

# International Journal of Korean Unification Studies

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## **New Crises and Old Coalitions? Foreign Policy Challenges and Issue Ownership Changes in South Korea\***

**Jungkun Seo**

In this study I explore the changes and challenges confronting conservatives in South Korea when it comes to party reputation over national security. First, this paper addresses the notion of credibility and flexibility related to the dilemma of party change and elaborates on the reality of party transformation in South Korea. Then, by analyzing polling results and policy details, I monitor how the Korean public perceives President Moon Jae-in's coping with North Korea's denuclearization. Additionally, I examine how and why conservatives in South Korea are forced to search for new ideas to recover their old coalitions when confronted with new crises, ranging from those involving North Korea to failed presidents. Concluding remarks include some reform agendas for South Korea's foreign policy-making in the post-Candlelight Era. This paper sheds new light on the how and why national security crises and challenges would often shape the reinvention of partisan coalition-building in domestic politics.

**Keywords:** issue ownership, North Korea nuclear crisis, party reputation, presidential approval ratings, domestic politics

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## I. Introduction

Voters are regularly asked, which party is most adept at handling certain policy issues. It is not uncommon that one party strong on national defense does not enjoy a good reputation when it comes to environmental protection. The cleavages over ideologies and interests normally create distinct partisan coalitions. And yet, it is often the parties themselves that seek to build their own policy character.<sup>1</sup> By putting party politics in perspective, the theory of issue ownership explains the processes and consequences of party reputation-building.

According to Petrocik, candidate strategies and voter responses combine to determine which party wins an election.<sup>2</sup> Then, the co-partisans within the legislature unite amongst themselves to build solid policy coalitions and to assume ownership over the issues. In short, party reputations over policy achievements produce party labels, which guide voters to evaluate problem emphases as well as candidate capabilities. Some argue that the issue of ownership misleads the relationship between parties and the public, as partisan elites adhere too closely to their proprietorship.<sup>3</sup> To be certain, so long as perception and reputation persist, issue ownership rarely changes in party politics.

With state and government enjoying power dominance for so long, conservatives and liberals in South Korea do not differ much regarding various policy areas, except when it comes to issue of national security. Over the past decades, conservatives in South Korea

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1. Gary W. Cox and Mathew D. McCubbins, *Legislative Leviathan: Party Government in the House* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1993); James M. Snyder Jr. and Michael M. Ting, "An Informational Rationale for Political Parties," *American Journal of Political Science*, vol. 46 (2002), p. 90–110; Jonathan Woon and Jeremy C. Pope, "Made in Congress? Testing the Electoral Implications of Party Ideological Brand Names," *Journal of Politics*, vol. 70 (2008), p. 823–36.
  2. John R. Petrocik, "Issue Ownership in Presidential Elections, with a 1980 Case Study," *American Journal of Political Science*, vol. 40, no. 3 (1996), p. 825–850.
  3. Patrick J. Egan, *Partisan Priorities: How Issue Ownership Drives and Distorts American Politics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013).



have enjoyed the upper-hand regarding policy geared towards considering North Korea a security threat. Having portrayed liberals as weak on security, conservative party coalitions have successfully claimed that a so-called “security gap” exists in the domestic politics of South Korea.<sup>4</sup> Nonetheless, the nuclear crisis initiated by the staunch leader of North Korea, but handled by the liberal president of South Korea seems to have turned the Figures.

President Moon, a former human rights lawyer, working closely with the Republican President Trump in the United States, has sought to take the driver’s seat in coordinating efforts to reduce nuclear tensions on the Korean Peninsula.<sup>5</sup> With conservative parties being defeated back to back in the presidential and local elections, since the inauguration in May 2017, the Moon administration has enjoyed a strong approval rating. Rather generally, how does the notion of issue ownership play out in new democracies like South Korea? More specifically, has the issue of military defense arguably owned by conservative coalitions simply disappeared in the new security environment on the Korean Peninsula?

This paper explores the changes and challenges confronting conservatives in South Korea when it comes to the party reputation over national security. First, I address the notion of credibility and flexibility related to the dilemma of party change and elaborate on the reality of party transformation in South Korea. Then, by analyzing polling results and policy details, I track down how the Korean public is responding to President Moon’s handling of North Korean denuclearization. Additionally, I examine how and why conservatives in South Korea are forced to search for new ideas to restore old coalitions when they confront new crises, ranging from North Korea to failed presidents. Concluding remarks include some reform agendas for South Korea’s foreign policy-making in the post-Candlelight Era. This paper sheds

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4. Hannah Goble and Peter M. Holm, “Breaking Bonds? The Iraq War and the Loss of the Republican Dominance in National Security,” *Political Research Quarterly*, vol. 62 (June 2009), p. 215–229.

5. Hal Brands, *American Grand Strategy in the Age of Trump* (Washington D.C.: Brookings Institution Press, 2018).

new light on the how and why national security crises and challenges would shape the reinvention of partisan coalition-building in domestic politics.

## II. Credibility vs. Flexibility: Coalition-building and Party Change

According to Schattschneider, “Modern democracy is unthinkable save in terms of parties.”<sup>6</sup> In addition, Rossiter earlier claimed “No America without democracy, no democracy without politics, no politics without parties, no parties without compromise and moderation.”<sup>7</sup> On top of the critical role played by political parties for democratic governance, scholars have long debated whether parties should change positions. A party shifts positions too often to gain credibility could backfire resulting in the party losing credibility in the eyes of the voters. If a party shifts positions too seldom to show flexibility, voters would also not be pleased with the party. Policy positioning in light of credibility and flexibility is a major dilemma facing political parties in representative democracies.

The famous definition of a party by Burke points to the value of stable policy coalitions in political competitions. Burke was a conservative, utilitarian, and classical liberal.<sup>8</sup>

According to the first great framer of the modern conception of representative government, the party as an institution is not merely the aggregate of its present members but reflects the memory and history of society. Burke’s party was “a body of people united for promoting by their joint endeavors, national interest, upon some particular principle in which they are all agreed.” Until the norm of universal

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6. E. E. Schattschneider, *Party Government: American Government in Action*. (New York: Rinehart and Co, 1942), p. 1.

7. Nancy L. Rosenblum, *On the Side of the Angels: An Appreciation of Parties and Partisanship* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2010), p. 117.

8. Edmund Burke, *The Works of the Right Honorable Edmund Burke*. vol. I (Boston: Little, Brown & Company, 1889).

voting rights was widely adopted, parties in western democracies played the pivotal role of organizing debates and orchestrating policies. Indeed, the party was a credible political institution conducting a noble mission.

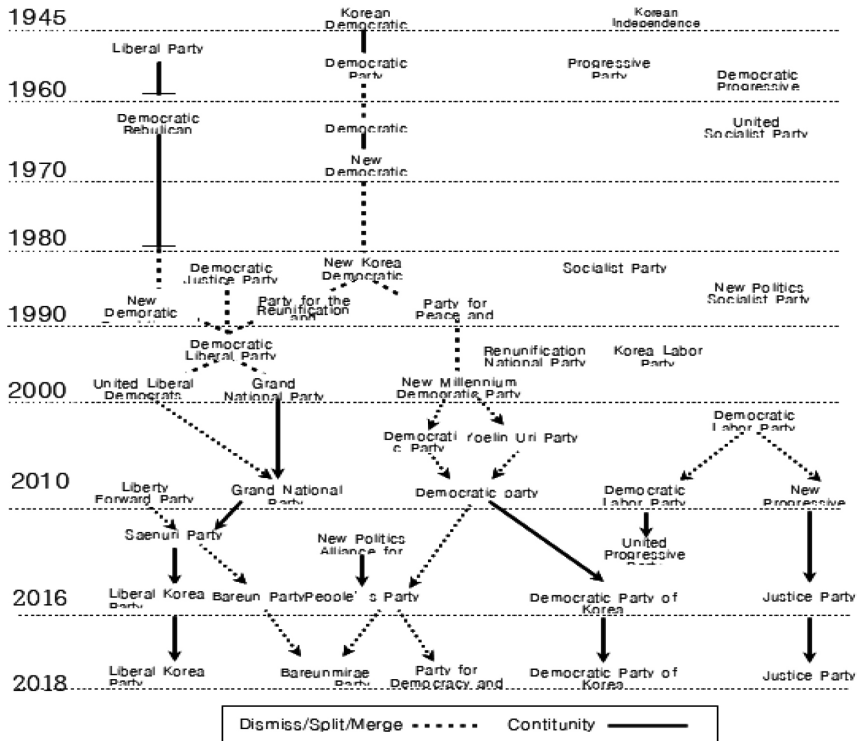
On the other hand, Downs offers a new definition of political parties in representative governance.<sup>9</sup> According to the economist, a party is “a team of people seeking to control the governing apparatus by gaining office in a duly constituted election.” With the election victory agreed upon as the sole purpose of parties, party leaders and members should see no reason why parties must stick to their previous positions. Downs’ party cares more about flexibility than credibility. The median voter theorem by Downs posits that political parties would pursue policies that appeal most to the median voter. It explains why political parties often promote the same policies, even if they break from their own policy positions in the past. Obviously, one big condition for the median voter theorem is related to the ideological distribution of voters. The theorem works if voters’ ideological distribution is a normal distribution. It will not work if voters’ ideological distribution is bimodal.

Over the course of the New Deal era in the United States, the Democratic Party had northern members and southern elites coming together as a dominant congressional majority party. The Republican Party as a “permanent minority” put together a conservative coalition along with some portion of southern Democrats. The American public had no clear choice between the parties showing “not a dime’s worth of difference” until the 1990s. Indeed, the American Political Science Association published in 1950 the report titled “Towards a More Responsible Two-Party System,” which called for the parties to present coherent, yet divergent, packages of policy proposals to the public. Downs’s seminal work in 1957, published only seven years later, put an end to this normative debate of whether a party should or should not change its position. In other words, Downs demonstrates that a rational political party would, in two-party competition, seek out an

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9. Anthony Downs, *An Economic Theory of Democracy* (New York: Harper and Row, 1957).

Figure 1. Party Title Changes in South Korea<sup>10</sup>



ideological position in the middle of the electorate’s preference distribution. Simply put, pursuing a new policy position ultimately shows that the party is flexible.

In the context of new democracies, the notion of new voter demand and party position changes seems to be required for nuanced analyses. Among others, one caveat is that parties in South Korea, for example, do not necessarily revise their positions but often rewrite their labels. The advantages and disadvantages of party credibility and

10. Kyungmee Park, “Korea Assembly and Political Party,” in *Korean Assembly and its Political Processes*, ed. Sung-ho Lim et al. (Seoul: Oruem, 2010), p.237-261, translated by the author. I am indebted to Professor Kyungmi Park for this analysis of party name changes in South Korea.

flexibility are considered only when parties function as a “party-as-a-label.” If political parties keep changing party names from one election to another, voters may be confused about “who’s who” when they consider which party is reliable and responsive. For sure, liberal parties in South Korea hardly use conservative labels and vice versa. Still, it is quite questionable whether the whole debate concerning the advantages and disadvantages of credible versus flexible parties could directly apply in the party politics of South Korea. Figure 1 shows the party changes, not party position changes, over the course of political history in South Korea.

Then, why is it that political parties in South Korea continue to undergo name changes? It has a lot to do with the do-or-die competition for the prize of presidency. Since democratization in 1987, Korean presidents have served a single term pursuant to the constitution. Likewise, there has been no case to date of a sitting president running for re-election in South Korea. Thus, if an incumbent president is very unpopular and the next election is quickly approaching, the ruling party tends to employ a tactic of cosmetic changes such as renewing the party name. At the same time, the opposition party in the course of fierce competition for presidential candidates often ends up having the runner-up defecting from the opposition party. Then naturally, the third opposition candidate builds a new party under a new name.

There are serious problems associate with changing party names in South Korea. One of such problems is that it tends to confuse voters during election campaigns. New names seriously and negatively affect the party-building processes in legislative arenas. A mature party could greatly develop when party members struggle hard for “soul-searching” after they lose the elections. In the midst of balancing efforts to sustain credibility and to show flexibility, political parties shape and reshape their political identities. If political parties continue to correct only labels, and not legacies, then party-building in new democracies is not possible. To a large extent, almost all the parties in South Korea have cleverly survived elections through this long-standing pattern of changing party names.

