

Obama, Trump, Clinton & The Korean Peninsula

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Introduction

2016 has already been a year of significant events on the Korean peninsula. January 6th saw North Korea conduct its fourth nuclear test, the deployment of the controversial American THAAD (Terminal High Altitude Area Defence) missile defence system in South Korea was announced in July, and numerous North Korean missile tests have occurred throughout the year so far. However, one of the most noteworthy events of the year, for both sides of the 38th parallel, may in fact take place far from the Korean peninsula; the U.S. presidential election. Both North and South Korean citizens and governments will be watching with a keen interest when American voters go to the polls on November 8th.

Relations between the two Koreas stand at a frosty impasse amid heavy American, South Korean and international sanctions aimed at North Korea (UN Security Council Resolution 2270) in relation to its latest nuclear test and a long-range missile launch in February. The U.S.-South Korean alliance is as strong as ever, while North Korea stands in international isolation as U.S.-North Korean relations and inter-Korean dialogue both appear to be non-existent. The rising tension between the U.S. and China, particularly over the issue of deploying THAAD in South Korea, as well as South Korean unease with an Abe-led revisionist and nationalistic Japan, further exacerbate this hostile dynamic in East-Asia.

After years of the 'Strategic Patience' and 'Pivot to Asia' policies of the Obama administration, North Korea has been given time to develop its nuclear weapons program; unchecked and unchallenged. The standard U.S. (and South Korean) response to North Korea during under this policy has been to ignore any calls for dialogue or deals from Kim Jong-Un's regime, and instead insist on denuclearization as a pre-condition for talks, ramp up the pressure, and apply heavy sanctions. None of these measures have so far induced any change in the North's outlook on its nuclear program, its relations with its southern neighbours and the U.S, nor its place within the international society. Surely whoever assumes the U.S. presidency has to come up with a new policy regarding North Korea in order to make any inroads towards peace on the Korean peninsula. The status quo suggests Washington and Seoul are suffering with a 'Pyongyang fatigue' induced hangover that is far from conducive to cracking the North Korean nuclear issue or bringing North Korea back in from the cold and into the international community.

Amid these circumstances, many on the Korean peninsula have been keenly observing, questioning and wondering what the impact a potential Trump or Clinton presidency may have here. In this essay we will examine what effect Obama's presidency has had, what a Trump or Clinton presidency would mean for the Korean peninsula, whether diplomacy with North Korea really is off the table and what options are available to the future president.

Obstacles to Peace on the Korean Peninsula

Before examining how Clinton or Trump may go about de-escalating the threat from North Korea and working towards building peace on the Korean peninsula, it's important to examine the current situation on the peninsula and the big obstacles that currently stand in the way of progress and peace in this corner of East Asia.

The future president is going to have his/her hands full when it comes to trying to subdue the threat emanating from Pyongyang. The secretive regime has proven to be a difficult negotiation partner, has a long history of provocative acts and bellicose rhetoric, and has an awful human rights record which oppresses its long-suffering people. Add to this decades of mutual mistrust, failed deals and severe sanctions against North Korea, and you start to get an idea of why Washington and Seoul have had such little contact with Pyongyang, and how the yawning chasm between the two Koreas has widened to the extent that it has. While The Republic of Korea (R.O.K.) has actively joined in the international stage since the barbed wire boundary along the DMZ was erected, The Democratic People's Republic of Korea (D.P.R.K.) has been isolated, fending off foreign intervention for over six decades.

The old custom of nations building borders and walls, of isolationism and protectionism, that we once thought gone is now getting salient around the world. North Korea has been the one major actor among others which opted to lock their borders, but the U.S., the very nation once proclaimed as the 'world police', is swinging her pendulum of foreign policy from isolation to engagement, as seen in the normalization of U.S.-Cuban relations in 2015 and the Iranian nuclear deal of 2014 (Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action). However, the U.S. has yet to extend this policy of engagement towards the D.P.R.K. As a result, Kim Jong-un's regime has been free to develop his nation's military potency and weapons technology. The lack of dialogue between Washington-Pyongyang, and Seoul-Pyongyang, combined with the recent U.S.-R.O.K. decision to deploy THAAD in South Korea, as well as the trilateral military intelligence sharing pact between Japan-R.O.K.-U.S., has left Pyongyang feeling more targeted, threatened and vulnerable. Further aggravating the D.P.R.K.'s feelings of susceptibility is the annual joint-U.S.-R.O.K. military drills held in South Korea. Pyongyang has long held the belief that these drills are a rehearsal for an invasion of their country. Similarly, events such as last year's landmine incident in which two South Korean conscripts were maimed, as well as the sinking of South Korean vessel, the Cheonan, and the shelling of Yeonpyeong Island, both in 2010, have left Seoul unsure of its

safety. This has seen South Korea harden its stance further towards its northern neighbour, as well as upping its military capability to deal with the threats originating from the North.

