

***Byungjin* and the Sources of Pyongyang's Paranoia**

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While 2017 ended amid fears that the “war of words” between the American President, Donald Trump, and the North Korea Supreme Leader, Kim Jong Un, would escalate out of control, 2018 and early 2019 were marked by a series of summits between Kim Jong Un on one side and Moon Jae-in and Trump on the other. With Pyongyang’s continued ballistic missile tests and its increasingly chilly diplomatic tone towards Seoul, it is apparent that Kim Jong Un’s apparent show of diplomacy in 2018 and early 2019 were part of a wider delaying tactic arising from Pyongyang’s fear that Trump was reckless enough to start a war on the Korean Peninsula. Broadly speaking, the *Byungjin* doctrine serves as a more useful indicator of Kim Jong Un’s policy priorities, including his identification with a nuclear arsenal in ensuring regime survival.

Keywords: North Korea, paranoia, Trump, 1992 Trap, Nuclear

I. Introduction

Despite the temptation to see the series of diplomatic summits between U.S. President Donald Trump and North Korean Supreme Leader Kim Jong Un since 2018 as creating hope for a path towards the denuclearization of North Korea, the reality is that such expectations are overblown. Upon deeper investigation, and moving beyond the media frenzies that have accompanied the various Trump-Kim summits, it is apparent that the diplomatic platitudes between Trump and Kim are more accurately described as attention-grabbing exploits, rather than holding any actual substance insofar as the denuclearization of North Korea is concerned. A more convincing explanation behind Kim Jong Un's apparent willingness to dismantle his nuclear arsenal is that the North Korean leader is simply stalling for time.

The logical implication of this is that the underlying tensions behind U.S.-North Korean relations will remain in place for the foreseeable future. This should come as little surprise, given the North Korean leadership's undiminished paranoia towards ensuring regime security, the Trump-Kim Jong Un summits notwithstanding. The following six sections will explore the roots of their fears, beginning with an examination of the evolution of North Korean political philosophy that has culminated in Kim Jong Un's adoption of the *Byungjin* policy shortly after his rise to power, which functions as a useful indicator of his regime's policy priorities. Based on this, the three following sections separately consider the factors that underpin the paranoia of the North Korean leadership: 1) longstanding North Korean fears of a U.S.-led war of regime change; 2) North Korea's fear of unification by absorption by the ROK; and 3) North Korea's fear that it, too, may face a fate similar to other authoritarian regimes that collapsed internally. A fifth section integrates these three disparate factors to underscore the extent to which paranoia has become so deeply internalized in the collective psyche of the North Korean government, such that Pyongyang has come to see its nuclear program as the surest means of ensuring regime security. Based on this analysis, this manuscript will conclude by considering the diplomatic and security policy implications for the ROK and the U.S.

II. Kim Jong Un and *Byungjin*

Some notion of the driving forces behind Kim Jong Un's diplomatic and security policy can be gleaned through a careful review of his adoption of the *Byungjin* or "Parallel Development" policy following his rise to power in 2011. As noted by Brian Myers, an earlier iteration of the "*Byungjin* Line" was propagated by North Korea's Founding Father, Kim Il Sung, in 1962 as a militarist slogan in conjunction with the economic development of the country.¹ In this regard, Myers argued that Kim Il Sung's unveiling of *Byungjin* was intended to ensure that the North Korean military could exploit any possible strain in the U.S.-ROK alliance to launch a surprise invasion of the South and thus unify the country. Moreover, Myers underscored that the succeeding generations of the North Korean leadership have never wavered from this long-held objective.²

While it is likely that Kim Il Sung continued to seek the unification of the Korean Peninsula after the 1953 Armistice Agreement, there is much debate over the plausibility of Myers' argument within the context of North Korean diplomatic and security policy since the end of the Cold War. In particular, it is difficult to overstate the extent by which the loss of superpower patronage by the Soviets and Chinese has upended North Korean strategizing since the 1990s. The period from 1989 to 1991 saw both Moscow and Beijing establishing diplomatic ties with Seoul, as well as the collapse of the USSR. Particularly serious for Pyongyang was the loss of Soviet patronage, the one-time provider of the kind of arsenal needed to fight a second Korean War.

Seen in this light, the more recent incantation under Kim Jong Un

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1. Brian R. Myers, "A Note On *Byungjin*," personal website of Brian R. Myers, July 30, 2017, personal website of Brian R. Myers, <<https://sthelepress.com/index.php/2017/07/30/a-note-on-byungjin-b-r-myers>> (date accessed November 16, 2019).
 2. Max Fisher, "North Korea's Nuclear Arms Sustain Drive for 'Final Victory'," *New York Times*, July 29, 2017, <<https://www.nytimes.com/2017/07/29/world/asia/north-korea-nuclear-missile.html>> (date accessed November 1, 2019)

is more plausibly understood as an effort to introduce two layers of regime security for Pyongyang. Kim Jong Un's iteration of *Byungjin* has envisaged the simultaneous commitment of North Korea's nuclear program alongside efforts to modernize the North Korean economy.³ This is evident based on the 2013 plenary session that saw the official unveiling of the *Byungjin* policy, calling for a "strategic guideline for the construction of a "strong and prosperous nation where the people can enjoy the wealth and splendor of socialism" through strengthening defensive capacity and focusing on economic construction."⁴

As Kim Jong Un's signature foreign policy, *Byungjin*'s equal attention to military security and economic development points to his attempts to consolidate two lines of defense for his regime's security. On one hand, the continued development of the nuclear weapons program provides North Korea with a strategic equalizer that offsets the obsolescence of its conventional arsenal against the U.S.-ROK alliance (hence strengthening North Korea's external security posture). On the other hand, Pyongyang's concurrent efforts to introduce state-managed economic reforms with an eye to increasing the circulation of foodstuffs and consumer goods in the country are clearly aimed at improving living standards in the country, in a clear nod to China's combination of authoritarian political leadership and rapid economic growth.⁵ On the surface, the construction of new consumer-oriented

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3. William Rooks, "Walking the *byungjin* line: North Korea in the Eurasian century," *ASPI*, June 12, 2019, <<https://www.aspistrategist.org.au/walking-the-byungjin-line-north-korea-in-the-urasian-century/>> (date accessed August 31, 2019).
 4. Seong-Whun Cheon, "The Kim Jong-un Regime's '*Byungjin*' (Parallel Development) Policy of Economy and Nuclear Weapons and the 'April 1st Nuclearization Law'," *Korea Institute for National Unification*, April 23, 2013, <<http://repo.kinu.or.kr/bitstream/2015.oak/2227/1/0001458456.pdf>> (date accessed September 1, 2019).
 5. Scott Snyder, "The Motivations Behind North Korea's Pursuit of Simultaneous Economic and Nuclear Development," *Council on Foreign Relations*, November 20, 2013, <<https://www.cfr.org/blog/motivations-behind-north-koreas-pursuit-simultaneous-economic-and-nuclear-development>> (date accessed October 1, 2019).