For now, at least, almost all the pundits and voters in South Korea agree that the current crisis is not just the crisis of the Liberty Korea Party (LKP), but that of conservatives as a whole. In the aftermath of the impeachment of President Park Geun-hye, conservative leaders and parties were divided. Then, the back to back presidential election and local elections dealt a fatal blow to conservative coalitions. Now, the progressive President Moon leads the charge for a new era of peace and stability on the Korean Peninsula. The Republican President Trump has cancelled U.S.-South Korea joint military exercise, calling it a “war game” and calls the North Korea leader “terrific and talented.” The effectiveness of the tactic to change a party’s name in the politics of South Korea seems to no longer be effective and consequently the conservative coalition seems to confront the real crises.

### **III. Security Crises and Foreign Policy-making in the Post-Candlelight Era**

In 2017, South Korea experienced the candlelight protest as a dramatic social movement, which called for the impeachment of the sitting president and the punishment of her close aides. As a consequence, President Park was finally ousted, and the new president Moon came to power through the special election held in May 2017. During his early period of governance, the Moon Administration enjoyed an unprecedented level of support for driving the campaign of “draining the swamp.” The past decade of conservative ruling in South Korea came to be portrayed as failed politics. With Moon’s likeability carrying the day, the Korean public gave the new progressive administration high marks on every reform effort. Despite a recent setback caused by poor economic performance, President Moon’s approval rating is still hovering around 60 percent.

The new administration in the first year of 2017, however, simply could do nothing but watch the security environment on the Korean Peninsula drastically deteriorated. The Kim Jong Un regime in North Korea successfully developed its nuclear program and delivery

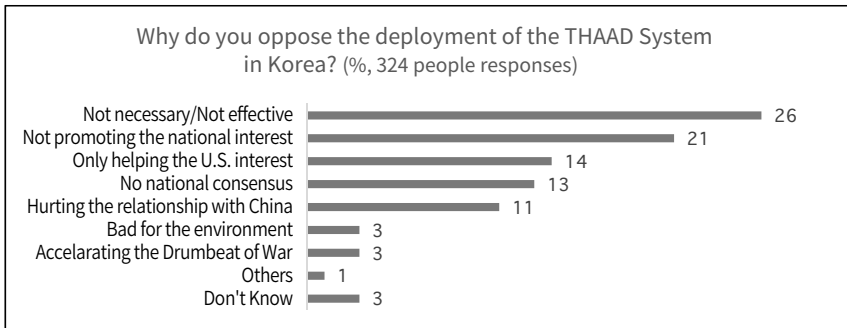
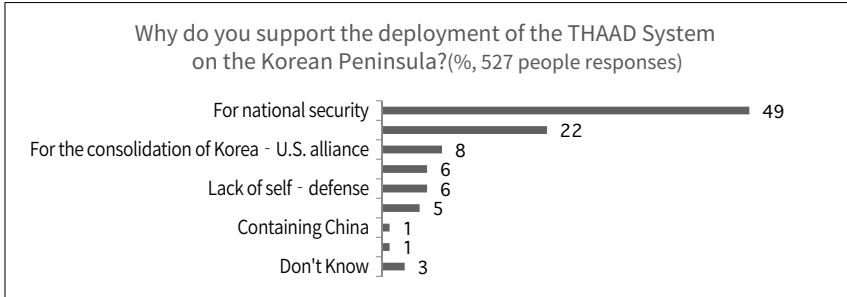
system. North Korea's nuclear-tipped intercontinental ballistic missiles (ICBM) could allegedly hit the city of New York. In response, President Donald Trump of the United States during his UN speech called Kim a "Rocket Man on a suicide mission." Hinting at a military strike against North Korea, Trump's mention of war was ratcheted up in 2017, and included the expression, "fire and fury," "locked and loaded," "totally destroy North Korea," and "the calm before the storm." In China, President Xi Jinping continued economic retaliation against South Korea's corporations doing business in China as the Chinese government and the Chinese public was outraged and very concerned about the THAAD system deployment in South Korea. Prime Minister Shinzo Abe from Japan was also busy courting Trump and was sometimes more unyielding than his counterparts from the United States and South Korea when it comes to talking to North Korea.

Then, to what extent has the so-called "Candlelight Spirit" affected foreign policy in South Korea? There is no doubt that the "Candlelight Protest" was critical for removing the former president. But, launching new foreign policy in the post-Candlelight Era turned out to be a completely different story. First of all, changes in security circumstances have little to do with protests in the streets. The candlelight protest was about the corruption and failures by President Park, not necessarily about foreign policy blunders. Second, free media in South Korea, uncontrolled by the Moon administration, is not necessarily cooperating with Blue House leadership and is often sending mixed signals regarding the effectiveness of the "driver-seat" argument laid out by the new administration over foreign policy-making. As President Moon claims that he would take a driver's seat in handling security concerns on the Korean Peninsula, the conservative media wasted no time criticizing him for being naïve and unrealistic.

Finally, the Korean public was highly divided over the question of how to respond to security threats from North Korea. In 2017, the Moon administration still had the public polarized over the issue of North Korea, ranging from nuclear weapons to human rights to aid decisions. Speaking of domestic polarization over foreign policy,

Figure 2 shows one good example of the public split over THAAD deployment in South Korea. Forty-nine percent of respondents who prefer to deploy THAAD believed that the missile defense system was necessary for national security. On the contrary, almost the same portion of respondents who viewed the deployment negatively claimed that the THAAD system was neither effective nor necessary for national security and interests. Eight percent of positive respondents endorsed the THAAD deployment as a part of efforts to consolidate the U.S.-South Korea alliance, whereas twenty-five percent of those opposing deployment discredited the promotion of the U.S.-South Korea alliance and underscored its relationship with China. Thirteen percent of those that disapproved of the THAAD system took issue with the decision-making processes and deplored no national consensus.

Figure 2. Political Divide over THAAD in South Korea, June 2017

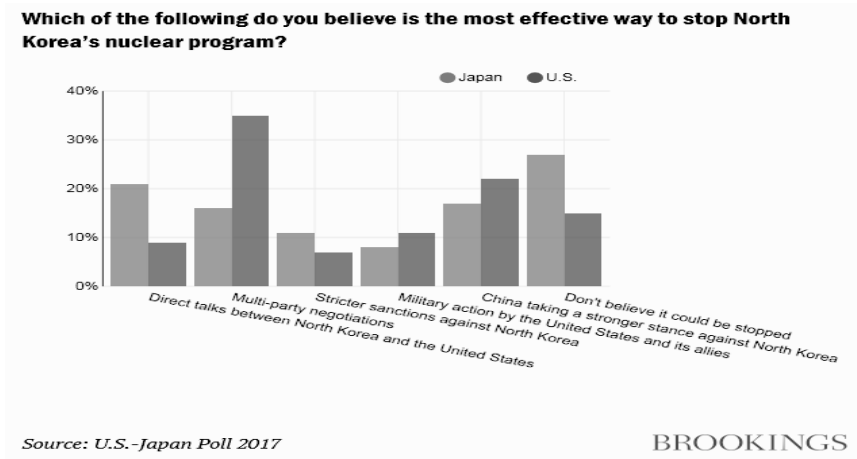


Source: Gallup Korea.



When it comes to diverse views concerning North Korea’s nuclear program, people in both Japan and the United States gave yet another perspective. As shown in Figure 3, Japanese citizens tend to be more pessimistic than the American counterparts about preventing North Korea from developing the nuclear weapons. Also, people in Japan heavily prefer direct talks between North Korea and the United States for resolving the nuclear crisis, whereas multi-party negotiations including China and Japan are highly favored by the American public. Among positions shared by both the Japanese and American public are disapproving the strategy of a military strike against North Korea and emphasizing the role of China in pressuring the North Korean regime to denuclearize.

Figure 3. U.S.-Japan Poll Results concerning North Korea, 2017



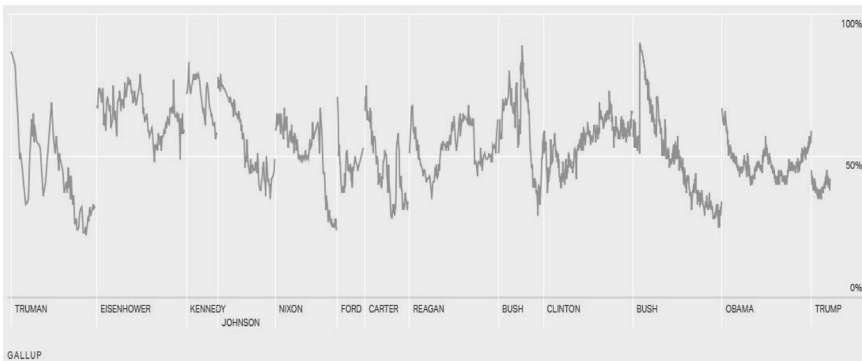
Source: Brookings Institution

#### IV. Presidential Politics and New Ownership of National Security in South Korea?

According to Neustadt, presidential power is the “power-to-

persuade.”<sup>11</sup> The American presidency is characterized as weak vis-à-vis U.S. Congress so that it is imperative for presidents to persuade members of Congress to believe that it is in their own interests to follow presidential leadership. During the periods of Richard E. Neustadt and other traditional scholars of the U.S. presidency, the House and Senate had an upper hand in the process of lawmaking. Thus, when the president pushes for his political agenda in the legislature, he tends to rely on the power to persuade, which comes from the inside-the-beltway reputation and public prestige. What is critical is how much support the sitting president enjoy as public support of the president is a key as to whether and how much members of Congress would embrace or embarrass the president.

Figure 4. US Presidential Approval Ratings Changes



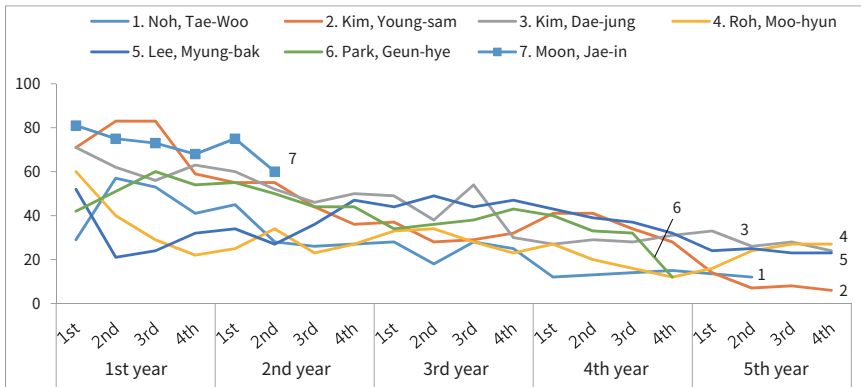
Source: Gallup.

Presidential job approval measured by polling is often considered in terms of public support of the president. Gallup defines “presidential job approval as a simple, yet powerful, measure of the public’s view of the U.S. president’s job performance at a particular point in time.” Indeed, public support of the president has its own characteristics. What is recurring as a strong pattern is the fact that presidential approval ratings tend to decrease over the course of

11. Richard Neustadt, *Presidential Power and the Modern Presidents* (New York: Free Press, 1960).

individual presidencies. Figure 4 shows the tendencies and except for the U.S. Presidents Dwight D. Eisenhower, Ronald Reagan, Bill Clinton, and Barack Obama, nearly all American presidents found public support dwindle the longer they held office. There are many different reasons for this. For example, American presidents cannot please everybody (James Polk). People only see their good points at first (Jimmy Carter). They are scapegoats for our problems (Martin Van Buren). The job is too much for one individual (Herbert Hoover). They make too many promises they cannot keep (Lyndon B. Johnson). Presidents often have to make unpopular decisions (Harry Truman). Presidents are not as powerful as people often think (Woodrow Wilson). And people do not always look at the overall record of a president (George Bush 41st). The case of Korean presidents is no exception. Figure 5 indicates the downward pattern of presidential job approval ratings in South Korea since democratization in 1987.

