues its policy to denuclearize North Korea, then there are a number of strategy options the United States can take against North Korea that support this policy. The first option is to launch an “Iraqi Freedom” type of attack against North Korea. Another option is to position hundreds of thousands of troops on the Korean border as a constant and persistent show of force. A third option is to continue to rely on strategic patience.

The ends of current U.S. security policy are to protect the homeland, to build security globally, to project power, and to win. The ways to achieve these goals will be
to employ all elements of national power, including diplomacy, economics, military, information dissemination, intelligence, financing, and enforcing legal mandates of the United Nations. The means must address the reality of reduced resources and uncertain congressional intent. So fiscal uncertainty impacts capability, capacity, and readiness. All three of these must be acknowledged in a risk assessment that includes making sure the policy is feasible, acceptable, and suitability.

Perhaps after a full evaluation, a new policy that does not set a goal of a nuclear-free North Korea is the better option. This policy would include much of the same thinking of the last 25 years, but it would recognize North Korea’s sovereignty and culminate the armistice with a bilateral peace treaty with North Korea.

The New Policy

Each administration in the past 25 years has taken different approaches to resolving the persistent problem posed by North Korea. The current policy of a rebalance to the Pacific has emerged as the top U.S. international priority:

The United States has been and will remain a Pacific power. Over the next 5 years, nearly half of all growth outside the United States is expected to come from Asia. That said, the security dynamics of the region—including contested maritime territorial claims and a provocative North Korea—risk escalation and conflict.\textsuperscript{82}

Recall that strategic patience in close consultations with our six-party allies and adversaries basically conveys that the United States could afford to wait for North Korea to denuclearize. But North Korea has made its decision: It is a nuclear state. Sanctions appear to be harming those that need the most help, but not the regime. The black market and China’s assistance have rendered the sanctions as futile. The commonality of the policy approaches over the last four U.S. administrations has been goals of regime collapse and denuclearization. Over those 25 years, the Kim dynasty has
continued to maintain control of its people; it continues to punish those that do not follow the Juche. There is no hard evidence that the military is failing. In fact, the patience of the world’s hegemonic power is emboldening the North’s new western educated leader, Kim Jung-Un. The United States should abandon these two lofty policy objectives.

Since 1948, there have been three leaders of the Hermit Society. All indications are that even though there are ebbs and flows within the regime, the people of North Korea, either out of respect or fear, have accepted the Juche philosophy. In one of the most revealing interviews in the undercover report of North Korea by National Geographic Explorer, Lisa Ling queried a North Korean guard who had defected to South Korea. During the interview, he is brought to tears only once—when asked about how his family will suffer. The guard knew that his whole family, through three generations, would be punished. They would be subjected to Yeon-jwa-je, guilt by association. No sanctions or demands for “denuking” can overcome the oppression of Yeon-jwa-je.

There are two facts that U.S. leaders may need to accept: North Korea is a country with nuclear capabilities and the prospects of internal regime change are not likely. Next, sanctions are ineffective in getting North Korea to submit to an unrealistic goal. Its people are dying, and they are dying at an alarming rate. The blame for these deaths, in the eyes of the North Korea populous, is not because of their beloved father. The reason people are dying, in their opinion, is because of the oppression of the Americans. The over-riding goal of the United States needs to be peace and stability. Pursuing a goal that guarantees peace and stability—and not complete, verifiable, and irreversible destruction of the North Korean weapons program—may be the best way to overcome the regime’s destructive human rights activities.
First, the United States must normalize relationships with North Korea. North Korea has diplomatic relations with most nations. The latest count includes 160 nations, including most European nations, with the notable exception of France. Normalization means opening of a U.S. embassy in North Korea, inviting North Korea to open an embassy in Washington D.C. Normal relations will lead to establishment of bi-lateral, open lines of communications. Perhaps increasing the bilateral talks is a better approach than the futile Six Party Talks that thus far have provided nothing more than a sounding board for North Korean issues. This step sounds very much like the Cuban plan, because it is also the first step of the Cuban plan. Continuing to ignore the fact that North Korea is in fact a state is only widening the divide between the two states; it is accomplishing very little both inside North Korea and internationally. Currently, we refuse to recognize North Korea as a state. Establishment and recognition of North Korea as a state is a much needed first step.