theme parks, ski resorts, cafes, and restaurants seeks to fulfill the dual objective of generating entertainment for the lives of the North Korean people (and thus distract the masses from such “undesirable” ideas as an uprising against his regime), while at the same time increasing the country’s capacity for earning foreign exchange from tourists.⁶

In this sense, it is notable that April 2018 saw Pyongyang’s *Byungjin* policy incorporate an increased “economic-focus” emphasis that sought an easing of international sanctions on North Korea. Based on these developments, Ruediger Frank has suggested that Kim Jong Un, having ensured his country’s external security through the development of a nuclear arsenal, is now attempting to consolidate regime survival through authoritarian-led economic reform in a manner similar to the Asian Economic Tigers of the 20th century (South Korea, Taiwan, Singapore, and China).⁷ Yet, there remains a significant obstacle to the possibility of North Korea becoming the next East Asia’s Tiger Economy. It is important to note that the aforementioned states have numerous social, economic, and political characteristics that, if fully transplanted into the North Korean context, would likely spell the demise of Kim Jong Un’s regime.

To begin with, the Tiger Economies owed their prosperity to strong Export-Oriented Industries (EOIs) as well as encouraging investment from foreign Multi-National Corporations (MNCs). By tying these countries’ fates to the external forces of globalization, such economic activity runs the risk of opening a Pandora’s Box of political dissent—ultimately, South Korea and Taiwan both became full-fledged democracies, while Singapore was at least compelled to ease up on aspects of its political authoritarianism. Although China has

6. Jung H. Pak, “The Education of Kim Jong Un,” *Brookings Institution*, February 2018, <https://www.brookings.edu/essay/the-education-of-kim-jong-un/?utm_source=FB&utm_medium=BPIAds&utm_campaign=EssayNK2&utm_term=SeNoCty-18%5E65-NoListNoCAnoBHV&utm_content=149384173> (date accessed September 15, 2019).

7. Ruediger Frank, “North Korea’s Economic Policy in 2018 and Beyond: Reforms Inevitable, Delays Possible,” 38 NORTH, August 8, 2018, <<https://www.38north.org/2018/08/rfrank080818/>> (date accessed November 17, 2019).

been able to combine political authoritarianism with a thriving export-oriented economy, it should be stressed that North Korea's ability to replicate the Chinese economic model is extremely limited, given that Pyongyang cannot hope to match the sheer size of China's internal market and its sense of national cohesion.

Absent the kind of sizeable internal domestic market that has kept the PRC's economy afloat, North Korea would have little recourse but to open itself up to the kind of external forces of globalization that would likely bring about the internal destabilization of the country by exposing North Korean society to such politically inconvenient ideas like democracy. The North Korean leadership is doubtless aware of these pitfalls: under these circumstances, it is apparent that Kim Jong Un's shift to an "economic line" in his implementation of *Byungjin* underscores that his leadership's vision is not so much an economic transformation of North Korea, but rather a shake-up of the country's antiquated economic structure in order to revitalize it and place it on a stronger footing to resist U.S. sanctions over its nuclear weapons program. In other words, while it is possible that the North Korean leadership believes that the economic component of *Byungjin* may help to revitalize its economy, Pyongyang doubtless sees such an outcome in strictly functional terms aimed at enabling Kim Jong Un to further consolidate control of the country against the prospective scenario of an internal uprising against his rule.

Moreover, lest there is any doubt concerning the extent of Kim Jong Un's commitment to his nuclear weapons program, as opposed to economic modernization, as the cornerstone of his regime's survival strategy, it is worth noting that the 2013 plenary session refers to a "precious sword that will advance the construction of a socialist strong and prosperous nation and Korean unification" and a "banner of safeguarding the autonomy and dignity of the people."⁸ This is further reinforced by Pyongyang's July 2019 constitutional amendment that also identified the country as a nuclear-armed state.⁹ As noted by

8. Cheon, "The Kim Jong-un Regime's '*Byungjin*'."

9. *South China Morning Post*, "North Korea changes constitution to strengthen Kim Jong-un's power," August 29, 2019, <<https://www.scmp.com/news/asia/>

Cheon Seong-Whun, the "*Byungjin* policy of economy and nuclear weapons signifies that North Korea will no longer differentiate its nuclear energy for peaceful use from military use."¹⁰ Such observations contradict the notion that Kim Jong Un has any plan to dismantle his nuclear program.¹¹

Rather, the notion that its nuclear weapons program stands as a key instrument of regime security for Kim Jong Un is further reflected by the events of early 2012, shortly after his succession to power that highlighted continued efforts to develop North Korea's operational nuclear arsenal. Presumably in the expectation that the Western-educated Kim Jong Un would be more enlightened and seek closer ties with the outside world, the Obama Administration sent Special Envoy Glyn Davies for talks with Pyongyang. During this period, Davies clearly underscored to North Korea the Obama Administration's willingness to provide increased economic and humanitarian aid in exchange for Pyongyang's cessation of any further conventional and nuclear weapon tests.¹²

Although North Korea initially agreed to these terms, resulting in the "Leap Year" Agreement of February 29, 2012, just weeks later, Pyongyang announced plans to resume a testing of the highly provocative Kwangmyongsong rocket. Ignoring the Obama Administration's warnings that such a course of action would void U.S. aid that had been agreed to under the "Leap Year" Agreement, Pyongyang went ahead with its missile test in April 2012, to mark the centenary of the

east-asia/article/3024963/north-korea-changes-constitution-strengthen-kim-jong-uns-power> (date accessed September 15, 2019).