**Figure 5. Korean Presidential Approval Ratings Changes**

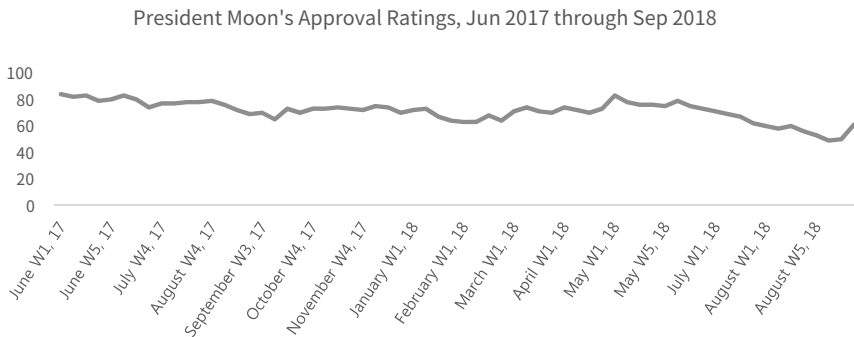


Source: Gallup Korea.

What about the case of President Moon? Since his inauguration in May in 2017, the progressive president has enjoyed relatively high approval ratings. Starting with approval ratings of about 80 percent, the Moon administration successfully filled the “communication gap” failure that the previous presidents were accused of. President Moon

launched a charm offensive and his un-going public strategy gained public support in South Korea.<sup>12</sup> The candlelight protest followed by the election of a new president has created a fresh opportunity for progressive parties in South Korea, whereas conservative coalitions have failed to do “soul searching.” In the aftermath of President Park’s impeachment, conservative leaders could not revamp the age-old conservative slogan of economic growth and national security. The disastrous election results of the local elections of June 2018 were a devastating blow for conservative parties and politicians. In spite of a recent setback caused by economic slowdown, President Moon is still popular among the Korean public, as shown in Figure 6.

Figure 6. President Moon’s Approval Rating Changes



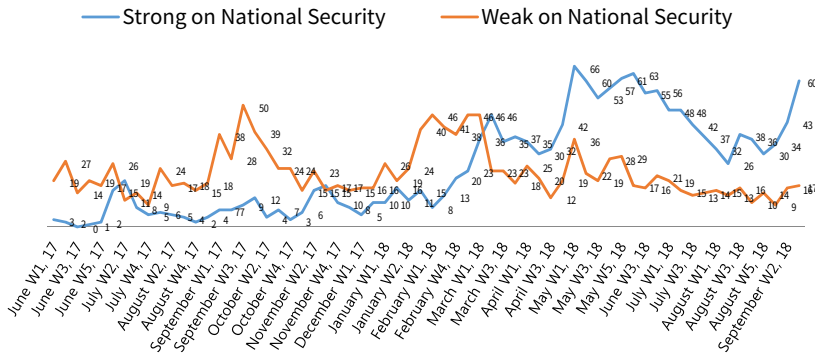
Source: Gallup Korea.

Do President Moon’s high approval ratings lead to the new ownership of a national security issue in South Korea? Figure 7 shows some switching and striking results when it comes to the evaluation of presidential leadership over national security. Until the month of March in 2018, the long-lasting pattern of progressive presidents being perceived as “weak on national security” persisted. The year 2017 was the peak of the nuclear crisis by North Korea, fanned by President

12. Samuel Kernell, *Going Public: New Strategies of Presidential Leadership* (Washington D.C.: CQ Press, 1997).

Trump’s unpredictability and bellicosity.<sup>13</sup> The public in South Korea was seriously concerned about the possibility of military conflicts on the Korean Peninsula.

Figure 7. Public Opinion over President Moon and National Security, 2017-2018



Source: Gallup Korea.

Things have suddenly turned around in early 2018, when Kim Jung Un made a speech of rapprochement and announced his intentions for denuclearization. The PyeongChang Winter Olympics proceeded peacefully and the summit meeting between President Moon and Chairman Kim took place in April of 2018. With respect to the handling of North Korea, South Koreans focused on “diplomacy” and “talk” for positive evaluation of the Moon administration. The same keywords also applied to the naysayers against President Moon. In other words, those negative about the Moon administration gave low approval ratings because President Moon only underscored “diplomacy” and “dialogue.” And yet, those who disapproved of President Moon’s handling of North Korea’s denuclearization were not in the majority.

Obviously, it is too early to tell whether this shift of security issue

13. Taesuh Cha and Jungkun Seo, “Trump by Nixon: Maverick Presidents in the Years of U.S. Relative Decline,” *Korean Journal of Defense Analysis*, vol. 30, no. 1 (2018), p. 79-96.

ownership in favor of a progressive president is significant and sustainable. The Kim Dae-jung government also briefly secured public support and then failed to maintain the momentum when the first-ever summit meeting between the two Koreas in 2000 ultimately changed little regarding the clash between North Korea and the Bush administration. And, the progress made towards North Korea's denuclearization this time could be lost at any time if North Korea and the United States repeat the past failures of no trust-building with each other.<sup>14</sup> There is, however, no doubt that the biggest premise of "denuclearization through dialogue," offers major advantages to the Moon administration when it comes to the dimension of public relations in South Korea. Especially, when the conservative opposition has no alternative strategy to offer in dealing with nuclear crisis on the Korean Peninsula, President Moon's leadership over national security could enjoy public support for a while to come.<sup>15</sup>

## V. Conclusion: Perceptions, Performance, and Party

The security crises concerning the denuclearization of North Korea pose new challenges to traditional ideas and political institutions in South Korea. Among others, unconventional U.S. foreign policy pushed ahead by Trump has made conservative voters and parties in South Korea scratch their heads over the solidarity of the U.S.-ROK alliance. The U.S. president's cancelling of the joint military exercise overnight and praising the North Korean dictator as talented were actions thought of as unthinkable since the armistice of the Korean War in 1953. This was truly shocking particularly because the conservative elites and parties have long employed the ROK-U.S. military partnership as the backbone for their political identities. Indeed, the playbook of "Red Scare" by conservative presidents and

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14. Jungkun Seo, "Agreements without Commitments? The US Congress and the US North Korea Agreed Framework, 1994-2002," *Korean Journal of Defense Analysis*, vol. 27, no. 1 (2015), p. 107-122.

15. John Mueller, *War, Presidents, and Public Opinion* (New York: Wiley, 1973).

parties have, until recently and effectively, put progressive parties on the defensive. Then, all of a sudden, just as the election of Trump in 2016 has thrown American politics into turmoil, the about-face of the American president since 2017 has astonished conservative politics in South Korea. In addition, as I have analyzed in this paper, the public in South Korea now overwhelmingly supports the basic direction of the Moon administration over the handling of North Korea. Simply put, the perception and reputation concerning the ownership of security issues by conservatives seems to change, at least for now.

When South Koreans endorse a peaceful approach to the nuclear crisis, I suggest that conservative coalitions no longer be out of touch with public sentiment. The political reality is that the notion of “war-as-no-option” is firmly planted in the mindset of Korean voters, whereas many people believe that the complete denuclearization of North Korea is required. Scare tactics long employed by the conservative media and the traditional elites would neither alarm nor attract the South Korean public any longer. With Trump being spontaneous each and every day, conservative coalitions could no longer rely on the U.S.-ROK alliance as their political panacea.

As of now, the only direction conservative politics in South Korea could take appears to be by adopting the position of “peace-through-strength,” which would get Korean conservatives back on track as security hawks. In other words, the Reagan style of rhetoric and reputation is needed for conservative coalitions in South Korea, as progressives continue to emphasize negotiations and compromises with North Korea. Among others, if conservatives aim to reshape their security issue ownership, they could, for example, call for the complete inspection of North Korea’s nuclear facilities and the return of wartime operational control (OPCON) to the South Korean military. Only when conservative coalitions in South Korea are consistently tough on American policymakers as well as the North Korean regime, they could present new party identities to the younger generations in South Korea.

What about the candlelight protest and political institutions in South Korea? Although the Candlelight Protest in 2016 has

dramatically presented a new possibility for civic participation for political reform in South Korea, the impact to date has been arguably limited to the overthrow and takeover of the presidency in the Blue House. For sure, the drive for “draining the swamp” has swept the political scene since the inauguration of President Moon. And yet correcting past wrongdoings does not always create the new political institutions, by which political reform could systematically and comprehensively persist.

For example, the so-called “imperial presidency” was considered to be the main culprit for the failure of previous presidents in South Korea.<sup>16</sup> The Moon administration, however, has not taken any critical measures to tackle this institutional problem of unchecked presidency. Rather, the need for handling the security situation and economic reforms has allegedly caused President Moon to delegate more powers than before to his Blue House advisors, who are not electorally accountable. I posit that the new security crises would provide an unprecedented opportunity to the progressive coalition only when President Moon and his party could take charge of the political reform of the presidency in South Korea. The personal charm of President Moon would be good for his own political career during his term in office but would be far short of building his party’s reputation in terms of national security after his retirement in 2022.

Finally, another missed opportunity in the aftermath of the Candlelight protest is the reform of the legislative branch in South Korea. As the Candlelight movement signifies the democratic principle of “checks and balances,” the National Assembly should function as a key player in the area of foreign policy-making. The Armed Services Committee should host hearings regularly to ask and assess the administration’s positions and strategies over the question of North Korea’s denuclearization. Legislative heavyweights should step up to the plate and lead public debate for national consensus-building over how to resolve the security crisis. Only when the National Assembly in South Korea helps the public hold the Moon administration

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16. Andrew Rudalevige, *The New Imperial Presidency: Renewing Presidential Power after Watergate* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2005).



accounting, can President Moon and his advisors care for democratic and consensual solutions to the nuclear crisis on the Korean Peninsula.

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## **Russia and the Korean Peace Process**

**Stephen Blank**

The fast-moving diplomacy around North Korea's nuclear weapons demands nimbleness and quick responses to dynamic changes in the relationships among the six interested parties. Yet Russia continues to adhere to long-standing objectives and positions. Consequently, it runs the risk of being further marginalized despite its anxieties to avoid that situation. This paper outlines Russia's vital interests in regard to the Korean Peninsula and its positions on major issues in the current process. It also underscores the fact that Russia's position on Korea is critical to its overall Asian policy. Therefore, because its policy remains immured in past concepts and goals, Russia's Korea and Asian policy are in danger of not being realized. Moreover, its ever-closer alignment if not alliance with China is rendering it less and less important as a factor in Korean affairs. The essay concludes with some remarks as to what the consequences of these processes might entail for Russia and the other parties in their efforts to resolve the North Korean nuclear issue.

**Keywords:** Russia, North Korea, South Korea, Denuclearization, China

## Introduction

The tumultuous twists and turns of what might be called the Korean peace process since 2017 have dramatically shaken up the relationships among the members of the six-party process. Earlier in 2018, the utterly unanticipated outbreak of a Korean peace process replete with unprecedented DPRK-U.S. and inter-Korean summits upended previous calculations among all the members of the six-party process in Korea. As a result, reports from the spring of 2018, when the reality of the Singapore Summit between President Trump and Kim Jong Un materialized, showed that every interested party was trying somehow to join the summit process and improve their ties with Pyongyang at the same time.<sup>1</sup>

This frenetic diplomatic activity among the six parties since March 2018 continues and in doing so indicates a continuing turbulence in the process; by September 2018 we seem to have reached a point not far from where all this activity began. Despite three inter-Korean summits by September 2018, the U.S. demands concrete steps towards denuclearization, e.g. an inventory of the DPRK's missiles and capabilities. Indeed, South Korean Foreign Minister Kang-Kung Wha suggested that the U.S. hold off on its demands for such an inventory and move to make peace on the peninsula to induce North Korea to pledge denuclearization.<sup>2</sup> And South Korea has subsequently agreed to