All of the above has left the U.S.-R.O.K. and the D.P.R.K. fearful of each other, each side determined that the other cannot be trusted and that the ramping up of military defensive options is a necessity. This has left the prospect of peace on the Korean peninsula seem light years away. Additionally, these issues have given Kim Jong-un more reason to think he needs to further strengthen his nation's weapons capability. Feelings of insecurity, as well as a deteriorating relationship with Beijing, have also forced the D.P.R.K. to become even more insular and have heightened the belief that the isolated nation can only expect to rely on itself. Uri-kkiri or Juche, meaning self-reliance, two of the main national political philosophies of North Korea, happen to share certain similarities with Trump campaign's slogan: 'America First' (more on this to follow). North Korea's philosophy of self-reliance is undoubtedly centered around, dependant on and empowered by its nuclear weapons program, which is also key to its regime survival, its national defence and a crucial bargaining chip.

The North Korean Nuclear Program

Of all the problems that stand in the way of progress towards better relations and peace between the the two Koreas, and North Korea and the rest of the world, the North's nuclear program is by far the most crucial issue. The central role of nuclear weapons was highlighted by current leader Kim Jong-un, who came to power in 2011, in his Byungjin policy; announced in March 31st, 2013. The Byungjin policy emphasizes parallel economic development and nuclear capability, with a specific focus on improving the living standards of North Koreans. Byungjin is not a new or novel policy but rather is a reboot of a policy developed by the current leader's grandfather, Kim Il-sung. Kim Jong-un's decision to re-launch his grandfather's policy suggests that he is keen to highlight his intent to continue the nuclear program that has been the spine of the Kim Dynasty's reign in North Korea. The original Byungjin line of 1962 was a policy which attempted to achieve parallel economic development and conventional military buildup. The recent version of this policy differs from the original policy in that Kim Jong-un blurs the line of nuclear power for peaceful uses and weaponry purposes, as well as pulling focus away from conventional military, instead focusing all attention on nuclear might. This latest edition of the Byungjin policy highlights Pyongyang's determination to pursue its nuclear weapons program. North Korea's determination to cling on to and further develop its nuclear weapons program has been one of the toughest challenges for the U.S. and the international community as a whole to try and deal with. This problem was further exacerbated when North Korea officially declared itself as a nuclear state as part of a constitutional renewal on April 13th, 2012. Several foreign experts, such as Larry Moffitt, have also expressed this belief. In the next section we look at how the current U.S. administration has attempted to tackle this problem.

Obama's Approach to North Korea

The outgoing President, Barack Obama, initially hinted towards a willingness to engage with North Korea during his presidential campaign in 2007: "We tried not talking to North Korea, and they now have enough material for 6 to 8 more nuclear weapons." (Obama, B., 2007b). Also in 2007, Obama lamented the Bush administration's overly punitive approach towards Pyongyang: "the notion that somehow not talking to countries is punishment to them—which has been the guiding diplomatic principle of [the Bush] administration—is ridiculous." (Obama, B., 2007a). Again, during his inaugural address in 2009, Obama outlined his willingness to speak to 'rogue nations': "To those who cling to power through corruption and deceit and the silencing of dissent, know that you are on the wrong side of history, but that we will extend a hand if you are willing to unclench your fist." (Obama, B., 2009a)

However, this openness to engagement with states like North Korea very quickly shifted to a hard-line stance after Pyongyang launched a satellite in April 2009, just three months after Obama's inauguration. This incident drew international concern that the launch was to test technology that could later be used for intercontinental ballistic missiles. Obama, speaking in Prague just hours after North Korea's aforementioned missile test, articulated his new tough stance on North Korea as such:

"North Korea broke the rules once again by testing a rocket that could be used for long range missiles. This provocation underscores the need for action...Rules must be binding. Violations must be punished. Words must mean something...Now is the time for a strong international response, and North Korea must know that the path to security and respect will never come through threats and illegal weapons...And that's why we must stand shoulder to shoulder to pressure the North Koreans to change course." (Obama, B., 2009b)

Further missile launches in 2013 and 2016, as well as North Korea's second, third and fourth nuclear tests, in May of 2009, February of 2013 and January of 2016 respectively, as well as the aforementioned Cheonan and Yeonpyeong Island incidents in 2010, only further solidified President Obama's belief that a tough approach on Pyongyang was the way to go. This new inflexible approach resulted in two new policies; 'Strategic Patience'; directed at North Korea, and the 'Pivot to Asia'; aimed at the wider Asia Pacific area.

The 'Pivot to Asia', which began in the fall of 2011, is a signatory foreign policy of the Obama administration which hones in on the Asia Pacific region. Notably, this policy was the brain-child of then Secretary of State Hillary Clinton. This geostrategic policy was intended to expand and reaffirm the U.S. relations with countries in the region. This policy marks a change in the weight of focus and the balance of resources away from the Middle East, inherited from the Bush

administration, toward the Asia Pacific region. Rebalancing encompasses not only military factors but also a range of issues including economic cooperation for example the TPP (Trans-Pacific Partnership).