10. Cheon, "The Kim Jong-un Regime's '*Byungjin*'."
11. Josh Smith, "'Defiant message' as North Korea's Kim rides white horse on sacred mountain," *Reuters*, October 16, 2019, <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-northkorea-kimjongun/defiant-message-as-north-koreas-kim-rides-white-horse-on-sacred-mountain-idUSKBN1WV08G?fbclid=IwAR3Bd_ACi23AA6GcPg2OngzpzNvxTr1ckUnQLxVyCmjDKhapLkwP6ZyV1ug> (date accessed October 16, 2019).
12. North Korean Economy Watch, "US-DPRK 'leap day deal' announced," April 18, 2012, <<http://www.nkeconwatch.com/2012/02/29/us-announces-new-deal-with-dprk/>> (date accessed October 1, 2019).

birth of Kim Il Sung.¹³ Although claimed as a test of a civilian satellite launch, the Kwangmyongsong rocket is a dual-use platform that can also be used for delivering nuclear warheads. Such an act signified the North Korean leadership's willingness to forego economic aid promised under the "Leap Year" Agreement as the price for continued development of its missile and nuclear programs—a trend supported by other developments that included multiple rocket tests in the period from 2013-18 that followed, along with a highly aggressive "war of words" with Seoul in the spring of 2013.¹⁴ In other words, while a *prima facie* interpretation of the *Byungjin* policy suggests that North Korea is undertaking economic development as an equal policy alongside its nuclear program, the underlying intention of both components of *Byungjin* point to Kim Jong Un's resolve to ensure regime survival. Yet, as explored elsewhere in this article, the fact that the North Korean leadership sees its nuclear arsenal as a critical instrument of regime survival means that it is highly unlikely that it will ever seriously contemplate its dismantlement.

In particular, from 2015 onwards, North Korea began attempts to develop and test the Pukkuksong series of ballistic missiles. A particularly notable characteristic about the latter class of weaponry was that it was designed for launch from submarines.¹⁵ In conjunction with North Korea's concurrent large Sinpo class submarine—a platform designed for the deployment and launch of nuclear missiles—it is apparent that Pyongyang remains intent on the

13. Ankit Panda, "A Great Leap to Nowhere: Remembering the US-North Korea 'Leap Day' Deal," *The Diplomat*, February 29, 2016, <<https://thediplomat.com/2016/02/a-great-leap-to-nowhere-remembering-the-us-north-korea-leap-day-deal/>> (date accessed October 1, 2019).

14. Rudy de Leon and Luke Herman, "North Korea and the War of Words," *Center for American Progress*, April 4, 2013, <<https://www.americanprogress.org/issues/security/news/2013/04/04/59324/north-korea-and-the-war-of-words/>> (date accessed October 1, 2019).

15. Helen Regan, Jake Kwon, and Yoko Wakatsuki, "North Korea launches ballistic missile a day after agreeing to US talks," *CNN*, October 2, 2019, <<https://edition.cnn.com/2019/10/02/asia/north-korea-missile-launch-intl-hnk/index.html>> (date accessed October 3, 2019).

development of an operational Submarine-Launched Ballistic Missile (SLBM) capability.¹⁶ Seen in this light, it is apparent that *Byungjin*, by marking Kim Jong Un's commitment to the country's nuclear weapons program, can be seen as a logical extension of the preceding *Songun* ("Military First") policy adopted by his father and predecessor, Kim Jong Il. For the older Kim, fears over the prospect of a U.S.-led war of regime change made North Korea's external security environment Pyongyang's policy priority:¹⁷ for the younger Kim, the acute awareness of the possibility of an Arab Spring-like scenario is the clear rationale behind his concurrent attempts to improve the standards of living in the country as an additional line of defense in ensuring regime security.¹⁸ Moreover, as the following sections detail, it is likely that the level of paranoia within the North Korean leadership has become so deeply internalized that it is difficult to imagine any plausible scenario wherein Pyongyang can seriously contemplate a long-term improvement in relations with Washington and Seoul, or in undertaking any form of political liberalization.

III. Pyongyang's Fears of the U.S.

Some insight into the extent of the North Korean leadership's paranoia in viewing the U.S. is reflected in what the authors of *Going Critical*, Joel Wit, Daniel Poneman, and Robert Gallucci, refer to as the "1992 Trap." The three men, who were directly involved in the 1993-94

16. H.I. Sutton, "North Korea Appears To Have Built Its First Real Ballistic Missile Submarine," *Forbes*, August 13, 2019, <<https://www.forbes.com/sites/hisutton/2019/08/13/north-korea-appears-to-have-built-its-first-real-ballistic-missile-submarine/#f39053c14e20>> (date accessed October 1, 2019).

17. Byung Chul Koh, "'Military-First Politics' and Building A 'Powerful and Prosperous Nation' in North Korea," *Nautilus Institute*, April 14, 2005, <<https://web.archive.org/web/20070927012049/http://www.nautilus.org/fora/security/0532AKoh.html>> (date accessed October 1, 2019).

18. Yonhap News Agency, "N. Korean newspaper calls Arab pro-democracy movement 'Arab Winter'," November 19, 2018, <<https://en.yna.co.kr/view/AEN20181119007100315>> (date accessed September 1, 2019).

North Korean nuclear crisis, coined the term to reflect their speculation over one possible motive behind Pyongyang's adoption of an increasingly inflexible posture from 1993 onwards, as arising from Pyongyang's belief that concessions made to the U.S. would not lead to reciprocal U.S. concessions. As the authors of *Going Critical* note in 1992,

The North was told to meet certain conditions before the Americans would [hold] another session [of talks]. The North took real steps – ratifying its safeguards agreement with the IAEA, embarking on a lengthy effort to implement that agreement, and negotiating with South Korea on an inspection regime for the Denuclearization Declaration. But these efforts came to naught in North Korean eyes. The IAEA discovered discrepancies in Pyongyang's initial declaration and inter-Korean dialogue broke down. As a result, the United States would not meet with the North again, Team Spirit was rescheduled, and Pyongyang faced the prospect of international sanctions as a result of its disagreement with the IAEA.¹⁹

In this regard, the events that followed since the war scare of June 1994 have likely caused fears of a "1992 Trap" writ large to have become deeply internalized in the collective psyche of the North Korean leadership. In particular, it is likely that the following three periods of Pyongyang's interaction with Washington have become so deeply seared into the minds of the North Korean leadership in illustrating the danger to North Korean interests that arise from making concessions to the U.S., which risk non-reciprocation from the White House.