Next the U.S. should abandon its hope for regime collapse. Regime change is simply unlikely. Kim Jung-un has been in power for three years, and this “Supreme Commander” has shown great resolve in keeping the Hermit Empire intact. Many experts predict regime change, but these experts may be more hopeful than realistic: ideology trumps practicality. The North Korean people believe that the western world is the source of all ills within their country. Juche is alive and well, more powerful from day to day. But this reality does not justify this oppressive ideology, nor does it mean the United States should consider it an established religion. However, the Kim Dynasty is in power. It will stay in power long after the current administration.
Third, North Korea has nuclear weapons and they are not going to give those weapons up. *The North Korea Nuclear Futures Project* warns that North Korea’s nuclear stockpile could grow from roughly 10-16 nuclear weapons it currently has to 100 by the year 2020. Much North Korean blood, sweat, and resources have been dedicated to establishing themselves as a nuclear power. Any policy that rest on a non-negotiable demand that North Korea must abandon its nuclear program is a non-starter. More importantly, North Korea’s nuclear capabilities must be contained and brought into the regulatory regime. North Korea sees the United States as a nuclear nation that is fully capable and willing to attack North Korea. The United States must eliminate its demand of complete, verifiable, and irreversible destruction of North Korea’s nuclear weapons program. A better policy is containment supported by a bi-lateral non-proliferation treaty. The United States should not reward North Korea for successfully producing weapons but should not further isolate this beleaguered state. Sales of nuclear weapons to North Korean proxies are much more dangerous than the current situation.

Finally, we need to seek an end to the Korea conflict. The current armistice should not be prolonged. A bilateral peace treaty between the United States and North Korea would symbolically end the war and would facilitate more open conversations. This would also serve to reduce hostilities between the two countries. Further, it would remove a rationale for North Korea’s nuclear proliferation. A bilateral end of hostilities between the United States and North Korea would symbolically level the playing field in the eyes of the North Korean regime.

The greatest obstacle to this entire policy change will be the U.S. political culture. The president who launches it will be scorned. A jingoistic legislature will decry it as a
cop out. Some Americans will hate it; others will laud it. Members of Congress would face their constituents’ ire if they were to introduce legislation that suggested normalizing relationships with a nuclear North Korea. Also, the ripple effect would be felt in Iran as that third leg of the axis of evil would chime in, as they did after the president’s Cuban plan. Democrats and Republicans would have to work together in supporting this new policy. Admittedly, this is not very likely. The Hawks would insist on containing and ending the nuclear threat, claiming that the irreversible destruction of North Korea’s nuclear weapons is the only way we can deal with North Korea. Anything short of this would be a policy of appeasement. The Doves, on the other hand, think the sanctions are the answer. The middle ground is hard to define. But it is hard to deny this assertion: “what you have been doing has not worked for 60 plus years, it’s time to try something new.”

Conclusion

North Korea poses a wicked problem. And it is not going away anytime soon. Since the 1953 armistice was signed, North Korea has been one of the U.S. most dangerous and unpredictable foreign policy issues. Peace, security, and economic prosperity in Northeast Asia are vital interests of the United States. As the Hermit Kingdom continues to starve its people and develop nuclear weapons, strategic patience appears to be working in favor of North Korea. Operation Iraqi Freedom taught us one major lesson: regime change is hard and expensive. Constantly showing our might may not be the best policy in Northeast Asia. The United States is obviously the most powerful, most generous, and most caring country in the world. The problem in North Korea, above all other problems, is its culture and the power of its Juche ideology. Open recognition, multilateral talks with a greater international range, and a shift from
unrealistic, unobtainable goals focused on denuclearization to goals focused on recognition and negotiation on ending the armistice and focusing on peace and stability is the most promising direction the United States needs to take.

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