1. Clint Work, "US-North Korea-South Korea: Three's Company Or a Crowd?," [www.thediplomat.com](https://thediplomat.com/2018/06/us-north-korea-south-korea-threes-company-or-a-crowd/), [https://thediplomat.com/2018/06/us-north-korea-south-korea-threes-company-or-a-crowd](https://thediplomat.com/2018/06/us-north-korea-south-korea-threes-company-or-a-crowd/), June 7, 2018; David Nakamura, "Rival Powers Scramble For Influence Ahead of Trump-Kim Summit In Singapore," [https://www.washingtonpost.com/politics/rival-powers-scramble-for-influence-ahead-of-trump-kim-singapore-summit/2018/06/06/0ba22b76-68d6-11e8-bea7-c8eb28bc52b1\\_story.html?noredirect=on&utm\\_term=.edf43d1f30d0](https://www.washingtonpost.com/politics/rival-powers-scramble-for-influence-ahead-of-trump-kim-singapore-summit/2018/06/06/0ba22b76-68d6-11e8-bea7-c8eb28bc52b1_story.html?noredirect=on&utm_term=.edf43d1f30d0), June 7, 2018; Jeong-Ho Lee and Sarah Zheng, "China, Russia and Japan Seek Seats At the Table With Kim Jong-un, Moon Jae-in and Donald Trump," <http://www.scmp.com/news/china/diplomacy-defence/article/2143328/china-russia-and-japan-seek-seats-table-kim-jong-un>, April 26, 2018
2. Lesley Wroughton and David Brunnstrom, "Pompeo Optimistic Pyongyang Trip Will Yield U.S.-North Korea Progress," [www.reuters.com](http://www.reuters.com/article/us-northkorea-usa-idUSKCN1MD2AD), <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-northkorea-usa-idUSKCN1MD2AD>, October 3, 2018

and started implementing confidence-building measures with North Korea as cited below. Meanwhile, North Korea, according to South Korean interlocutors, continues to develop its nuclear program and demand first a formal declaration of an end to the Korean War, all the while protesting its desire to eliminate its nuclear capability by the end of President Trump's term in 2021.<sup>3</sup> It continues to assert that it does not have sufficient trust in the U.S. to denuclearize without a security guarantee from Washington.<sup>4</sup> Indeed, a Russian expert recently told this author among others that no concession from the United States could be large enough or sufficiently credible to induce Kim Jong Un to denuclearize. Therefore, the "peace process" should be built on long-term confidence-building measures while North Korea retains at least some nuclear weapons.<sup>5</sup> To complicate matters further, the third inter-Korean summit in September 2018 added a new element as the inter-Korean rapprochement continued. Both sides pledged confidence-building mechanisms along their shared border and Pyongyang again announced its readiness to dismantle a nuclear missile site.<sup>6</sup>

Nevertheless, North Korea's pledges fell and still fall far short of what Washington is demanding. But even so, Secretary of State Mike Pompeo reaffirmed his willingness to resume negotiations with Pyongyang even as he announced that sanctions would continue until denuclearization is accomplished even though Pyongyang cites

3. "North Korean Leader Kim Jong Un Wants To Denuclearize During Trump's First Term: Seoul Officials," <https://www.cnn.com/2018/09/06/north-koreas-kim-jong-un-wants-to-denuclearize-by-trumps-first-term.html>, September 6, 2018
4. Margaret Beshar, "DPRK Says Will Not Denuclearize Before More Trust in US," <https://www.voanews.com/a/north-korea-says-will-not-denuclearize-before-more-trust-in-us/4592754.html>, September 29, 2018
5. Meeting with Russian expert who insisted on anonymity, Washington, D.C., November 12, 2018; Konstantin Asmolov, "Complete Denuclearization? Not Before the Korean War is Officially Over," [www.valdaiclub.com](http://www.valdaiclub.com), August 3, 2018
6. Ankit Panda, "A Productive Fifth Inter-Korean Summit, But Denuclearization Remains Distant," [www.thediplomat.com](http://www.thediplomat.com), September 24, 2018; Toby Dalton, "A Challenge and an Opportunity in the Latest Inter-Korean Military Agreement," <https://warontherocks.com/2018/10/a-challenge-and-an-opportunity-in-the-latest-inter-korean-military-agreement/>, October 1, 2018

sanctions as the source of distrust.<sup>7</sup> Consequently, the overall “peace process” now comprises smaller processes like the inter-Korean talks, and the bilateral U.S.-DPRK negotiations, while also displaying a curious mixture of volatility and stasis. Yet as of today the peace process, despite that volatility, has ironically reached a point not that far removed from where matters stood in 2017. Nevertheless, the intense activity of the six parties involved continues as shown by their mutual interaction and, in particular, North Korea’s intensified diplomatic exchanges with the U.S., South Korea, China, and Russia (there is as yet little sign of direct contacts with Japan) as well as the debate on Korea at the most recent session of the UN General Assembly.<sup>8</sup> At the same time, the results of the inter-Korean summit in early September 2018 show that the potential for individual parties to move the process in unexpected directions, which forces all the other parties to scramble to keep up, remains a constant possibility. This complicated situation forces each of the involved governments to conduct a highly flexible and nimble diplomacy lest it be left behind or even out of the process even if the key issues are nowhere near resolution at present.

In this context we must constantly assess the objectives and changing tactics of the six parties. Any breakdown in the U.S.-DPRK talks or in the inter-Korean dialogue could derail even the limited progress hitherto made or at least force a reorientation of efforts to denuclearize the Korean Peninsula. The possibility of returning to “square one” or to a new beginning in that process obliges us to rethink the vital interests of all the players involved in the quest for peace in Korea. At the same time, moves like the confidence-building measures announced at the September 2018 inter-Korean summit raise the possibility of rapidly changing directions and new possibilities that oblige all the other parties to respond with alacrity or be left behind. This

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7. “North Korea Says It Won’t Disarm First, Citing Sanctions as Source Of Mistrust In U.S.,” <https://www.nbcnews.com/news/world/north-korea-says-it-won-t-disarm-first-citing-sanctions-n915036>, September 29, 2018

8. “What We’re Watching at the U.N. General Assembly,” <https://www.nytimes.com/2018/09/24/world/americas/un-general-assembly.html>



danger of being left behind or left out applies with particular cogency to Russia, as can be seen through an examination of its Korea policy through all the ups and downs of the period since the announcement of the summit in the spring of 2018 to the time of this writing November 2018. Yet despite the points made above concerning the need for the parties to conduct a nimble diplomacy, Moscow remains immured in proposals and perspectives that go back several years.

### **Russia's Vital Interests in Korea**

Russia's primary vital interests in Korea are peace and inclusion. Those interests are equally critical in importance and linked because if Russia is excluded from a Korean peace process it cannot guarantee that either its interests will be safeguarded or that it has any leverage over other actors concerning questions of war and peace. This has been clear to Moscow for some time and that prospect visibly alarms it.<sup>9</sup> Moreover, if Russia is marginalized in regard to Korean issues, that outcome undermines any pretension to being a great Asian power. Inclusion in any Korean process is important in its own right but also a part of that larger objective of great power status in Asia. That great power status in Asia has become steadily more important for President Putin's government. Indeed, Putin's first initiative in Asia to regain Russia's position was a trip to Pyongyang in 2000 to reestablish Russian standing as a valuable interlocutor for North Korea. Putin already understood then that if Russia is excluded from the Korean dialogue and cannot influence North Korea, it counts for little or nothing in Asia. In other words, Russia's Korea policy is integral to its entire "Ostpolitik" or Asia policy and cannot be understood apart from it.

Peace is equally essential for Russia. Korea has engaged vital Russian interests since the first of the four wars Russia fought over

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9. "What We're Watching at the U.N. General Assembly," <https://www.nytimes.com/2018/09/24/world/americas/un-general-assembly.html>

Korea in the twentieth century.<sup>10</sup> If war breaks out in or over Korea it will likely force Russia, most likely against its preferences, to take sides and possibly become involved in a war where it has no control over any of the protagonists' actions or leverage upon their behavior.<sup>11</sup> It then would be dragged into a conflict that began without reference to its interests and that other governments started for reasons having little relevance to Moscow. Indeed, some analysts have opined that the Russo-Chinese exercises "Vostok-2018" and earlier joint exercises reflect both states' reactions to the possibility of a war over Korea.<sup>12</sup>

Moreover, a war in or over Korea is highly detrimental if not disastrous to its major Asian policies. This war will terminate any opportunity to enlist Asian or international help to rebuild Siberia and the Russian Far East (RFE) while possibly drawing those territories and thus Russia into the war. If those lands cannot be developed then the "pivot to Asia" that has characterized much of Russian policy will be destroyed for its premise and priority goal are that Russia can attract foreign investment to help develop Siberia and the RFE. Therefore, it is of the utmost importance that Russia be visibly included among the parties who guarantee the peace and the subsequent restructuring of Northeast Asia, if not international security. But the importance of peace does not end here.

Indeed, the issue of Russia's ability or lack thereof to influence

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10. The Russo-Japanese War in 1904, the Soviet-Japanese conflicts in 1938-39, the Korean operation in 1945, and the Korean War where Soviet pilots flew combat missions.
  11. Stephen Blank, "Russia and the Two Koreas In the Context of Moscow's Asian Policy," *Academic Paper Series*, Korean Economic Institute of America, October 2015, [www.keia.org](http://www.keia.org); also in Gilbert Rozman, Ed., *On Korea*, 2016: Washington, D.C.: Korean Economic Institute of America, 2016, pp. 60-76
  12. Tom O'Connor, "China and Russia Train for War With U.S. if Trump Invades North Korea," <https://www.newsweek.com/china-could-fight-us-war-north-korea-breaks-out-751779>, December 18, 2017; Kalev Stoiescu, "Vostok-2018: Political and Military Significance," <https://icds.ee/vostok-2018-political-and-military-significance>, September 11, 2018; Damien Sharikov, "Russia Is Preparing For North Korea War As Tensions Rise, Says Putin's Top Security Adviser," [www.newsweek.com](http://www.newsweek.com), December 1, 2017

decisions that reckon with its interests and reduce the likelihood of violence relate very strongly to its other obsession, namely its great power status in both Asia and globally. Beyond the threat to Moscow's Asian policy if it is marginalized or war breaks out, those two outcomes also jeopardize its pretensions to great power status in Asia and globally. Moscow is driven by the quest for great power status as a major Asian player. Indeed, obtaining an acknowledgement of that status is a principal goal of all of its Asian policies as is securing foreign investment to help develop Asiatic Russia. Therefore, it is equally critical to Moscow that Russia be heard, seen, and acknowledged by everyone as an equal player in the six-party process regardless of facts on the ground. In pursuit of that goal a principal tactic of Russian foreign policy has been to try to persuade North and South Korea and the U.S. that Moscow is a principal player in regard to this issue and that it can offer positive steps to any or all of these states because it supposedly has real cards to play regarding Korea, namely its energy supplies, location, and legacy of ties with Pyongyang.

A war in Korea, launched by anyone, not only threatens Russian material and political interests in Asia, but it also threatens the regime at home since the illusion of great power status has become the main domestic prop of a regime mired in domestic stagnation. Since a war or marginalization would show that Russia actually lacks leverage on the parties, it could start a political avalanche at home. Luke Chambers and Vitaly Kozyrev separately observed in 2010 that the president's conduct of foreign policy is a critical aspect of the restoration of both the state and Russia's great power standing abroad, the two key objectives of Putin's policies throughout his tenure in office. Thus actions assessing Russia as an independent, sovereign great power evoke strong public support.<sup>13</sup> Furthermore, as Kozyrev observes,

Many decisions concerning security issues are related to the factor of *legitimacy of the ruling elite*, rather than the correlation between Russia's

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13. Luke Chambers, "Authoritarianism and Foreign Policy: The Twin Pillars of Resurgent Russia," *Caucasian Review of International Affairs*, IV, No. 2, 2010, pp. 119-120

power and capabilities. Being unable to secure required conditions for a qualitative breakthrough toward an effective economic model and relying increasingly on natural resources for economic growth, the governing groups constantly feel a danger of social unrest and the pressure from competing influential political and business circles.<sup>14</sup>

However, because Russia has failed to develop its own Asian capabilities sufficiently and recklessly precipitated what amounts to a war with the West in Ukraine, Russia's overall Asian policies are increasingly also driven by a perfervid anti-Americanism that is, if anything, growing.<sup>15</sup> So beyond increasing alignment with China on many international issues and striving to persuade North Korea of its importance to the North Korean government and despite its proclaimed opposition to nuclearization, Russia will not do much to arrest or stop that nuclearization because doing so would signify support for the Trump Administration's policies. Indeed, it has continued to identify with China's approach that blames the U.S., seeks to mitigate North Korean behavior, and finds excuses for it by referring to the U.S. threat.<sup>16</sup> Furthermore, despite praising President Trump's approach, Putin, once again, has stated that Washington must stop pressuring North Korea to disarm without offering it encouragement, respond to its positive actions, and give North Korea security guarantees in advance of any denuclearization, a long-standing Russian policy and also a non-starter

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14. Vitaly Kozyrev, "Russia's Security Policy in Asia in Times of Economic Uncertainty," Paper Presented to the Annual Meeting of the American Political Science Association, September 2-5, 2010, p. 21

15. "Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov's remarks at the 73rd session of the UN General Assembly," New York, September 28, 2018, [http://www.mid.ru/ru/foreign\\_policy/news/-/asset\\_publisher/cKNonkJE02Bw/content/id/3359296?p\\_p\\_id=101\\_INSTANCE\\_cKNonkJE02Bw&\\_101\\_INSTANCE\\_cKNonkJE02Bw\\_languageId=en\\_GB](http://www.mid.ru/ru/foreign_policy/news/-/asset_publisher/cKNonkJE02Bw/content/id/3359296?p_p_id=101_INSTANCE_cKNonkJE02Bw&_101_INSTANCE_cKNonkJE02Bw_languageId=en_GB)

16. Gilbert Rozman, "North Korea's Place in Sino-Russian Relations and Identities," <http://www.theasanforum.org/north-koreas-place-in-sino-russian-relations-and-identities>, 2015; Yuri Morozov, "Russia, China, and the North Korean Nuclear Problem," *Far Eastern Affairs*, XLVI, No. 3, 2018, pp. 38-53

from Washington's standpoint.<sup>17</sup> And, despite agreeing to UN resolutions on sanctions for North Korea's continuing nuclearization process, both Russia and China are increasingly openly violating those sanctions.<sup>18</sup> Finally both Russia and China have openly announced their support for North Korea's negotiating position of phased, synchronous concessions by both sides.