The first of these episodes concerns the aftermath of the 1993-94 nuclear crisis, with the U.S. and North Korea signing the Agreed Framework, under which North Korea suspended activity at the Yongbyon nuclear reactor, for which the Clinton Administration agreed, as a *quid pro quo*, to supply Heavy Fuel Oil (HFO) and Light Water Reactors (LWRs) to provide Pyongyang with alternative sources

19. Joel Wit, Daniel Poneman, and Robert Gallucci, *Going Critical: The First North Korean Nuclear Crisis* (Washington: Brookings Institution, 2004), pp.89-90.

of energy that could not be diverted to nuclear weapons production.²⁰ In addition, North Korea later claimed that the Clinton Administration also agreed to the lifting of U.S. sanctions on North Korea as part of the Agreed Framework.²¹

Yet, just weeks after the signing of the agreement, the strongly hawkish Republican Party won control of both houses of the U.S. Congress, the Senate and the House of Representatives, and in turn vociferously condemned such diplomatic engagement with Pyongyang as "appeasement" of a "rogue state."²² Moreover, by controlling the purse strings of a White House Administration dogged by personal controversies and disliked by conservatives over an entire range of policy issues, the Republican Party was in a strong position to sabotage the Clinton Administration's attempts to implement the Agreed Framework.²³ Rather than stirring domestic controversy by investing political time and energy in getting the agreement implemented, the Clinton Administration instead placed its implementation on the backburner, most notably with delays to Washington's lifting of sanctions on North Korea. In this regard, it has been speculated by left-leaning academics such as Gavan McCormack that the Clinton Administration had been deliberately half-hearted in its implementation of the Agreed Framework, in the expectation that North Korea would collapse of its own accord, similar to how the Communist regimes of Eastern Europe had in 1989-91.²⁴ Such predictions were understandable, in light of the severity of the famine

20. The LWRs promised to North Korea were designed to provide civilian nuclear power, and would have been impractical for reconfiguration for the reprocessing of nuclear material to a level necessary for the production of nuclear bombs. See Leon Sigal, *Disarming Strangers: Nuclear Diplomacy with North Korea* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1998), pp.68-69.

21. Gavan McCormack, *Target North Korea: Pushing North Korea to the Brink of Nuclear Catastrophe* (New York: Nation Books, 2004), p.156.

22. Wit et al., *Going Critical*, p.336.

23. Don Oberdorfer and Robert Carlin, *The Two Koreas: A Contemporary History* (New York: Basic Books, 2014), p.281.

24. McCormack, *Target North Korea*, p.156.

that hit North Korea during this period.²⁵ While the validity of such a perspective is debatable, it is notable that throughout 1997, the state-run Korea Central News Agency became increasingly shrill in its condemnation of the Clinton Administration's failure to implement the agreement. This was made further evident by North Korea's first test of a Taepodong rocket in 1998 as a show of defiance against the Clinton Administration, as well as showing the beginning of its interest in undertaking its Highly Enriched Uranium (HEU) nuclear program.²⁶ In this sense, the convergence of growing North Korean criticisms of Clinton's half-hearted implementation of the Agreed Framework suggests some level of plausibility behind Pyongyang's growing concerns of the possibility that Washington would not honor its obligations under the Agreed Framework.

The second period that aroused North Korean fears of a "1992 Trap" was the transition from the Clinton to the Bush Administration from 2000 to 2001. Although the Clinton Administration stepped up the process of diplomatic engagement with Pyongyang in 1999-2000, it was a case of "too little, too late." The last months of the Clinton Administration saw an exchange of high-level envoys (with Marshal Jo Myong Rok's visit to Washington being reciprocated by Secretary of State Madeleine Albright's visit to Pyongyang), culminating in Pyongyang declaring a moratorium on missile testing, as well as signing the Joint Communiqué of 2000, spelling out that "neither government would have hostile intent toward the other."²⁷ Had the trajectory of cautious diplomatic engagement by the White House with Pyongyang continued after the end of the Clinton Administration's second term of office, it is plausible to imagine a radically different outcome, one in which a sufficient critical mass of moderates in Pyongyang might have continued to block demands from military

25. Oberdorfer and Carlin, *The Two Koreas*, pp.289-93.

26. Leon Sigal, "Bad History," *38 NORTH*, August 22, 2017, <<https://www.38north.org/2017/08/lsgal082217/>> (date accessed August 1, 2019).

27. *US State Department*, "U.S.-D.P.R.K. Joint Communiqué," October 12, 2000, <https://1997-2001.state.gov/www/regions/eap/001012_usdprk_jointcom.html> (date accessed September 1, 2019).

hardliners for a resumption in nuclear reprocessing.

Yet, from the perspective of Pyongyang hardliners, the concessions that it made to Washington towards the end of 2000 did not translate into any meaningful improvement in relations with the U.S. Instead, 2000 saw the electoral victory of George W. Bush—an unexpected outcome, and one that was rather controversial as Bush defeated his Democratic opponent, Al Gore, on the basis of electoral college votes rather than the popular vote.²⁸ In this regard, Bush's inauguration signified a departure from the previous White House administrations that had been guided by pragmatism in the conduct of American foreign policy. From the beginning in 2001, Bush and his advisors repeatedly voiced skepticism of North Korean trustworthiness, thereby criticizing not only the Clinton Administration's turn to diplomatic engagement with Pyongyang, but also ROK President Kim Dae Jung's concurrent process of diplomatic engagement through the adoption of the Sunshine Policy.²⁹

In this, the influence of the neoconservative movement—a stridently hawkish school of thought within the Republican Party that is based on ideologically-driven hostility towards authoritarian regimes and advocates the spread of democracy—must be emphasized.³⁰ The Bush Administration's controversial invasion of Iraq in 2003 over an unproven nuclear weapons program led to speculation that Washington's real agenda was the toppling of Saddam Hussein in order to pave the way for the installation of an American-style democracy in its place.³¹ Such concerns on the part of Pyongyang are not surprising, given the increasingly hawkish foreign

28. *Constitution Daily*, "On this day, Bush v. Gore settles 2000 presidential race," December 12, 2018, <<https://constitutioncenter.org/blog/on-this-day-bush-v-gore-anniversary>> (date accessed June 1, 2019).

29. Mike Chinoy, *Meltdown: The Inside Story of the North Korean Nuclear Crisis* (New York: St Martin's Press, 2008), pp.55-63.

30. Charles Pritchard, *Failed Diplomacy: The Tragic Story of How North Korea Got the Bomb* (Washington: Brookings Institution Press, 2007), p.50.