As part of the wider reaching 'Pivot to Asia', the Obama administration has also introduced the so-called 'Strategic Patience' policy aimed at North Korea. The policy signals that North Korea should turn back to the table first to thaw frosty relations with the U.S. and other international partners, including its neighbors South Korea. Therefore, the Obama administration is asserting that a North Korean nuclear freeze is a prerequisite for any possible dialogues or deals with the U.S. The reasoning behind this policy is centered on the myth of the collapse of North Korea, which is easy to describe as naïve and wishful thinking on behalf of Washington and Seoul as well. Tim Beal, the author of the book *North Korea: The Struggle against American Power* (London: Pluto, 2005) criticized this approach to North Korea thusly; "Obama has used the collapse myth as an excuse for inaction – the policy of strategic patience." (Beal, T., 2016) Beal's belief that 'Strategic Patience' has in effect been to do nothing vis-à-vis North Korea is widely echoed by experts, such as Jong-kun Choi of Yonsei University or James E. Goodby and Donald Gross of the Brookings Institute. 'Strategic Patience' has done nothing but given North Korea more time to develop its nuclear weapons and pushed the chance of resuming talks or making a breakthrough with Pyongyang further and further away from reality. There are numerous pieces of evidence of the failure of 'Strategic Patience' to make progress on the North Korean nuclear issue.

The first and most prominent example of the failure of 'Strategic Patience' is that we have seen three North Korean nuclear tests during Obama's presidency; in 2009, 2013 and 2016. Secondly, the Leap Day Agreement of 2012 could have spelt a significant breakthrough on the North Korean nuclear issue, however it failed to last even two months. Under the terms of the deal the U.S. would provide North Korea with 240,000 tons of food aid in exchange for the North's "commitment to denuclearization" as well as a "moratorium on long-range missile launches, nuclear tests and nuclear activities at Yongbyon, including uranium enrichment activities." The agreement also would see the "return of IAEA inspectors to verify and monitor the moratorium on uranium enrichment activities at Yongbyon and confirm the disablement of the 5-MW reactor and associated facilities." (The U.S. Department of State Press, 2012) After the North conducted a rocket launch on April 13th, 2012, just 45 days after the signing of the Leap Day Agreement, Obama's tolerance for, and trust in North Korea seemingly ran out. The North claimed the rocket launch was a satellite for peaceful purposes, the U.S. claimed it was a long-range missile. (The White House Press, 2012). After this event the Obama administration seemed to believe that trust-building and negotiating with North Korea was simply no longer a viable option. Undoubtedly Pyongyang is not the easiest negotiation partner, however was all hope lost after this missile launch? Could a diplomatic solution really not been found? The breakdown of the Leap Day Agreement ironically seems to show that 'Strategic Patience' was lacking in its key ingredient; patience. Symptoms of Washington/Obama's "Pyongyang Fatigue"

provide a third example of 'Strategic Patience' taking backward steps on the North Korean nuclear. On January 16th, just 10 days after its fourth nuclear test, the D.P.R.K. offered the U.S. a deal whereby the North would freeze any further nuclear development, in exchange for the U.S. cancelling its joint military drills with South Korea. This can be interpreted as a sign that North Korea was willing to return to negotiations on its nuclear program. However, the offer was turned down by the U.S. within a matter of hours. By design or by circumstance, Obama has ended up doing the opposite of the plans he laid out during his presidential campaign and early days in office, and has in effect replicated the past mistakes of the Bush regime that he was so critical of. The policy of 'Strategic Patience' has been marked by a pessimistic attitude towards a diplomatic solution for dealing with Pyongyang, as well as a lack of political will required to tackle the Kim regime. It's clear that the next president, be it Clinton or Trump, will need to show far more political will to crack the North Korean dilemma and will need to come up with an alternative approach.

Trump & Clinton's Potential Policies on North Korea

1. Hillary Clinton

Having examined the status quo between North Korea and the U.S. under the outgoing Obama administration, the key question is what would a Trump or Clinton administration do to resolve the North Korean nuclear situation and work towards peace on the Korean peninsula?