Moreover, on October 9, 2018, following the latest visit of U.S. Secretary of State Mike Pompeo to North Korea, deputy foreign ministers of Russia, China, and North Korea—Igor Morgulov of Russia, Kong Xuanyou of China, and Choe Son Hui of North Korea—gathered for the first time in Moscow to discuss easing sanctions on North Korea. Summarizing the meetings, Morgulov, stated in a TASS interview that “measures” should reflect “reciprocity, and parallel, synchronous and gradual steps” and emphasized that the situation on the Korean Peninsula would be settled in “accordance with the Russian-Chinese roadmap.”<sup>19</sup>

Consequently, if China is encouraging North Korea to resist U.S. pressure for denuclearization as President Trump has suggested, it is quite likely that Russia is also doing so and probably at China's behest.<sup>20</sup> Certainly, both states' violations of UN resolutions that they supported regarding sanctions on North Korea are becoming ever more transparent.<sup>21</sup> Increasingly, Russian analyses of the Korean issue also

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17. “Putin Says North Korea Needs More Encouragement,” *Radio Free Europe Radio Liberty*, [www.rferl.org](http://www.rferl.org), September 12, 2018; “Putin Says North Korea Doing a Lot To Disarm But Washington Not Responding,” *Reuters*, September 12, 2018

18. Mercy A. Kuo, “China, Russia, and US Sanctions On North Korea,” [www.thediplomat.com](http://www.thediplomat.com), November 13, 2018

19. *Ibid.*

20. Cristina Maza, “Donald Trump Blames China for North Korea's Failure to Denuclearize, Beijing Slams President's ‘Irresponsible and Absurd Logic’,” <https://www.newsweek.com/donald-trump-blames-china-north-koreas-failure-denuclearize-and-beijing-slams-1097294>, August 30, 2018

21. “U.S. Warns Russia, China and Others On Enforcing North Korea Sanctions,” <https://www.cbsnews.com/news/un-report-says-north-korea-is-continuing->

blame Washington for North Korea's continuing nuclearization due to its threats against North Korea.<sup>22</sup> Therefore Russia has argued, along with China, and to Pyongyang's delight, that Washington must make the first concessions, e.g. ending the state of war on the Korean Peninsula, giving security guarantees, and ceasing its threats while deferring the urgent necessity of denuclearization.<sup>23</sup> Moscow has also shown visible pleasure at the fact that the outcome of the Singapore summit appeared to correspond to it and Beijing's proposal (largely a Chinese initiative) of a so called double freeze or roadmap: North Korea freezing nuclear tests in return for a freeze on U.S.-ROK exercises.<sup>24</sup> Yet even though the U.S. and North Korea reached this outcome on their own, it has not led to any dramatic improvement in matters since Singapore nor has it led to any upgrading by the parties of Moscow's importance to the process.

But because Russia has subordinated itself to China for global as well as regional reasons, Russian leaders and analysts know and have to admit, though they are extremely loath to do so, that Russia plays second fiddle to China in Korea.<sup>25</sup> For this reason and due to the fact that the Korean parties and the U.S. have managed to sustain a dialogue without any noticeable Russian participation or contribution (quite the

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nuclear-and-missile-programs-2018-08-04, August 4, 2018

22. "Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov's Remarks At the UN Security Council Ministerial Meeting On North Korea Settlement Efforts," New York, September 27, 2018, [http://www.mid.ru/en/web/guest/general\\_assembly/-/asset\\_publisher/lrzZMhfoyrUj/content/id/3354592](http://www.mid.ru/en/web/guest/general_assembly/-/asset_publisher/lrzZMhfoyrUj/content/id/3354592), September 27, 2018
23. "Putin Says North Korea Needs More Encouragement," *Radio Free Europe Radio Liberty*, [www.rferl.org](http://www.rferl.org), September 12, 2018; "Putin Says North Korea Doing a Lot To Disarm But Washington Not Responding," *Reuters*, September 12, 2018
24. "Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov's Statement and Answers To Media Questions At a Joint News Conference By BRICS Foreign Ministers Following Their Meeting, Pretoria," June 4, 2018, [http://www.mid.ru/en/meropriyatiya\\_s\\_uchastiem\\_ministra/-/asset\\_publisher/xK1BhB2bUjd3/content/id/3248286?novelty-display-dynamic=novelty](http://www.mid.ru/en/meropriyatiya_s_uchastiem_ministra/-/asset_publisher/xK1BhB2bUjd3/content/id/3248286?novelty-display-dynamic=novelty)
25. Artyom Lukin, "Why Russia Is Still Playing Second Fiddle In Korean Geopolitics," <http://valdaiclub.com/a/highlights/russia-second-fiddle-in-korea/>, August 21, 2018; "On North Korea, Trump Has Putin Playing Second Fiddle," *Moscow Times*, June 7, 2018, Johnson's Russia List, June 7, 2018

opposite), marginalization is an ever-present threat and Moscow constantly endeavors to hide this reality by trying to puff up its importance to all the other parties. But, as of this writing, it has had only partial or limited success in doing so. For example, despite numerous public Russian invitations, North Korean ruler Kim Jong Un has yet to meet with Putin despite three summits with Xi Jinping and South Korean President Moon and one with President Trump. Therefore, a considerable amount of Russian diplomacy here is a matter of show, not substance.

Perhaps even more disturbing to Moscow and Beijing is that the development of North Korea's missiles and nuclear weapons justifies and stimulates U.S. deployment of the THAAD missile defense system in and around Korea that they both regard as a threat to their own nuclear weapons and strategy. Clearly Russia lacks political leverage upon North Korea to secure its objectives to dismantle THAAD by prevailing upon Pyongyang to stop its nuclear program. Despite the fact that THAAD is very much a joint U.S.-ROK reaction to North Korea's denuclearization, Russian, if not Chinese pressure on North Korea to denuclearize to secure its interests and those of China are nowhere to be seen. Meanwhile, the DPRK's program provokes the U.S. to build and strengthen its missile defenses with its allies while Moscow continues to run after Pyongyang by blaming America and its threats to North Korea for the crisis. Since Russia lacks any compelling military-political leverage on North Korea or China on these issues, to ensure that it is seen and heard as a major player, it must then emphasize the economic opportunities it claims to possess to build economic linkages with North Korea and thus re-establish its political leverage on North Korea. Absent those economic linkages, it forfeits any hope of influencing or persuading North Korea to accept Russia's core economic proposals for the Korean Peninsula, which have major political significance as well. Moreover, as long as these proposals remain in abeyance, it also stands revealed as a minor player in what it regards as a vital area, an intolerable affront to its great power amour-propre. Indeed, if Russia cannot convince others to take its economic proposal and interests seriously, its Asia project falls apart and it stands revealed

as a secondary if not tertiary player in Asia, an unacceptable outcome.

Because Russia continues to lack any means of political leverage on North Korea, it has no choice, given the overall situation and its own intrinsic anti-Americanism, to continue abetting North Korean proliferation. Like China, Russia simultaneously supports and then covertly violates the UN sanctions that it supported. It disapproves of North Korea's nuclear quest although it will do little or nothing to stop it and has, in fact, abetted it over the years by helping it break sanctions by means of energy transfers to the DPRK.<sup>26</sup> Essentially Russian diplomacy engages in a fruitless vicious circle that to a considerable degree is of its own making due to its failure to develop Russian Asia, its alliance with China, and visceral anti-Americanism. And it has thus failed, as Russian analysts have had to admit, to display the requisite nimbleness to enhance its standing during the tumultuous Korean "peace process."<sup>27</sup>

Given the circumstances, Russia's intention to preserve its economic and thus political connection to North Korea, can only be realized by economic deals with North Korea that then have political repercussions. Therefore, Russia has obsessively pursued the following economic projects in order to enhance its political standing across the region and convince everyone else that it truly has an important and constructive role to play in the six-party or any other process pertaining to Korea. However, U.S. experts like Victor Cha have observed that it plays a "peripheral" role here.<sup>28</sup> First Russia has consistently striven to convince the region and now the other five parties of this process of the necessity for a Trans-Siberian-Trans-Korean railway to become a more powerful economic-political player on the Korean Peninsula and facilitate Russia's key role as a medium for intercontinental trade between Europe and

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26. Danielle Haynes, "Pompeo, Haley Call Out China, Russia For Oil Transfers To North Korea," [https://www.upi.com/Top\\_News/US/2018/07/20/Pompeo-Haley-call-out-China-Russia-for-oil-transfers-to-North-Korea/6111532123060](https://www.upi.com/Top_News/US/2018/07/20/Pompeo-Haley-call-out-China-Russia-for-oil-transfers-to-North-Korea/6111532123060), July 20, 2018

27. Lukin

28. Victor Cha, *The Impossible State: North Korea Past and Future*, New York: Harper Collins Books, 2013, pp. 345-369



Asia.<sup>29</sup> This project dates back to Sergei Witte and the 1890. Indeed, it was one of the causes of Japanese suspicion of Russia's aims in Korea that led to the Russo-Japanese War in 1904. Yet despite the characteristic tenacity of Russian diplomacy revealed in its obsessive quest for this project, it still has not gotten off the ground.

The second and more recent obsession (not too strong a word) revolves around a Trans-Siberian-Trans-Korean gas pipeline to play to Russia's strong suit, i.e. its enormous reserves of oil and gas. But for this pipeline to be built, not only must both Koreas agree to all the complex issues involved, e.g. the route, tariffs, and volume of gas that will go through the pipeline and whether its products may be sold beyond the Korean Peninsula; somebody else will also have to pay for that pipeline's construction and maintenance. As a result, given the inherent complexity of those issues, the unresolved issues between North and South Korea, the overall stagnation of the peace process, and North Korean nuclear intransigence, little has been accomplished. Russia consequently fears being dragged into a war for issues where it has no leverage and by a power over whom it has little control but whose stakes are immensely important to it. A potential third project that has not been pursued with the same tenacity is the possibility of using Russian hydrocarbons or surplus electricity in the Far East to generate a region-wide electricity network comprising Northern China, the Russian Far East, possibly Mongolia, and both North and South Korea. Yet this too has not gotten off the ground.<sup>30</sup> Thus, if we give Russia's influence and standing in Korea a cold, hard, unsentimental look, we find that Russia is, to some degree, a marginal wannabe that unjustifiably craves being accepted as one of the major actors equal to the U.S. and China even though it has little to offer or to contribute to sustaining a long-term peace in Korea.

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29. *Ibid.*, p. 369

30. This is the subject of a forthcoming article by the author

## **Russian Policy throughout the Crisis**

Therefore, any hint of marginalization represents a red line for Russia with regard to the process of resolving Korean issues. But, under the circumstances, and as shown by the process leading up to the Singapore summit, Pyeongyang does not need Moscow to contact the U.S., negotiate with it, or even make peace as legally Russia is not a belligerent in the Korean War. Indeed, the Singapore process and its aftermath clearly raised the dreaded specter of Russia's marginalization. One sign of this marginalization is the fact that Kim Jong Un has yet to accept Moscow's increasingly desperate pursuit of a summit with him even though he has met with Secretary Pompeo and Xi Jinping thrice. Should the negotiations among the parties break down, some sort of violent event could well take place, and if it assumed the form of a DPRK probe against the ROK, or if Washington moved to preempt Pyeongyang, such moves could also constitute red lines for Russia. Yet it is quite unclear what Moscow can do to arrest those possible outcomes or what it can do to advance the dialogue that still exists. Indeed, its desperation to be taken seriously here led it to propose that it be the mediator between Washington and Pyeongyang, a proposal that has not even merited a public comment in Washington.<sup>31</sup> And if it continues to side with China to thwart U.S. pressure, then its prospects in the emerging environment are clouded.