31. Brandon K. Gauthier, "How Kim Jong Il Reacted To The 2003 Invasion of Iraq," *NK News*, March 20, 2003, <<https://www.nknews.org/2013/03/how-kim-jong-il-reacted-to-the-2003-invasion-of-iraq/>> (date accessed August 1, 2019).

policy statements emanating from Washington as early as January 2002, when Bush's State of the Union Address referred to North Korea, along with Iraq and Iran, as part of an "Axis of Evil." Given that the same speech made reference to the 9/11 terrorist attacks on the U.S. even while the Bush Administration was ramping up its preparations for the invasion of Iraq, Pyongyang began to fear that the emerging "Bush Doctrine" was using the threat of nuclear proliferation to justify the initiation of a war of regime change, with North Korea set to be one of Washington's next targets after Iraq.³² Moreover, the Bush Administration itself gave further credence to Pyongyang's concerns, first by terminating its supply of HFO to North Korea under the Agreed Framework—the only part of the latter agreement that Washington had actually implemented³³—and in the subsequent Six Party Talks, repeatedly insisted on complete dismantlement of North Korea's nuclear facilities as a precondition for any direct North Korean negotiations with the U.S.³⁴ Given that such a demand would have deprived North Korea of significant leverage in negotiations, it is not surprising that these terms were rejected by Pyongyang.

The abrupt turnaround in the U.S. posture over the course of 2000-02, from tentative diplomatic engagement to a renewal of hostility and threats of war, have doubtless impressed on the North Korean leadership the unpredictability of the vagaries of the U.S. election system. Under such circumstances, the possibility that a comparatively benign White House may be unexpectedly replaced by a more hardline administration at short notice reinforces the North Korean government's belief in the need to maintain a fallback security position to guard against the contingent scenario of prolonged U.S. hostility. In this context, the appeal of the nuclear weapons program as a contingency strategy for North Korea in the event of continued U.S. hostility made perfect sense—Clinton had contemplated the initiation of airstrikes to destroy Yongbyon in June 1994, but then backed down due to the prospective devastation that a non-nuclear-armed North

32. Chinoy, *Meltdown*, p.121.

33. Chinoy, *Meltdown*, pp.136-37.

34. Chinoy, *Meltdown*, pp.217-19.

Korea was capable of inflicting on the U.S.-ROK alliance.³⁵ Transplanted within the context of the Bush Administration's invasion of a non-nuclear-armed Iraq, the logical implication for North Korea was that development of its nuclear arsenal would grant Pyongyang an instrument of regime security that Saddam Hussein did not have. Moreover, the prudence of maintaining a credible threat of nuclear proliferation was further underscored by the fact that, in the aftermath of the North Korean 2006 missile and nuclear tests, the Bush Administration took a more flexible negotiating posture in the period 2007-08, leading to the signing of the February 13, 2007 Agreement, under which Pyongyang supposedly committed itself to the dismantlement of its nuclear facilities.³⁶ From the North Korean perspective, the fact that the Bush Administration adopted a more flexible negotiating posture in the Six Party Talks was evidence that North Korea's de facto nuclear status after 2006 was a formidable source of leverage against Washington.

The third period of interaction that evoked fears of a "1992 Trap" began in the immediate aftermath of the February 2007 Agreement, alongside Barack Obama's Presidential campaign, and lasted all the way through President Obama's two terms in office. While it remains unclear if Kim Jong Il intended to follow through with the terms of the February 2007 Agreement, it is very likely that hardliners in the North Korean military saw Washington's adoption of a more flexible negotiating position after 2006 as evidence of the extent to which Pyongyang had gained negotiating leverage as a result of having undertaken its first nuclear test. Moreover, given that the abrupt turnaround in U.S. policy towards Pyongyang from cautious engagement in 2000 to renewed hostility the year after, it is likely that North Korean hardliners saw the need to maintain a hedge against the possibility of prolonged hostility from the U.S. Such calculations were reflected in how Pyongyang prepared for Washington's transition to the Obama Administration in 2009. During his 2008 election campaign,

35. Wit et al., *Going Critical*, pp.243-246.

36. Chinoy, *Meltdown*, pp.328-30.

Obama had repeatedly promised to hold dialogue without preconditions with adversaries of the U.S., and that he was willing to “outstretch the hand if you unclench your fist”.³⁷ Such an effort at diplomatic outreach was presumably aimed at North Korea as one of Washington’s various adversaries. Yet, within months of Obama’s inauguration, Pyongyang made clear its disinterest in negotiations with the new administration. As early as February 2009, American intelligence saw signs that Pyongyang was preparing a resumption of missile testing, with the April test of a Taepodong rocket being followed by its second nuclear test in May that year. With such explicit rejection of his effort at diplomatic outreach occurring amidst mounting Republican criticism over his ambitious domestic political agenda, Obama instead shifted back to a default position of deterrence against North Korea. Although Obama made a modest attempt to restart diplomatic engagement with Pyongyang after Kim Jong Un’s succession to power in early 2012, such efforts came to naught, as reflected in North Korea pressing ahead with yet another rocket test, the “Leap Year” Agreement of February 2019 notwithstanding.

Taken together, the overall track record of Pyongyang’s interaction with the U.S. since Washington’s suspicions of North Korea’s nuclear program has very likely caused a “1992 Trap” writ large version to have become deeply internalized in the minds of the North Korean leadership. When North Korea suspended activity at the Yongbyon nuclear reactor under the Agreed Framework, the Clinton Administration implemented the latter agreement in a half-hearted manner, with repeated delays to the delivery of HFO and the LWR reactor project. When North Korea announced its moratorium on missile testing under the Joint Communiqué, such a tentative bid to improve relations was not reciprocated following the transition to the George W. Bush Administration. When Obama offered tentative feelers towards peace to Pyongyang, the North Korean leadership was

37. Maria Rosaria Coduti, “The limits of ‘strategic patience’: How Obama failed on North Korea,” *NK News*, November 2, 2016, <<https://www.nknews.org/2016/11/the-limits-of-strategic-patience-how-obama-failed-on-north-korea/>> (date accessed October 3, 2019).

not impressed by his lack of staying power in seeking to sustain the process of diplomatic engagement. The remaining voices within the North Korean government that had previously favored continued diplomacy doubtlessly found their influence within Pyongyang weakened.³⁸ In this regard, it is notable that North Korean negotiators have increasingly referred to U.S. offers of economic aid as a “Trojan Horse,” reflecting Pyongyang’s conviction that apparent American offers of aid are saddled with ulterior motives.³⁹