In the case of Hillary Clinton, many political observers expect her to continue on with Obama's policy of 'Strategic Patience' and his stance of pressure and sanctions to force North Korea to fall in line. Hillary Clinton was one of the major players in the Obama administration, and served as Secretary of State. She has vigorously championed liberal values; freedom, civil rights, equal rights, and beyond. However, when it comes to foreign policy, she is often perceived as hawkish and a hard-liner who strongly believes in military solutions over diplomatic solutions to deal with various complicated international problems. On top of that, her close advisers, such as Wendy Sherman, the would-be next Secretary of State, keenly subscribe to the notion that Pyongyang would automatically collapse. This raises serious concerns that no matter how dearly she upholds liberal values in domestic issues, she may attempt to resolve international issues by embracing non-liberal means, or even military solutions, such as drone attacks and boots on the ground. If she were to employ that tactic on the Korean peninsula she could heighten the already tense mood and further exacerbate inter-Korean relations, as well as U.S.-North Korean relations. Given North Korea's already deep running mistrust of the United States, not to mention Pyongyang's established nuclear weapons program, this tactic would have to be considered highly risky.

Clinton's hawkish leanings outlined above explain her recent addresses touting the necessity of the U.S. Missile Defense system and its importance on the Korean peninsula, as well as emphasizing the importance of the U.S.-R.O.K.-Japan trilateral alliance:

"When I was Secretary of State, we worked closely with our allies Japan and South Korea to respond to this [North Korean] threat, including by creating a missile defense system that stands ready to shoot down a North Korean warhead...The technology is ours. Key parts of it are located on Japanese ships. All three countries contributed to it. And this month, all three of our militaries will run a joint drill to test it." (Clinton, H., 2016)

One such missile defence system that Clinton was talking about is the soon-to-be deployed THAAD missile defence system, which has already provoked heightened political and military tension from Beijing and Pyongyang. THAAD is currently a highly controversial issue in South Korea and China. The U.S. and South Korea recently announced on July 8th it would be deploying THAAD in South Korea to deal with the threat of incoming North Korean missiles. China has been vehemently against THAAD's deployment in the area as it fears it will be deployed, not to deal with North Korea, but in fact as an attempt by Washington to curb China's rise. These fears seem to have some validity as the THAAD system comes with an X-band radar which has a radius of over 1000kms; which would penetrate into China if deployed in South Korea. The chances of Clinton fulfilling her desire to get China on-board when it comes to sanctions and pressure aimed at Kim Jong-un's regime will surely take a significant hit after the deployment of THAAD in South Korea, and the significant effect it will have on China-U.S. relations. Several experts have even stated their belief that episodes such as THAAD serve as a microcosm of a wider pattern of rising tension between the U.S. and China. Joel Wit, a Senior Fellow at the US-Korea Institute, commented:

"While the deployment of THAAD is a necessary measure given the growth of North Korea's nuclear and missile inventories, this step is only likely to widen the gap between the United States and China over a strategy to deal with the dangers posed by North Korea. It is essential that Washington and Beijing find cooperative paths forward, or else regional tensions are only likely to increase." (38 North, 2016)

Consequently, the U.S. has been looking to bolster its presence in the East Asian region and reinforce its alliances with its traditional regional partners; South Korea and Japan. As a result of this regrouping of old allies, we are now left with a formulating new-Cold War bloc divide of the U.S., South Korea and Japan on one side and China, North Korea and Russia on the other.

Therefore, it is not an exaggeration to say that if Hillary Clinton, as the president of the U.S., were to pursue the hardline policy towards North Korea that many expect she will, she could bring much more tension on the Korean peninsula under the name of reaffirming alliances between the U.S. and South Korea. Additionally, Clinton's steadfast determination that sanctions and pressure will force Pyongyang into either changing its course or collapsing has

been tried multiple times by previous hard-line presidents, both South Korean and American. Reviewing tough North Korean policies of the past, such as the 'Vision 3000: Denuclearization and Openness' policy of President Lee Myung-Bak, George W. Bush's labelling of North Korea as part of the so-called "axis of evil", show that hopes of a Pyongyang collapse are, at best, optimistic, and at worst, delusional. Similarly, sanctions and pressure being the vehicles towards better Washington-Pyongyang relations, and a peace and a nuclear-free Korean peninsula have proven to be fruitless multiple times in the past.

Conversely, Clinton may prove to be less predictable than many assume and choose to consider a path of engagement with North Korea. This of course hinges on if Pyongyang shows serious signs of willingness to work towards denuclearization, or if Pyongyang wracks up the tension and plays the brinkmanship card. Though It is hard to arrive at the conclusion that Hillary Clinton holds a dovish stance toward North Korea, she has been keen on to seek 'smart diplomacy' rather than 'bombing the hell out of ISIS' as Trump said to stun the public (Trump, D. 2015c). At the very early stage of Obama administration, then Secretary Clinton hinted her government's seeming willingness to engage in talks with Pyongyang:

"We will need to work together to address the most acute challenge to stability in Northeast Asia, North Korea's nuclear program. The Obama Administration is committed to working through the Six-Party Talks, and I will discuss with South Korea, Japan, and China how best to get the negotiations back on track. We believe we have an opportunity to move these discussions forward, but it is incumbent upon North Korea to avoid any provocative action and unhelpful rhetoric toward South Korea.