Russia, China, and Japan were clearly surprised at the U.S. and North Korean movement towards the Singapore summit and their subsequent moves towards the U.S., and both Koreas underscore those three states' efforts to reassert their interest and standing as participants with vital interests in the outcome of any negotiations. Indeed, one Chinese news report openly warned against feeling marginalized, but that is exactly what Beijing, Moscow, and Tokyo all felt, and evidently still worry about.<sup>32</sup> And at one point even China feared being excluded

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31. Olivia Beavers, "Russia Willing To Mediate US-North Korea Talks: Report," <https://thehill.com/homenews/administration/366458-russia-willing-to-mediate-us-north-korea-talks-report>, December 26, 2017

32. Jeong-Ho Lee and Sarah Zheng, "China, Russia and Japan Seek Seats At the

from peace talks about formally ending the Korean War.<sup>33</sup> Moscow too clearly worries about a peace process excluding it, i.e. bypassing the six-party process and has scrambled to keep up since the process began.<sup>34</sup>

When it briefly looked like the summit was off on May 24-25, 2018, Moscow's disappointment was palpable. But that disappointment, as reflected in Putin's statement concerning it, displayed more than just fear of exclusion though it did so implicitly and not overtly. Putin's statement reflected Russia's search for a new basis for its Korean policies, Russia's abiding tendency to blame America for whatever goes wrong in Korea, and its adherence to China's policy line even as Chinese influence in and upon North Korea outstrips that of Russia.<sup>35</sup> According to Putin,

For his part, Kim Jong Un did everything he had promised, even detonated tunnels and mines at his test site, but then word came of the U.S. decision to cancel the summit. We hope that dialogue will still be resumed and continued and that the summit will take place. Without it, it is hardly possible to hope for tangible progress in resolving an issue that is extremely important not only on a regional but also on a global scale—the denuclearization of the Korean Peninsula.

We will work all together to narrow the gaps between the positions of the U.S. and North Korea. Probably, under the circumstances, it would make sense to return to earlier mechanisms that generally proved useful for making progress on this road.<sup>36</sup>

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Table With Kim Jong-un, Moon Jae-in and Donald Trump," <http://www.scmp.com/news/china/diplomacy-defence/article/2143328/china-russia-and-japan-seek-seats-table-kim-jong-un>, April 26, 2018

33. Jane Perlez, "China, Feeling Left Out, Has Plenty to Worry About in North Korea-U.S. Talks," <https://www.nytimes.com/2018/04/22/world/asia/china-north-korea-nuclear-talks.html>, April 22, 2018

34. E.G. Artyom Lukin, "From the 'Diplotainment' Of Summits To Six-Party Talks," <http://valdaiclub.com/a/highlights/from-the-diplotainment-of-summits-to-six-party>, June 1, 2018

35. Putin, Macron Hold News Conference in St Petersburg – Transcript, [www.kremlin.ru](http://www.kremlin.ru), May 24, 2018

36. *Ibid.*

This statement underscored Russia's lack of ideas or ability to influence the principal players regarding the issues surrounding a summit and forced reliance upon others to lead that process. It also exonerated North Korea even though its diplomats clearly evinced reluctance about planning a summit, a reluctance that was instrumental in President Trump's choice to scuttle the summit.<sup>37</sup> Indeed, Trump opined then that China was behind North Korean wavering that caused the postponement.<sup>38</sup>

Putin and Foreign Minister Lavrov's subsequent remarks simultaneously offering to mediate between Washington and Pyeongyang while fully supporting the latter reveal both the inherent duplicity of Russia's policies and also their transparent failure to advance Russian leverage upon the peace process. In fact, according to Russian observers and as noted above, Russian expert opinion, if not the Russian government, leans to the conclusion that North Korea should retain at least a small nuclear deterrent against the U.S.<sup>39</sup> Not only did the progress of summit diplomacy leave Moscow out in the cold, it also torpedoed Moscow's earlier efforts to set up a tripartite summit with North Korea and China, a gambit that Pyeongyang only accepted at the last minute and that never came about.<sup>40</sup> Indeed, as part of Russia's commentary and reaction to the outbreak of the summit, Lavrov, echoing Russian commentators and undoubtedly acting under official prompting, predictably claimed that the process leading to the summit corresponded to the 2017-18 joint Sino-Russian "roadmap."<sup>41</sup> While

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37. Mark Laidler, "Trump Pulls Out Of Summit Meeting With Kim Jong-Un," <https://www.nytimes.com/2018/05/24/world/asia/north-korea-trump-summit.html>, May 24, 2018

38. *Ibid.*

39. Meeting with Russian expert who insisted on anonymity, Washington, D.C., November 12, 2018; Asmolov

40. Frolov,

41. "Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov's Statement and Answers To Media Questions At a Joint News Conference By BRICS Foreign Ministers Following Their Meeting, Pretoria," June 4, 2018, [http://www.mid.ru/en/meropriyatiya\\_s\\_uchastiem\\_ministra/-/asset\\_publisher/xK1BhB2bUjd3/content/id/3248286?novelty-display-dynamic=novelty](http://www.mid.ru/en/meropriyatiya_s_uchastiem_ministra/-/asset_publisher/xK1BhB2bUjd3/content/id/3248286?novelty-display-dynamic=novelty), June 4, 2018; Stephen Blank,

President Trump has frozen U.S.-ROK exercises and North Korea has suspended its tests, it is more likely that this was due to Chinese influence on Kim rather than Russian prompting. That Russo-Chinese program of the double freeze would leave DPRK nuclear weapons in place while reducing readiness if not capability among ROK and U.S. forces. Not surprisingly, Moscow claims other governments' success as its own but that episode also shows that Russian diplomacy still asserts that all of its initiatives are successful regardless of realities, not least the pivot to Asia of which Korea policy is a key element.<sup>42</sup> Moreover, as of October 2018, Russia, though it was consulted by Pyeongyang, seems to have little say in the bilateral DPRK-U.S. process.

Since the Singapore summit China has managed to reassert itself or at least present an impression to that effect.<sup>43</sup> This is also because China feared that it might be marginalized in a U.S.-North Korean negotiation.<sup>44</sup> But neither Russia nor Japan have garnered much success in re-arranging their relations with North Korea or assuring that Washington will consider their views despite their support for the summit process and intent to cooperate in bringing peace to the Korean Peninsula.<sup>45</sup> Therefore, Lavrov's visit and statements like Putin's that

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"Is There Still a Role For Russia in the Korean 'Peace Process?," Eurasian Daily Monitor, May 14, 2018, <https://jamestown.org/program/is-there-still-a-role-for-russia-in-the-korean-peace-process/>

42. Alexander Lukin, *Pivot To Asia: Russian Foreign Policy Enters the 21st Century*, New Delhi: Vij Books India PVT LTD, 2016, p. 87; Sergei Karaganov, "Russia's Victory, New Concert of Nations," *Russia In Global Affairs*, <http://eng.globalaffairs.ru>, (date accessed on April 3, 2017); Vladimir Petrovsky, "Russia and Asia-Pacific Economic Integration: Seeking a 'Point of Entry,'" *Far Eastern Affairs*, XLIII, No. 4, 2015, p. 10; "Round Table: Relations Between the PRC and the U.S.A. At Present: Prospects and Challenges for Russia," *Far Eastern Affairs*, XLIII, No. 4, 2015 p. 57; Anna Kireeva, "Russia's East Asia Policy: New Opportunities and Challenges," *Perceptions*, XVII, No. 4, Winter, 2012
43. Jeong-Ho Lee and Sarah Zheng
44. Larry M. Wortzel, "China's Role In the North Korean Crisis," *Defense Dossier*, No. 22, December, 2018, pp. 11-12, [www.afpc.org](http://www.afpc.org)
45. Yuki Tatsumi, "Trump-Kim Meeting Is Set. What Now For Japan?," <https://thediplomat.com/2018/05/trump-kim-meeting-is-set-what-now-for-japan>, May 16, 2018

North Korea needs “absolute guarantees of its security” indicate Moscow’s desperate desire to be included in the proceedings.<sup>46</sup> Indeed, one Russian analyst, Andrei Fedorov now claims, in the absence of any supporting evidence, that Russia, China and North Korea agree that if accords are reached with Washington, Russia and China will serve as their guarantors, something that cuts against the grain of North Korea’s unrelenting efforts to free itself from dependence upon those two governments.<sup>47</sup> And while Moscow may assert this role, nobody has asked it to undertake that mission, and China will certainly not let Russia’s policy supplant it in its self-conceived role as North Korea’s “patron.”

To show who really counts in this process we need to examine the North Korean leadership’s travels. Kim Jong Un has thrice traveled to China while the Chinese Foreign Minister has come to Pyeongyang. But there have been no exchanges with Japan, and there has only been an exchange of foreign ministerial visits between North Korea and Russia with only an invitation for Kim to come to Russia as of November 2018. Although Lavrov during his visit to North Korea and then Putin invited Kim Jong Un to Russia and since Lavrov’s visit represented his first visit to Pyeongyang in a decade, the optics speak for themselves here.<sup>48</sup> Even though South Korean President Moon came to Moscow and then Vladivostok in September 2018, Russia’s low standing in the regional pecking order and apparent marginalization cast a revealing harsh light upon Russia’s unending proclamations of the success of its Korean and larger Asian policies, i.e. its so-called pivot to Asia. Russia has also essentially spurned South Korean President Moon’s efforts to get Russia

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46. “Putin: North Korea Wants ‘Absolute’ Security Guarantee To Abandon Nuclear Arms,” *Radio Free Europe Radio Liberty*, [www.rferl.org](http://www.rferl.org), June 7, 2018

47. Mansur Mirovalev, “Russia Attempts To Regain Clout Over North Korea,” <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2018/06/russia-attempts-regain-clout-north-korea-180605193845968>; “Putin: North Korea Wants ‘Absolute’ Security Guarantee To Abandon Nuclear Arms,” <https://www.rferl.org/a/putin-says-north-korea-wants-absolute-security-guarantee-if-us-wants-to-abandon-nuclear-weapons/29277406.html>, June 7, 2018

48. Tom Balmforth and Josh Smith, “Lavrov Invites Kim To Moscow As Moscow Makes Pyeongyang Play,” [www.reuters.com](http://www.reuters.com), May 31, 2018

to pressure North Korea into denuclearizing. Instead, it predictably focuses on Moon's parallel efforts to bring about tripartite Russo-DPRK-ROK economic projects like the railway, gas pipeline, or hydroelectric projects, none of which has gotten anywhere yet.<sup>49</sup> And, apart from not calling for denuclearization, Moscow keeps trying to reduce sanctions before denuclearization has even begun.<sup>50</sup> So, while it suits North Korea to elicit Russian support for its positions in regard to denuclearization and gaining relief from sanctions, it also is the case that Russia has locked itself into a position that allows it no alternative but to follow China and support North Korea against Washington and Seoul.<sup>51</sup>

Russia's marginal status here also raises questions about the value of its alliance with China and the true success of its "Pivot to the East." Indeed, some commentators have opined that Putin actually does not know where Chinese policy is going here.<sup>52</sup> Therefore, if Russia keeps following China's lead on Korea, it will be hitching its wagon to another uncontrollable great power whose interests diverge from its own and doing so largely because alliance with China enhances its global posture against Washington and domestic economic-political capabilities rather than enhancing its standing in Asia.