Taken together, it is likely that the North Korean leadership, recalling the repeated explicit threats of war made by successive White House administrations, has presumably come to the conclusion that Washington’s hostility will continue to endure in the long term, regardless of whether the White House is held by the Democratic or the Republican Parties. Given the idea that it faces the threat of forced regime change no matter what, Pyongyang apparently has come to the conclusion that its nuclear arsenal, by forcing Washington to contemplate the prospect of an extremely costly conflict, functions as the surest instrument of regime security against the de facto status of long-term U.S. hostility.⁴⁰ As then-U.S. Director of National Intelligence Dan Coats noted, North Korea has observed “what has happened around the world relative to nations that possess nuclear capabilities and the leverage they have...If you have nukes, never give them up. If you don’t have them, get them.”⁴¹

38. Oberdorfer and Carlin, *The Two Koreas*, p.431.

39. Hyung-Jin Kim, “North Korea says it won’t surrender to U.S.-led sanctions,” *The Associated Press*, June 26, 2019, <<https://www.ctvnews.ca/business/north-korea-says-it-won-t-surrender-to-u-s-led-sanctions-1.4482941?cache=yes%3FclipId%3D375756%3FclipId%3D89531%3FclipId%3D89578%3FautoPlay%3Dtrue%3FautoPlay%3Dtrue%3FautoPlay%3Dtrue%3Fot%3DAjaxLayout%3Fot%3DAjaxLayout%3FautoPlay%3Dtrue%3FautoPlay%3Dtrue%3Fot%3DAjaxLayout%3Fot%3DAjaxLayout>> (date accessed September 1, 2019).

40. Robert Carlin, “Distant Thunder: The Crisis Coming in Korea,” 38 NORTH, October 17, 2019, <https://www.38north.org/2019/10/rcarlin101719/?fbclid=IwAR3fKKOlqA0CPVX_d6I9_zxiOv-gbo8YlhqKJ-Cn9p6bkSD-kWxzcQjJbk8> (date accessed October 17, 2019).

41. Pak, “The Education of Kim Jong Un.”

IV. Pyongyang's Fears of the ROK

Moon Jae-in's efforts to restart the process of diplomatic engagement with Pyongyang notwithstanding, it is likely that North Korea also fears the possibility of similar dynamics in its interaction with Seoul as those reflected in the "1992 Trap," albeit for different reasons. In this sense, Pyongyang has reasons to be wary of Seoul, regardless of whether the ROK is led by a pro-engagement administration, or a hawkish, conservative one.

Pyongyang recalls the period from 1998 to 2007, during which time Seoul was led by the pro-engagement administrations of Kim Dae Jung and Roh Moo Hyun. Kim, an advocate of diplomatic rapprochement with the North, unveiled the "Sunshine Policy," under which his administration granted the reunion of families that had been left divided since the 1953 Armistice Agreement, increased ROK economic and humanitarian aid to the North, and established the Kaesong Industrial Complex.⁴²

Inasmuch as his aspirations to bring about the unification of the Korean Peninsula were concerned, Kim Dae Jung and his advisors saw two potentially negative scenarios arising from the possible collapse of North Korea. The first concerned the possibility of North Korea collapsing from within, in a manner similar to how the East European Communist regimes had in 1989-91. Although the Velvet Revolutions of Eastern Europe were largely peaceful, the possibility of such an outcome is not a foregone conclusion in the context of the Korean Peninsula. Rather, in the event of a collapse from within, there is the possibility of a struggle for power in Pyongyang between rival military factions, with the potential to lead to all-out conflict on the Korean Peninsula. Second, even if a North Korean collapse were peaceful (leading to unification of the peninsula under Seoul), the ROK would still face the challenge of rehabilitating the moribund economy of the North. In light of the economic challenges faced in eastern Germany since unification, it was apparent to Seoul that too abrupt a Korean

42. Roland Bleiker, *Divided Korea: Toward A Culture of Reconciliation* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2005), pp.85-87.

unification would impose a significant burden for the South.

Under such circumstances, it is apparent that the economic objective of Kim Dae Jung's Sunshine Policy was to promote a "soft landing" for North Korea. This would not only mitigate the impact of economic desperation in the North, but also, by bridging the gap in levels of economic development between the two Koreas, help to cushion the impact of unification.⁴³ In this sense, then, the underlying long-term plan of both Kim Dae Jung and Roh Moo Hyun was to plan for the contingency of North Korea's collapse. Pyongyang thus likely had reasons to view the flow of aid from Seoul under the Sunshine Policy as yet another "Trojan Horse"—that reflected Pyongyang's belief that gifts from the outside world came with strings attached that would function contrary to North Korean interests.

From Pyongyang's perspective, such fears were doubtless underscored by the events that followed its missile and nuclear tests in 2006. These tests were more likely intended as a signal of defiance against the Bush Administration's imposition of sanctions on Pyongyang's offshore financial assets with the Banco Delta Asia rather than Seoul⁴⁴—it is notable that the 2006 Taepodong test coincided with the Independence Day holiday in the U.S. Nonetheless, the fact that the 2006 missile and nuclear tests came on the bank of a growing corruption scandal surrounding Roh Moo Hyun discredited the progressives in Seoul, as reflected in Lee Myung Bak's electoral victory during the 2007 ROK elections.

Citing the failure of his predecessors to bring an end to North Korea's missile and nuclear ambitions, Lee adopted a more hardline posture toward North Korea and stronger security relations with Washington—actions that provoked North Korea into retaliating by sinking the ROK corvette Cheonan in March 2010 (causing 46 fatalities), leading to Lee retaliating by imposing the "May 24 Measures," a set of harsh punitive sanctions on Pyongyang that prohibited North Korean ships from entering ROK waters, froze

43. Bleiker, *Divided Korea*, pp.86-87.

44. Chinoy, *Meltdown*, pp.252-81.

government-level interactions with Pyongyang, blocked further expansion of inter-Korean economic cooperation, and cut back on inter-Korean family reunions. Such measures in turn led to a further round of the vicious circle in inter-Korean hostility, as reflected in the North Korean bombardment of Yeongpyong Island (causing 4 fatalities) in November 2010, and an increasing number of missile and nuclear tests since 2012.⁴⁵

Responding to the stand-off that developed between Lee Myung Bak and Pyongyang, his successor, Park Geun Hye, daughter of Park Chung Hee, unveiled what initially appeared to be an effort to adopt a more balanced ROK foreign policy approach to Pyongyang—Trustpolitik. In 2011, Park had written an article in *Foreign Affairs*, hinting at her willingness to undertake diplomatic engagement with Pyongyang. In spite of the childhood trauma she experienced with the death of her mother at the hands of a Pyongyang-backed agent in 1974 (the assassin's actual objective was President Park Chung Hee, but stray bullets struck First Lady Yuk Young-Soo),⁴⁶ President Park wrote of her desire for "enduring peace" on the Korean Peninsula, but her efforts at "genuine reconciliation" had failed to evoke trust between Seoul and Pyongyang."