The North Korean Government has committed to abandoning all nuclear weapons and to return at an early date to the Treaty on Nonproliferation of Nuclear Weapons. We continue to hold them to those commitments. If North Korea is genuinely prepared to completely and verifiably eliminate their nuclear weapons program, the Obama Administration will be willing to normalize bilateral relations, replace the peninsula's longstanding armistice agreements with a permanent peace treaty, and assist in meeting the energy and other economic needs of the North Korean people." (Clinton, H. 2009)

Additional reasons for optimism that a Clinton presidency could make a positive impact vis-a-vis North Korea, is the fact that she has much more pragmatic and clear judgement on foreign relations and understanding of international history than her rival Donald Trump. The former Secretary is an experienced politician not an extreme/fanatic populist i.e. Trump. While Hillary seems unlikely to follow in the footsteps of her husband Bill, who engaged with North Korea to defuse a nuclear crisis in the 1990s, she does acknowledges America's position on the world stage to be that of an exemplary leader. Additionally, during her tenure in the Department of State, she was a co-founder of 'Pivot to Asia' which was focused around soft power.

It is widely perceived that a long time career politician Clinton is less reckless than Trump on the issues of foreign policy. Yet, still many see not much divergence from the two candidates policies on foreign affairs. Victor D. Cha, a former Director of Asian Affairs in the White House's National Security Council under G. W. Bush Administration, told New York Times: "Putting aside the politics of a different policy, the change would be at the margins, I think," and "there is little disagreement that sanctions need to be pushed harder." (Landler, M. 2016) "The main difference between the two might be what would be on offer if North Korea bends to the sanctions and is ready to come back to talks," said Mr. Cha. He added "Trump seems to be saying he would go as far as putting a face-to-face on the table, which would be a break from 30 years of past diplomacy." (Landler, M. 2016) In the same article, New York Times cited similar view: "Some predicted that after a policy review, a Trump administration would likely take a similar approach toward Pyongyang as a Clinton administration. To the extent that Mr. Trump fleshed out his plans for dealing with the North, he said he would put pressure on its neighbor, China, to use its influence with Mr. Kim to curb his nuclear provocations. That is essentially what Mr. [Jake] Sullivan said in his description of Mrs. Clinton's policy." (Landler, M. 2016)

2. Donald Trump

While Hillary Clinton's potential policy toward North Korea seems easy to envisage, Trump's is just the opposite. Some say Trump's addresses relating to foreign policy could be interpreted as the traditional realistic view of international relations, putting emphasis on national interests. However, his world view lacks concrete philosophy, and is riddled with countless contradictions. Trump campaign's main slogan is 'America First', meaning that America's national interests take precedence over anything else. However, abandoning traditional alliances by pulling out the U.S. troops from South Korea and letting South Korea and Japan develop their own nuclear weapons, which were outlined as a part of the 'America First' policy, are hardly the national interests of America. He signalled he could meet with Kim Jong-un and Putin to talk one-on-one, but it would be too naive and blue sky thinking that Trump would make a dramatic breakthrough and eventually bring peace on the Korean peninsula.

Trying to evaluate Trump's policy on North Korea is no simple task due to his tendency to contradict previous statements. However, what we do know is that, Trump, the author of the famous book "The Art of the Deal", approaches diplomatic relations with international partners as a business deal. Cost-and-profit analysis is the backbone of his diplomatic philosophy (if he has one). In the same tune with his business-man-like rhetoric, Trump frequently slams Obama administration's foreign policy with flat denial of diplomatic results and sharp denunciation. He panned the Iran nuclear deal; "the contract is a disaster in virtually every way" (Trump, D., 2015a). His party has also attributed China's rise and growing confidence on the world stage to Obama's 'weakness': "The complacency of the Obama regime has emboldened the Chinese government and military to issue threats of intimidation throughout the South China Sea" (The Republican Party Platform Committee. 2016, p.48-49). Trump's Republican Party went on to add: "In the international arena, a weak Administration has invited aggression" citing the examples of

“a resurgent Russia occupying parts of Ukraine and threatening neighbors from the Baltic to the Caucasus” and the rise of ISIS in the Middle East. (Ibid, p.41) Finally, the Republicans summarized that “In all of our country’s history, there is no parallel to what President Obama and his former Secretary of State have done to weaken our nation” (Ibid, p.41). What is significant about Trump’s/the Republican Party’s public denunciation of Obama’s administration has the same effects of pointing to the Clinton’s trajectory as the head of the Department of State. Simply put, from the standpoint of the real estate mogul, Hillary Clinton is nothing but a liar who makes bad deals, just as Barack Obama did; “Hillary Clinton who, as most people know, is a world class liar” (Trump, D., 2016), said Trump earlier this year. Furthermore, as Trump’s comments above on President Obama show, he, and his party, is unwavering in its determination to make sure America is tough and gets what it wants:

“We believe that American exceptionalism — the notion that our ideas and principles as a nation give us a unique place of moral leadership in the world — requires the United States to retake its natural position as leader of the free world. Tyranny and injustice thrive when America is weakened. The oppressed have no greater ally than a confident and determined United States, backed by the strongest military on the planet. Quite simply, the Republican Party is committed to rebuilding the U.S. military into the strongest on earth, with vast superiority over any other nation or group of nations in the world.” (The Republican Party Platform Committee. 2016, p.41)

The desire to have the U.S. take the role of the “leader of the free world” appears to be directly in conflict with signatory policy of “America First”, which includes pulling U.S. troops out of overseas deployments, such as Japan and South Korea. Some see Trump’s withdrawal of the U.S. troops from South Korea and possible summit with North Korea as being conducive to forging good relations with Pyongyang. Therefore, it needs to be examined whether they are clinging onto false hope. What would a Trump presidency mean to the two Koreas? What political landscape would the two Koreas encounter if Trump becomes the Commander-in-Chief of the U.S.? First, let us assume the unimaginable possibility that U.S. pulls out their troops from South Korea. It is no doubt that North Korea would welcome the American Troops’ withdrawal, because Pyongyang has viewed the U.S. troops in South Korea as the number one threat to their regime. Backing this view, North Korea endorsed Donald Trump over ‘dull’ Hillary Clinton. On the contrary, Trump is accused of being pro-North Korea by the opposition. Unlike North Korea’s crystal clear reaction, the Republic of Korea’s public opinion would be polarized as to whether the U.S. military’s non-presence in the country is an appropriate option or not. Given from where each political inclination in South Korea has stood over this highly controversial issue, a small minority of people in South Korea would welcome the decision. Partly because what they have been supporting is the country free from the heavy American military influence and unwanted entanglement with America’s international power games. On top of that, this is based on somewhat ‘Anti-America’ sentiment deeply rooted since the division of the Korean peninsula. On the other hand, the right-wing in South Korea would vent a knee-jerk reaction of sheer fear

and anger. It harks back to the public discourse of Wartime Operational Control (OPCON) transfer to South Korea a decade ago. At that time, the so-called patriot right-leaning population vented its rage that South Korea's armed forces was soon to wield OPCON power. They firmly believe South Korea is safe under the U.S. military presence, so the absence of American troops in the country is unimaginable. If Trump would stick to his plan of withdrawal, another domestic political chaos is destined in South Korea, and this is hardly a stable state of peace.

More importantly, Trump's cherished benefit-cost analysis formula applies to his pledge to pull out the U.S. military from foreign countries. According to his calculation, the United States doesn't have "the luxury of doing what we used to do; we don't have the luxury, and it is a luxury. We need other people to reimburse us much more substantially than they are giving right now because we are only paying for a fraction of the cost." And he went on to say "I would be absolutely prepared to tell those countries, 'Congratulations, you will be defending yourself.'" (Trump, D., 2016b) Those countries he repeatedly mentions are the countries 'with massive wealth'. On the eve of the GOP Texas Primary debate, Donald Trump iterated, "We can no longer defend all of these countries, Japan, Germany, South Korea. You order televisions, you order almost anything, you're getting it from these countries. They are making a fortune. We defend all of these countries for peanuts. You talk about budgets. We have to start getting reimbursed for taking care of the military services for all of these countries." (Trump, D., 2016c) The costs of having the U.S. military troops in South Korea have definitely been in the red on Trump's balance sheet 'Inc. America'.

Trump's perception on America's missile defense system shares the same logic with defending countries 'with massive wealth'. The former CEO turned GOP nominee revealed his view on missile defense system in his book criticizing it on economic grounds:

"Missile defense is inappropriate; focus on terrorism. We definitely must find funding for defense, which means somebody is going to come up with less money for their own project. I think the best place to start is by diverting money from the planned missile defense system. I know this sounds almost counterintuitive because a missile defense system is supposed to help us defend against attack by rogue states. To begin with, I am not laughing at missile defense, and I never have. The question isn't whether or not such a defense can be built. The question is whether it is the right defense for our times. And I believe the answer is, largely, no. In this age of miniaturization, our real threat is not going to be flying in on a missile. It's going to be delivered in a van, or a suitcase, or a fire-hydrant-sized canister." (Trump, D. 2000)

He repeated this unflinching view on missile defense system in his interview with New York Times this year, saying "We've had them (missile defense systems) there for a long time, and now they're practically obsolete, in all fairness." (Landler, M. 2016) However, surprisingly, he made a turnaround to embrace MD system in his recent address at American Legion. He vowed "We will rebuild our depleted military, and pursue a state-of-the-art missile defense. We will do

it based on those three famous words: Peace Through Strength.” (Trump, D., 2016d) The nominee and the party finally accord with each other in this area as the Republican Party Platform declares “We must fund, develop, and deploy a multi-layered missile defense system.” (The Republican Party Platform Committee, 2016, p.48)