Russian leaders and experts may well believe that, "In general, the cooperation with China on a wide spectrum of policies objectively strengthens Russia's positions on the international arena as an independent center of power."<sup>53</sup> However, that proposition actually means that Russia cannot play a role in world politics beyond what

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49. Chang May Choon, "N. Korea a Key Topic In Moon's Moscow Visit," *The Straits Times*, <https://www.straitstimes.com/asia/n-korea-a-key-topic-in-moons-moscow-visit>, June 21, 2018

50. "Russia Seeks To Lift Bank Sanctions On North Korea-U.S. Ambassador to UN," [www.en.censor.net.ua](http://www.en.censor.net.ua), November 9, 2018

51. Min-Kyung Jung, "N. Korea, China, Russia to Hold Trilateral Consultations On Denuclearization," [www.koreaherald.com/view.php?ud=20181007000154](http://www.koreaherald.com/view.php?ud=20181007000154), October 7, 2018

52. Pavel K. Baev, "Putin Tries to Exploit Anti-Trumpism to Advance His Economic Agenda," *Eurasia Daily Monitor*, May 30, 2018, [www.jamestown.org](http://www.jamestown.org)

53. Alexander Lukin, *Pivot To Asia: Russian Foreign Policy Enters the 21<sup>st</sup> Century*, New Delhi: Vj Books India PVT LTD, 2016, p. 87

China will allow it to do. In the cold light of contemporary events concerning North Korea, that assessment may need revision for Russia has clearly been marginalized throughout this process and knows it. Likewise, this process to date also raises serious questions concerning the validity of the chorus of approbation surrounding Moscow's "pivot to the East" as described by Russian experts.<sup>54</sup> Indeed, Daniel Drezner has recently related that Russian experts in private think rather little of the so-called success of Russia's Asia policy describing it as largely a mirage.<sup>55</sup>

### Russia's Overall Korea Policy and the Korean Summits

More specifically, the train of events around North Korea since 2017 shows that, despite over a decade of strenuous efforts, Moscow has rather little to offer to North Korea, or anyone else, to engender peace and denuclearization in Korea. Nor does North Korea highly rate its potential influence or ability to contribute meaningfully to that outcome. Certainly there has hitherto been little progress towards realizing the 2011 agreements between Kim Jong Il and President Dmitry Medvedev concerning economic deals and Russia's century-long dream of a Trans-Siberian-Trans-Korean railway while the more modern proposal for a Trans-Siberian-Trans-Korean gas pipeline remains on paper.<sup>56</sup> Although Moscow will likely try to persuade South Korean President Moon to relaunch these initiatives during his Moscow trip, it is up to Kim Jong

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54. *Ibid.*; Anna Kireeva, "Russia's East Asia Policy: New Opportunities and Challenges," *Perceptions*, XVII, No. 4, Winter, 2012; Petrovsky; Karaganov, etc.

55. Daniel W. Drezner, "Spoiler Alerts Went To Moscow, and All You Get Are These Lousy Observations," [https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/posteverything/wp/2018/05/30/spoiler-alerts-went-to-moscow-and-all-you-get-are-these-lousy-observations/?utm\\_term=.4bd93a25239d](https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/posteverything/wp/2018/05/30/spoiler-alerts-went-to-moscow-and-all-you-get-are-these-lousy-observations/?utm_term=.4bd93a25239d), May 30, 2018

56. Stephen Blank, "Making Sense of Russo-North Korea Relations," Gilbert Rozman and Sergei Radchenko Eds., *International Relations and Asia's Northern Tier, Sino-Russian Relations North Korea, and Mongolia*, Palgrave Macmillan: Springer, Singapore, 2017, pp. 283-299



Un who has yet to show tangible support for them.<sup>57</sup> South Korea's support for such proposals is irrelevant as long as the North refuses to make progress on them. While the sanctions regime being applied to North Korea has visibly eroded since the Singapore summit, Russia remains relatively unable to exploit that situation to push those projects forward for all of its support for violating the sanctions.<sup>58</sup>

### **The Korean issue and the Arctic**

The Korean Peninsula is particularly important to Russia because these large-scale economic projects possess correspondingly large potential political payoffs. Moscow is playing for very high economic-political stakes in Korea but failure to capitalize politically on its "investments" in North and South Korea entails its further marginalization if a genuine "peace process" develops there. Lastly, failure to register here as a great power affects other crucial areas of Russian policy like the Arctic, given the importance of Korean ports to transcontinental trade between Europe and Asia through the Arctic and the Arctic's critical importance to Russia's future. As Alexander Korolev wrote in 2016 about then South Korean President Park's Eurasia Initiative,

Park's "Eurasia Initiative" highlights extending transportation, energy and trade networks that connect the Pacific coast to Europe and its capacity to engage North Korea and becomes an indispensable element of this geopolitical model. South Korea's rail network is supposed to be linked with the Trans-Siberian railway, and new energy cooperation must link energy infrastructures, including electricity grids, gas and oil pipelines, and co-developing China's shale gas and Eastern Siberia's petroleum and gas. This can stimulate trade and, more importantly, provide material foundations for reforms in North Korea and, eventually Korea's

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57. "South Korean President To Visit Russia In June-Reports," [www.tass.com/world/1008664](http://www.tass.com/world/1008664), June 8, 2018

58. Mark Laidler, "Trump Veers To a Korea Plan That Echoes Failures Of the Past," [www.nytimes.com](http://www.nytimes.com), June 3, 2018

unification.<sup>59</sup>

Some South Korean experts argue that when the Trans-Siberian and a trans-Korean railway are united along with the opening of a trans-Siberian-trans-Korean gas pipeline, and Korean ships can go to the Arctic through the Russian Far East, this initiative will be realized.<sup>60</sup> Also in this context the successful completion of a pilot project connecting Khasan in Russia and Rajin in North Korea's Special Economic Zone by rail and rebuilding the port of Rajin is a significant development.<sup>61</sup> Russian writers also cite other infrastructural projects with North Korea, the settlement of its debts to Russia and willingness to trade bilaterally in rubles as signs of progress.<sup>62</sup>

Undoubtedly, the Arctic connection through Korea possesses considerable importance to Russia, but China and South Korea have already preceded it here despite these aforementioned projects. Beijing, like Moscow, long ago grasped the desirability of access to North Korean ports to exploit the Arctic commercially. Moscow fears that China may use the Rajin port to gain access to the Arctic and thereby minimize its commercial exposure in the developing Northern Sea Route (NSR). Meanwhile, China has also gained access to another North Korean port at Chongjin on the East China Sea. While China is interested in the DPRK's ports to gain access for its northeastern provinces, the Arctic connection is clearly not far from Russia's mind as Russian analysts observe.

The most significant Arctic-related shipping development in China is the leasing of North Korea's port Hunchun Chuangli Haiyun Logistics Ltd,

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59. Alexander Korolev, "Russia's Reorientation to Asia: Causes and Strategic Implications," <https://poseidon01.ssrn.com/delivery.php?ID=6850050980860241121211191140281080650500360050070200230981000160750251130180221150060570310080341100260400201011200241250860980510200030050850691081150021271180111180210100850910701140930691130071071210710841180740701010281240800050900089095064083093069&EXT=pdf>, 2016, p. 3

60. *Ibid.*

61. *Ibid.*, pp. 3-4

62. *Ibid.*; Blank, "Making Sense of Russo-North Korea Relations," pp. 283-299

based in neighboring Jilin province, in northeastern China. Rajin lies on the far northeastern tip of North Korea, near its border with Russia. The company is private, but the lease was agreed on “in cooperation with six Chinese ministries and the Jilin provincial government.” In 2008, a 10-year lease was signed for Rajin’s Pier 1. This granted China access to the Sea of Japan for the first time since 1938. Although the Arctic was not mentioned in media reports about the lease, Chinese scholars presumably view Rajin as a potential Arctic hub. According to several Chinese analysts, the opening of Arctic shipping routes will be beneficial for the Tumen river area. In late 2011, the lease was extended for another 20 years. A year later, Hunchun Chuangli’s parent company, Dalian Chuangli Group, was granted 50-year leases on Rajin’s Piers 4, 5 and 6.<sup>63</sup>

Chinese observers feared exclusion from this Russian-DPRK project. Professor Zhou Yongsheng, at the Institute of International Relations of China Foreign University, urged China’s inclusion in the project.<sup>64</sup> Now that the Russia-DPRK project is suspended and China’s Arctic reach is growing, its economic primacy in foreign economic ties to North Korea is uncontested and a major factor of its leverage over the entire complex of North Korean issues. Meanwhile, Russia has just cut its spending on Arctic transport infrastructure by 90%.<sup>65</sup> In other words, even before 2018, China had preempted Russia here.

For South Korea, however, the political objective is a thriving relationship with Russia that will allow it unimpeded access to Arctic shipping routes and help facilitate North Korea’s eventual return to the community of nations. But the economic vision far transcends the eventual reintegration of North Korea. As Mia Bennett writes,

Essentially, South Korea can be seen as part of an enlarged zone of Arctic destination trade that includes the areas beyond the Arctic Ocean’s littoral, stretching from the ports of northern Scandinavia, around the coast of the Russian Far East and Sakhalin, and down into the ports of Northeast

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63. Linda Jacobson and Jingchao Peng, “China’s Arctic Aspirations,” *Sipri Policy Paper*, No. 34, 2012, pp. 7-8, [www.sipri.org](http://www.sipri.org)

64. Yonhap, in English, November 28, 2013, FBIS SOV, November 28, 2013

65. Stephen Blank, “The Bloom Comes off the Arctic Rose,” *Eurasia Daily Monitor*, [www.jamestown.org](http://www.jamestown.org), July 20, 2017

Asia.<sup>66</sup>

Along similar lines, Young Kil Park, Director of the International Maritime Affairs and Territory Research Center at the Korean Maritime Institute (KMI), advocated developing a strategic plan to connect the East China Sea, the Sea of Okhotsk, and the Arctic Ocean with a coinciding land-based approach to integrate communities near the East China Sea like Mongolia, the Russian Far East, and Northeast China. As Bennett observes, “Park’s views encapsulate the desire in some Korean policy circles to further integrate the country into its regional neighborhood by sea and land as a means of building a foothold into the nearby Arctic, the problem of North Korea, notwithstanding.”<sup>67</sup>

The Arctic’s energy riches are also of much interest to South Korea since it is the fifth largest importer of crude oil and second largest importer of LNG. Because most of these imports depend upon transiting the already contested Straits of Hormuz, the NSR holds much promise as an alternative for South Korea and other Asian states. South Korea already possesses a large fleet of LNG tankers since pipelines are not in the offing anytime soon. Improved ties to Russia make great sense in this context.<sup>68</sup> While Russia obviously benefits from this trend, it has not progressed much under the new South Korean government, and South Korea benefits much more than does Russia, especially as the U.S. is apparently entering in a big way into the Asian energy market and will compete with Russia for market share.<sup>69</sup> Likewise, President Trump’s apparent dismissal of a large U.S. economic program for North Korea opens the way to Chinese preponderance in any postwar economic reconstruction there, hardly a desirable outcome for Russia.<sup>70</sup>

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66. Mia Bennett, “The Maritime Tiger: Exploring South Korea’s Interests and Role In the Arctic,” *Strategic Analysis*, XXXVIII No. 6, 2014, p. 892

67. *Ibid.*, p. 893

68. *Ibid.*, pp. 893-895

69. Yasuo Takeuchi and Ryosuke Hanafusa, “US Shale Gushes Into Asia,” <https://asia.nikkei.com/Economy/US-shale-based-LNG-gushes-into-Asia>, May 22, 2018

70. Jane Perlez, “A Trump-Kim Deal Could Send China’s Trade With North Korea Soaring,” <https://www.nytimes.com/2018/06/05/world/asia/china-north->

## Korea and Russia's Pivot to the East

These outcomes too highlight Russia's inability to develop a competitive or particularly attractive profile for either Korea or Asia in general that would then allow it to play a critical role in any Korean peace process and stands in glaring contrast to China's success in doing so. To be sure, Russia has significantly expanded its trade with all of the countries of Northeast Asia, and the share of its trade going to Asia is clearly in sight of the goal of eclipsing its trade with Europe. So Moscow is realizing its long-proclaimed option of reorienting the bulk of its trade, which in fact is mainly energy, to Asia at the expense of Europe.<sup>71</sup> While Russian diplomacy since the announcements of the inter-Korean and Kim-Trump summit has scrambled to catch up and asserted the success of Russian policy, the reality is clearly much different.