These diplomatic platitudes notwithstanding, it is apparent that Park Geun Hye's Trustpolitik also incorporated elements of coercion, hence Pyongyang's refusal to reciprocate. In outlining her vision of Trustpolitik, Park called for the adoption of "two coexisting strands: first, North Korea must keep its agreements made with South Korea and the international community to establish a minimum level of trust, and second, there must be assured consequences for actions that breach the peace."⁴⁷ Hence, Park's vision for Trustpolitik was buttressed by an "alignment" policy that envisaged "a tough line

45. Elias Groll, "North Korean Missiles Just Keep Getting Better," *Foreign Policy*, October 3, 2019, <<https://foreignpolicy.com/2019/10/03/north-korean-missiles-just-keep-getting-better/>> (date accessed October 10, 2019).

46. Oberdorfer and Carlin, *The Two Koreas*, p.39.

47. Geun Hye Park, "A New Kind of Korea: Building Trust Between Seoul and Pyongyang," *Foreign Affairs*, September/October 2011.

against North Korea sometimes and flexible policy open to negotiations other times.”⁴⁸

Furthermore, even the carrots that Park dangled before Pyongyang in seeking North Korea's cooperation also carried implicit costs to the interests of the North Korean government. In her New Year's Address in January 2014, President Park referred to the prospect of Korean unification as a Daebak (jackpot). It was apparent that Park had been inspired by the German experience of reunification following the end of the Cold War. On March 28, 2014, in the city of Dresden in the former East Germany, Park had proposed the Dresden Initiative, incorporating a range of humanitarian, economic, and other dimensions to assist in the gradual rehabilitation of North Korea.⁴⁹ This envisaged humanitarian assistance, inter-Korean economic projects, and the setting up of a “World Eco Peace Park” along the Demilitarized Zone on the Korean Peninsula. There was no coincidence in Park's decision to visit Dresden, which was devastated by bombing during World War II and came under the control of the Communist East German state. Yet, the subsequent rebuilding of Dresden as a center of culture and industry has enabled the city to emerge as the fastest economically growing region in the former East Germany.

While such a vision for the future of a unified Korean Peninsula may appear attractive, the North Korean leadership was doubtless aware that there would be little place for them in such a scenario. Rather, the North Korean leadership was well aware of the extent to which its rule has been buttressed by a reign of terror enforced by the secret police and the threat of concentration camps. Under such circumstances, Kim Jong Un was, without a doubt, aware that he and his supporters would be pariahs in any scenario involving Korean unification. It was thus hardly surprising that Park Geun Hye's Trustpolitik failed to elicit any significant improvement in inter-

48. Park, “A New Kind of Korea.”

49. Yonhap News Agency, “Full text of Park's speech on N. Korea,” March 28, 2014, <<https://en.yna.co.kr/view/AEN20140328008000315>> (date accessed October 1, 2019).

Korean relations. In particular, Park's emphasis on the conditional nature of engagement under *Trustpolitik*, in linking any further ROK concessions to Pyongyang to the denuclearization of North Korea, was a non-starter for Kim Jong Un.⁵⁰

V. North Korea Observations of Other Authoritarian Regimes

Moreover, Pyongyang has observed international trends elsewhere in the world in seeking to anticipate socio-economic trends that have unseated other authoritarian regimes. Such a strategy is logical as part of an early-warning strategy to preemptively identify internal socio-economic trends that may threaten its grip on power. In this regard, the North Korean government has seen, and been particularly disturbed by, two other waves of internal uprisings against authoritarian rule, these being the Velvet Revolutions that swept the Communist regimes of Eastern Europe from power in 1989-91, and the Arab Spring that has been underway since 2011.

While the opaque nature of North Korean politics and media necessitates caution against excessive speculation about the inner workings of the North Korean government, some insight into its paranoia can be gleaned from foreign observers who have spent significant periods of time residing in Pyongyang. Two notable anecdotes are particularly fascinating. John Everard, a former British Ambassador in Pyongyang, noted that senior North Korean officials are regularly shown videos of former East German civil servants reduced by poverty to selling pencils on the streets, a clear signal to government technocrats of the fate they can expect should they fail to ensure the Kim family's hold on power.⁵¹ Equally interesting, Chung Mong-joon, a former Chairman of the Grand National Party in Seoul,

50. Nicholas Wheeler, *Trusting Enemies: Interpersonal Relationships in International Conflict* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018), pp.86-88.

51. Mark McDonald, "North Koreans Struggle, and Party Keeps Its Grip," *New York Times*, February 26, 2011, <<https://www.nytimes.com/2011/02/27/world/asia/27northkorea.html>> (date accessed March 1, 2011).

cited his father's conversations with the late Kim Jong Il, in which the late North Korean leader reportedly "had nightmares at times in which his people threw stones at him."⁵²

The vividness of such anecdotes, if they can be verified, underscores the extent to which the North Korean leadership may have grounds to be genuinely fearful of their grip on power when other like-minded authoritarian regimes have failed to do so. Under these circumstances, it is likely that Kim Jong Un regards the North Korean military as the most important political instrument for ensuring his regime's security, for two reasons. First, faced with the continued U.S. military presence in Northeast Asia, Kim Jong Un's possession of a fledgling nuclear arsenal functions as an "insurance policy" that enables Pyongyang to threaten nuclear devastation against the U.S. and its allies, in the event that Washington were to initiate a war of regime change against Pyongyang.⁵³ Although no one is in any doubt that the U.S. and its allies would emerge triumphant in such a conflict, there is also doubt that such an outcome would be a pyrrhic victory for the U.S., in light of the likely scale of U.S. and allied casualties. Absent a nuclear arsenal, however, North Korea's ability to deter a U.S.-led war of regime change is particularly weak, given the obsolescence of its conventional military arsenal.

Second, given the nuclear arsenal's status as the crown jewel of the North Korean military, it is extremely doubtful if it will ever voluntarily relinquish it.⁵⁴ Given the Kim Jong Un regime's concurrent

52. Sangho Song, "Kim Jong-il dreamed of stoning," *Korea Herald*, March 27, 2011, <<http://www.koreaherald.com/view.php?ud=20110327000236>> (date accessed April 1, 2011).