In 2000, on the threshold of new millennium, Kim Dae-jung and Kim Jong-il held a historical summit, dusting off remnants of the past. The legacy of an attempt join hands in peace could not descend to successors in Seoul, but Donald Trump signalled his willingness to take over the baton. If he is willing to meet with Kim Jong-un, given the scope of issues and deals one summit can cover, anything could happen. However, it is worth noting that Trump once wrote in USA Today citing Ronald Reagan’s quote, “no deal is better than a bad deal” (Trump, D. 2015a) to criticize the Iranian nuclear deal. This suggests no matter what Trump offers to North Korea during his presidential campaigns, the liability of his pledge is on very fragile ground. He would rather not make deals with Kim Jong-un and push China to take on a bigger role in dealing with Pyongyang, while simultaneously slandering and threatening Beijing. Trump’s party, the Republican Party indicated their intent to push China on the North Korean nuclear issues articulating that China “recognize the inevitability of change in the Kim family’s slave state and, for everyone’s safety against nuclear disaster, to hasten positive change on the Korean peninsula” (The Republican Party Platform Committee, 2016, p.48). The Republican Party Platform has bashed China on numerous occasions, including Beijing’s record of “dissent [being] brutally crushed, religious persecution heightened, the internet crippled, a barbaric population control two-child policy of forced abortions and forced sterilizations continued.” (Ibid) It has also issued clear threats against Chinese interference with Taiwanese principles of democracy and independence; “If China were to violate those principles [of Taiwanese independence], the United States, in accord with the Taiwan Relations Act, will help Taiwan defend itself” (Ibid). China is hardly likely to play along with Trump’s wishes on the North Korean nuclear issue given the statements towards Beijing outlined above. A further key question is to what degree Trump will toe the party line.

Rather than consistent, sensible policies that yield results, what we can expect from him is a bizarre photo-op of grabbing hamburgers with a 32-year-old leader from the hermit kingdom. It is no secret that politicians promise more than they can deliver. In Donald Trump’s case, the promises he pledged are already contradictory. Based on the above blueprint of Donald Trump’s plans on North Korea, it’s clear that his policy towards North Korea is contradictory (as is the case with many of his policies), hard to predict and therefore is unlikely to hold the key to long-term stable peace on the peninsula.

Options for the Future President vis-a-vis North Korea

Thus far we have attempted to foresee the paths Trump or Clinton will pursue in dealing with Pyongyang. Additionally, we have outlined various problems that are associated with the isolated state. Neither the projected policy of pressure and sanctions favored by Hillary Clinton, nor Trump's contradictory policy of promises of hard pressure and offers to meet Kim Jong-un or pulling out American troops based south of the 38th parallel, are likely to provide any long-term steps towards building stable peace on the Korean peninsula. Surely there are other options available to the future president? Can the lessons of the past; the failure of past policies towards North Korea and the inability to stop North Korea's nuclear development, provide any clues as to how to reel in the D.P.R.K.? We believe there are plenty of lessons to be learnt and as a result various alternative options that the future president can deploy to try and end the North Korean threat and set up the foundations of peace on the Korean peninsula.

Neither presidential candidate has shown any interest in pursuing a diplomatic approach to dealing with Pyongyang. Despite the results a similar approach under the incumbent president Barack Obama that resulted in defusing the Iranian nuclear crisis as well as a new era of normalized relations with Cuba, a similar approach towards the D.P.R.K. is seemingly not being considered. Is a diplomatic solution really an unrealistic and futile option for North Korea? Is the North Korean regime so unpredictable, so unreliable and so unreasonable that talks are simply not viable? We don't believe so. Throughout the six decades and three chapters of the Kim dynasty in the D.P.R.K. there have been some constants and patterns that can serve as useful points of departure for the U.S. and South Korea to go about making progress on the North Korean issue.

The perceived threat, vulnerability and danger that the U.S. and South Korea sense from North Korea is mutual. North Korea has long felt threatened and intimidated by being in the crosshairs of the mighty U.S. military which is amassed on Pyongyang's doorstep, south of the 38th parallel. Both the South Korean and American military capability and spending dwarf that of North Korea. After the loss of a major ally after the break-up of the Soviet Union, the D.P.R.K. was suddenly looking extremely exposed; this was further compounded after Pyongyang's other major ally, Beijing, took a big step back following the North's third nuclear test in 2013. Bearing in mind the North's standpoint and feeling of susceptibility and isolation, as well as its concerns over national security, are crucial considerations when trying to make any breakthrough with them. The Bill Clinton administration demonstrated this when it was able to get the D.P.R.K. to agree to ending their nuclear program through the Agreed Framework of 1994. Key parts of that the deal that facilitated a North Korean commitment to denuclearization included agreeing that the two sides would move "toward full normalization of political and economic relations", and vitally that "The U.S. will provide formal assurances to the D.P.R.K., against the threat or use of nuclear weapons by the U.S." (International Atomic Energy Agency, 1994). The U.S. also insisted that the D.P.R.K. should engage in North-South dialogue. This is a key lesson the future U.S. (and South Korean) president should bear in mind. This point also illustrates the fruitlessness of both

insisting on preconditions of denuclearization for talks, as well as sticking with the theory that North Korea will collapse.

If diplomacy is to be given a realistic chance of success and is going to be seriously explored by the U.S.-R.O.K., then there are several key elements that must be included to achieve denuclearization in North Korea and long-term, stable peace on the Korean peninsula. Firstly, as explained above, bearing North Korea's viewpoint in mind and offering them what they really need/want is the first hurdle to clear. As the U.S. and South Korea have far superior soft and hard power, they should take the lead in this diplomatic process, through actions, not just words. Incumbent South Korean President Park Geun-hye has been forthcoming with words and policies such as Trustpolitik to try and work with North Korea. However, actions have been conspicuously absent thus far. The U.S.-R.O.K. has a variety of ways to show its will and sincerity towards working with Pyongyang. For starters they can offer to temporarily suspend the joint-military drills and work towards a long-term plan for peace, rather than deploy more military hardware and perpetuating the arms race that exists across the two Koreas. None of these gestures are huge losses for the U.S.-R.O.K. yet they could prove to be the catalyst for a breakthrough with North Korea.

Conclusion

Is the international politics an arena of peaceful cooperation or brutal battlefield? Such a question divides the perception of the world. Though Thomas Hobbes's famous phrase 'the war against all of all' may seem outdated, the idea has not breathed its last breath. Despite a time gap of four centuries, nations have not evolved from Hobbes's basic *raison d'être* of a nation-state. However, World War I and II marked significant watershed moments in history. After World War II and its atrocious aftermath, the international players were gathered to prevent any acts of a war actualizing remorse and tragic lessons learned from the war. In this effort, various international institutions were created, and a new international order was set on a firm footing; the United States of America has stood in the center of the world order of politics. The Korean peninsula is no different, orbiting the axis of Pax Americana. Especially, divided by the 38th parallel, the physical and non-physical presence and influence of the U.S. are profound in Korea. This paper sees there to be a great importance of analyzing two U.S. presidential candidates' foreign policies over the two Koreas.

As suggested, the seasoned former Secretary of State Hillary Clinton will likely take the baton from the outgoing president and will not stray from the similar track of 'Strategic Patience'. As much as she has possibility to keep in line with the existing state on Korean peninsula, she also has the possibility to be a stepping stone to sustainable peace in the region. On the other hand, Donald Trump, the GOP's presidential hopeful, has been perceived as a reckless and rather problematic figure. Therefore, what he would do as a commander-in-chief casts doubt on not

only political pundits but voters so as to cause frustration. What is clear at least is that the self-grandiose reality TV show star/real estate mogul has shown his little trust in diplomacy. It is not a surprise that his presidency might be a concoction of Henry Kissinger, Richard Nixon, and G. W. Bush in a rosy picture. The best case scenario is a sustainable peace across the two Koreas, while the worst case scenario is military clash on Korean peninsula. The two candidates' presidencies would be laid somewhere in the middle of those two extreme case scenarios. To be more realistic, given the time period of mere four years or perhaps eight years of presidency of the U.S., it is improbable that the Oval Office would shake up the two Koreas. Therefore, it is not unreasonable to expect that the next president, whoever enters the White House, would maintain the status quo in Korea.

The issues on the two Koreas, particularly on North Korea, are unfathomable, but not unsolvable. To unravel the over six decades of unease on the Korean peninsula, the trust building process is the very first step to take. Which presidential candidate would take the first step toward the ultimate goal of peace on the Korean peninsula? Which of Clinton or Trump has strong political will to navigate the wavy sea of diplomatic challenges presented by the two Koreas? The answer lies with the American voters on November 8th, 2016. At this moment, what is clear is that as much as the president of the U.S. is important, so is the political leadership in South Korea. The equivalent consequences of the counterparts in the region; Republic of Korea, China, Japan, and Russia should not be neglected. Political cooperation is possible when all are in the same tune. Therefore, standing on the sideline watching to see who will be the next president of the U.S. is not the most advisable attitudes to have for Americans and also for South Koreans. Representative democracy has proven throughout the history to be the best and most effective tool to practice democracy, but it has its own flaws. It could conjure up a ghost of Robespierre and alike by voters own hands. Hence, representative democracy requires adamant commitments to engage and participate. In this effort, this paper hopes to be a valuable resource and be a building block towards better relations between Washington-Pyongyang, and thus a more stable and peaceful environment on the Korean peninsula.

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