53. Bruce Klingner and Sue Mi Terry, "We participated in talks with North Korean representatives. This is what we learned," *Washington Post*, June 22, 2017, <https://www.washingtonpost.com/opinions/we-participated-in-talks-with-north-korean-representatives-this-is-what-we-learned/2017/06/22/8c838284-577b-11e7-ba90-f5875b7d1876_story.html?tid=ss_fb&utm_term=.26b37f0f4aa3> (date accessed July 1, 2017).

54. Van Jackson and Stephen Epstein, "North Korea/US Summit – Don't Hold Your Breath," Victoria University Wellington, May 15, 2018, <<https://www.victoria.ac.nz/news/2018/05/north-koreaus-summit-dont-hold-your-breath>> (date

fear of the possibility of regime collapse from within (in a manner similar to the Velvet Revolution or the Arab Spring), it is clear to Kim Jong Un that the military, as the one entity with a monopoly of force within North Korea, is a particularly crucial state organ to crush any uprising against his rule. Under such circumstances, it is unthinkable that Kim Jong Un would be seriously prepared to undermine the military's loyalty to his regime through the country's denuclearization.

VI. Kim Jong Un's North Korea: Past the Point of Nuclear No Return?

In dealing with previous administrations, Kim Jong Un and his predecessors relied heavily on bluster and the deliberate instigation of crises in an effort to increase negotiating leverage over the U.S. and its allies, thereby compensating for Pyongyang's position of weakness and isolation.⁵⁵ While such tactics may have worked for Pyongyang in previous years, Trump's combination of ego, belligerent bluster, and foreign policy inexperience meant that such negotiating tactics nearly backfired on Pyongyang. It should be recalled that Trump's reckless "war of words" nearly led Washington into launching military action on the Korean Peninsula in 2017, a scenario for which neither Pyongyang nor Seoul (nor the majority of the U.S. security establishment) had any particular appetite due to the recognition that such an enterprise would entail extremely heavy casualties.

Thus, rather than trying to "out-Trump" in aggressive bluster, it is apparent that in early 2018, the North Korea leadership identified Trump's ego as his "Achilles heel"—so long as superficial efforts to placate Trump's ego are in place, it is possible for Kim Jong Un to deflect the prospective scenario of U.S. military actions against his regime. In addition, the long technical process that would be required to ensure verification of the complete dismantlement of the North

accessed June 1, 2018).

55. Snyder, *Negotiating on the Edge: North Korean Negotiating Behavior* (Washington: USIP, 1999), pp.69-74.

Korean nuclear weapons program provides Kim Jong Un with multiple opportunities that can be exploited to delay and stall, while waiting for Trump to serve out what is left of his term in office.⁵⁶

VII. Conclusion

Faced with this pessimistic assessment, what are the available policy prescriptions that can be plausibly contemplated in addressing the likelihood that Pyongyang's paranoia has become so deeply embedded as to be virtually set in stone? The poor prospects for the denuclearization of North Korea notwithstanding, the necessity of formulating diplomatic and security policy towards Pyongyang remains. This challenge is all the more reinforced by the fact that policymakers, scholars and the international community alike do not have the benefit of hindsight in ascertaining Pyongyang's intentions. Under the circumstances of there being no good options in dealing with North Korea, it is hence necessary for policy towards Pyongyang to be formulated on the basis of which course of action leads to the "least bad" outcome, while simultaneously maintaining a fallback position against worst-case scenarios.

The logical starting point of this is the necessity of affirming the continued relevance of the ROK-U.S. alliance network. The latter has come under strain in recent years due to the Trump Administration's lack of coherence in North Korea policy (ranging from threats of war in 2017 to referring to "love letters" to Kim Jong Un in 2018⁵⁷) as well as U.S. threats to downgrade the alliance in an attempt to demand improved U.S. access to the ROK's imports market. Nonetheless, it

56. Bret Stephens, "Kim Jong-un and the Art of Tyranny," *New York Times*, September 7, 2017, <<https://www.nytimes.com/2017/09/07/opinion/kim-jong-un-north-korea-nuclear.html>> (date accessed October 1, 2017).

57. Uri Friedman, "The Disturbing Logic of Trump's Lovefest With Kim Jong Un," *The Atlantic*, June 1, 2019, <<https://www.theatlantic.com/politics/archive/2019/06/why-doe-donald-trump-keep-praising-kim-jong-un/590830/>> (date accessed June 2, 2019).

remains important for ROK policymakers to maintain a long-term perspective in reviewing Seoul's relations with Washington. In this regard, the continued maintenance of a firm deterrence posture against North Korea remains necessary, both to warn Pyongyang against excessive brinkmanship, and also to guard against attempts by Pyongyang to sow discord between the U.S. and the ROK. Moreover, given that the Trump administration has demonstrated a certain willingness to abandon longstanding U.S. allies on a whim, it remains necessary for Seoul to hedge against the possibility of an increase in pro-isolationist sentiments in the U.S. that leads to further American disinterest in the alliance. Nonetheless, in so affirming the continued relevance of a strong military posture and the U.S. military presence in Northeast Asia, such a policy prescription has the concurrent effect of continuing to feed North Korea's paranoia. In this regard, the possibility of a return to war-mongering on the part of Washington cannot be ruled out, particularly in light of the continued debates and uncertainty over the outcome of the 2020 U.S. presidential elections. Such an outcome may arise as a result of the mercurial nature of Trump, should he win the 2020 elections: alternatively, in the event that the Democratic Party emerges triumphant in the 2020 elections, it poses the possibility that the post-Trump White House, in seeking to affirm its national security credentials, may again attempt to confront North Korea over its missile and nuclear programs.

Under such circumstances, it is necessary for the ROK to maintain a proactive role in defusing the occasional tendency of the White House to contemplate unilateral military action against North Korea. The Clinton Administration planned to do so in June 1994, but was persuaded not to go ahead with airstrikes on the Yongbyon nuclear reactor by ROK President Kim Young Sam. Likewise, Trump's "war of words" with Kim Jong Un during the second half of 2017 gave rise to fears that his administration was prepared to ride roughshod over ROK objections to unilateral U.S. military action against North Korea. Set against this backdrop, Moon Jae-in's "Winter Olympics diplomacy" with Kim Jong Un was crucial in boxing Trump into a diplomatic corner from which the White House could not plausibly

justify unilateral U.S. military action against North Korea. In seeking to hedge against the possibility of a future White House administration that is prepared to ride roughshod over the interests of the ROK, it is Seoul's moment to shine in adopting a measured diplomatic posture in line with its growing aspiration as a rising power in international relations.

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