Moscow's inability to affect the Korean "peace process" significantly is all the more telling because after China, Korea is the most promising venue for Russia's "pivot to the East" and peace in Korea is obviously the most urgent as well as critically important issue in East Asian security.<sup>72</sup> In that context, Moscow's relative unimportance to the process is a telling riposte to all the Socialist realism-like analyses emanating from Moscow attesting to the great success of Russia's Asian policies.<sup>73</sup>

Lavrov's 2018 visit to Pyongyang shows just how much Russia is trying to catch up to China and avert its marginalization here. Lavrov predictably invited Kim Jong Un to Moscow, echoed Kim Jong Un's approach that any denuclearization be phased over time, and denounced sanctions and said they should precede denuclearization,

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korea-trade.html, June 5, 2018

71. Michael Corbin, "A Russian Pivot to Asia? Russian Trade With Asia From 2006-2016," *Kennan Cable*, May 2018, No. 33, <https://www.wilsoncenter.org/publication/kennan-cable-no-33-russian-pivot-to-asia-russian-trade-asia-2006-to-2016>

72. Alexander Lukin, p. 4

73. Kireeva, "Russia's East Asia Policy: New Opportunities and Challenges," *Perceptions*, XVII, No. 4, Winter, 2012; Petrovsky; Karaganov

which is a pipe dream. Meanwhile, Moscow continues, as it has long done, to violate the sanctions that it voted for in the UN.<sup>74</sup> In his efforts to upgrade Russia's role on the Korean Peninsula, Lavrov again offered Russia as a mediator between Pyeongyang and Washington. In addition, according to Lavrov,

We discussed certain steps that can be made towards this, including the old idea of launching trilateral projects between the two Koreas and Russia to link their railway networks and to build a gas pipeline as well as energy projects. The desire to re-unite the railway systems expressed by the leaders of North Korea and South Korea at their meeting in Panmunjeom has given a new lease on life to these trilateral cooperation initiatives.<sup>75</sup>

Meanwhile, he and numerous other Russian analysts reiterated the argument that peace can only come through a rejuvenated six-party process, where Moscow plays an equal part to the other countries in Northeast Asia and peace comes only through a step-by-step process that leads to a restructuring of Asian security in general even though Russia was not a belligerent in the Korean War and lacks legal standing to sign a paper formally ending that war. Specifically, he observed that,

Russia was involved in the six-party talks on the North Korea issue—a mechanism that was still there. In accordance with the logic that this mechanism is based on, we support the current changes in relations between the two Koreas, as well as between Pyeongyang and Washington. It will require step-by-step actions, consistency and patience. At the final stage of the process, multilateral talks involving all the six countries will become inevitable, which is what the Russian-Chinese road map implies. The denuclearization of the Korean Peninsula should be supported by mechanisms ensuring peace and stability in Southeast Asia.<sup>76</sup>

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74. "Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov's Remarks and Answers To Media Questions Following Talks With Foreign Minister of North Korea Ri Yong-ho," Pyeongyang, May 31, 2018, [http://www.mid.ru/en/foreign\\_policy/news/-/asset\\_publisher/cKNonkJE02Bw/content/id/3240604](http://www.mid.ru/en/foreign_policy/news/-/asset_publisher/cKNonkJE02Bw/content/id/3240604), May 31, 2018

75. *Ibid.*

76. Jeong-Ho Lee and Sarah Zheng

Naturally, under the circumstances, Kim Jong Un was happy to complain to Lavrov about U.S. "hegemonism."<sup>77</sup> But that only entails a promise to exchange views with Russia.<sup>78</sup>

Nevertheless, Kim does not need Russia nor possibly even China to communicate with Washington although his visits to China suggest greater reliance on China. Neither does he currently need a mediator. Or if he does it will not be Russia and more likely it will be South Korea who has already stepped into that breach.<sup>79</sup> While he clearly would like to have Russian support for issues like sanctions and denuclearization, he does not need a mediator, least of all Russia. Indeed, the presumption that another mediator is needed derives from the belief that the summit and its aftermath will go so badly that neither side will be able to communicate effectively with each other or through someone other than Russia. So, despite Putin's continuing offer of Russian mediation services, neither assumption is presently warranted or likely to be fulfilled anytime soon.<sup>80</sup> In any case, it is hardly likely that Washington will then solicit Russian mediation given Moscow's utter duplicity on this and so many other issues. Moreover, President Trump has accepted the need for some sort of longer temporal process, presumably a phased one for denuclearization, if not for any reason other than because the verification process is so difficult in North Korea and trust so lacking.<sup>81</sup>

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77. "Kim Jong Un Complains Of U.S. 'Hegemonism' To Russia's Sergey Lavrov," <https://www.cbsnews.com/news/kim-jong-un-complains-of-u-s-hegemonism-to-russias-sergey-lavrov-today-2018-05-31/>, May 31, 2018

78. *Ibid.*

79. Sang-Hun Choe, "Pompeo Trip to North Korea Yields New Summit Meeting, South Korea Says," <https://www.msn.com/en-us/news/world/pompeo-trip-to-north-korea-yields-new-summit-meeting-south-korea-says/ar-BBO4dcp>, October 7, 2018

80. "Moscow Ready To Act As Mediator Between US, North Korea, Says Kremlin," <http://tass.com/politics/983093>," December 26, 2017

81. John Wagner, "Trump Says He Might Accept a 'Phase-In' Of North Korea's Denuclearization," [https://www.washingtonpost.com/politics/trump-says-he-might-accept-a-phase-in-of-north-koreas-denuclearization/2018/05/24/067cd2de-5f37-11e8-a4a4-c070ef53f315\\_story.html?utm\\_term=.e36d80258388](https://www.washingtonpost.com/politics/trump-says-he-might-accept-a-phase-in-of-north-koreas-denuclearization/2018/05/24/067cd2de-5f37-11e8-a4a4-c070ef53f315_story.html?utm_term=.e36d80258388), May 24, 2018

And Secretary of State Pompeo has recently reaffirmed that point, essentially abandoning any particular timeline for denuclearization.<sup>82</sup> In other words, Lavrov's proposals were essentially propaganda and his audience was as much Pyeongyang and Beijing as it was Washington. So, in large measure, his trip exemplified the Russian tendency to emphasize show over substance in its Korean and Asian diplomacy.

### **Enmity with Washington and the Pro-Chinese Tilt**

As we have argued throughout this paper, Russia's Korean policy is intertwined with or part of its broader "pivot to Asia" and its overall policies towards the U.S. Clearly the preeminent aspect of the "pivot to Asia" is the Russo-Chinese alliance.<sup>83</sup> While calling this relationship an alliance evokes academic criticism, Alexander Korolev has cogently argued that the arguments that no alliance can or does exist are based on mythologies that are easily shattered when one examines the real progression of the Russo-Chinese relationship.<sup>84</sup> And the Vostok (East)

82. "Pompeo Backs Away From Denuclearization Goal For North Korea," <https://www.wvlt.tv/content/news/Pompeo-backs-away-from-denuclearization-goal-for-North-Korea-495079891.html>, October 3, 2018

83. Most analysts do not accept that there is an alliance, and the two governments call it a comprehensive strategic partnership. But for an argument advancing the idea of an alliance see, Stephen Blank, "The Dynamics of Russo-Chinese Relations," Sumit Ganguly, Andrew Scobell, and Joseph Chinyong Liow, Eds., *The Routledge Handbook of Asian Security Studies*, Second Edition, London: Routledge, 2017, pp. 74-87; Stephen Blank "Russo-Chinese Relations In Strategic Perspective," Gilbert Rozman and Sergei Radchenko Eds., *International Relations and Asia's Northern Tier, Sino-Russian Relations North Korea, and Mongolia*, Palgrave Macmillan: Springer, Singapore, 2017, pp. 93-108

84. Alexander Korolev, "The Strategic Alignment Between Russia and China: Myths and Realities," Lee Kwan Yew School of Public Policy Papers, Working Paper No. LKYSPP 15-19, 2015, <https://poseidon01.ssrn.com/delivery.php?ID=031091004086065016111093067096108018021040001044049026109104125095110025031123124110101005043014122099042089123013108076090095052020066046041116080103113113113068031040084075121094065074070009084077120091087006099070112091090022027064105026120015101073&EXT=pdf>; and author's conversations with U.S. analysts and officials, 2017-18



2018 Russo-Chinese military exercises led many Russian analysts to say publicly that they reflected bilateral alliance between those two governments.<sup>85</sup>

Sino-Russian intimacy clearly affects all the relationships that comprise the Korean nuclear and other issues. First of all, Russia's inability to compete effectively with China for influence over North Korea despite its consistent aspiration to upgrade its standing in Pyongyang's eyes not only lets North Korea play them off against each other, it also permits Pyongyang to believe that rhetoric aside, Russia and China will have its back and prevent any truly terrible outcome. Thus the evidence is overwhelming that even as they vote for sanctions, Moscow and Beijing are still covertly supplying North Korea.<sup>86</sup> Indeed, China may be manipulating the sanctions weapon to bring North Korea back under control.<sup>87</sup> Yet at the same time, North Korea, with good reason, trusts neither China nor Russia. This mistrust is of long standing.<sup>88</sup> Certainly one reason for going nuclear is to emancipate North Korea from China's tutelage.

Consequently, Russia has long rhetorically opposed North Korean proliferation while believing and saying that it is Washington's fault for threatening North Korea that it has gone nuclear and therefore

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85. This alliance is the subject of a forthcoming work by the author

86. Nick Wadhams and Jason Koutsoukis, "Pompeo Warns Russia, China Over Violating North Korea Sanctions," <https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2018-08-04/pompeo-warns-russia-china-over-violating-north-korea-sanctions>, August 3, 2018

87. Samuel Ramani, "Why Russia Is Openly Violating Sanctions Against North Korea," [https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/monkey-cage/wp/2018/04/20/why-is-russia-openly-flouting-international-sanctions-against-north-korea/?utm\\_term=.dd1dca53413a](https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/monkey-cage/wp/2018/04/20/why-is-russia-openly-flouting-international-sanctions-against-north-korea/?utm_term=.dd1dca53413a), April 23, 2018; Samuel Ramani, "China's Approach to North Korea Sanctions," [www.thediplomat.com](http://www.thediplomat.com), January 10, 2018

88. Balasz, Szalontai, *Kim Il Sung In the Khrushchev Era: Soviet DPRK Relations and the Roots Of North Korean Despotism, 1953-1964*, Washington, D.C. and Stanford, California: Woodrow Wilson Center Press and Stanford University Press, 2005; "North Korean Attitudes Toward China: A Historical View of Contemporary Difficulties," <https://www.wilsoncenter.org/event/north-korean-attitudes-toward-china-historical-view-contemporary-difficulties>, April 6, 2009

Washington must make concessions.<sup>89</sup> Moreover, despite its rhetoric about opposing nuclearization and desire not to have new nuclear states arrive that would devalue its nuclear status and cause perennial crises, Russia remains unwilling to do anything about North Korea's nuclear program.<sup>90</sup> As relations with America have deteriorated, this increasingly open anti-Americanism has come more overtly to the fore of Russia's position on Korea and it is tied to the alliance with China.

As we have noted, for many Russian observers and officials, even going back to Yeltsin, a primary purpose, if not the primary purpose of the ever-growing intimacy with China that arguably has now become an alliance is to enhance Moscow's ability to stand up to Washington.<sup>91</sup> Yet since the invasion of Crimea and the imposition of sanctions, it has had no choice but to become China's ally, a role in which it is visibly more dependent on Chinese economic and political support. Thus today, despite six years of intense discussions launched by the Abe government in Tokyo, Russian relations with Japan have made little if any substantive progress either economically or politically.<sup>92</sup> Both governments may intend to cooperate to bring peace to Korea, but actually they have both been marginalized here, and Tokyo effectively must rely on Washington to advance its interests on the peninsula.<sup>93</sup>

Meanwhile, in regard to the overall agenda of Asian security, Russia is ever more inclined to follow China's agenda be it in the South China Sea or Korea.<sup>94</sup> The so-called roadmap that the two governments

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89. Stephen Blank, "Making Sense of Russo-North Korea Relations," Gilbert Rozman and Sergei Radchenko Eds., *International Relations and Asia's Northern Tier, Sino-Russian Relations North Korea, and Mongolia*, Palgrave Macmillan: Springer, Singapore, 2017, pp. 283-299

90. *Ibid.*

91. E.G. Alexander Lukin, *passim*, but note in particular the Yeltsin quote on p. 275

92. Daniel Hurst, "Abe's Russia Trip Comes to An Underwhelming End," [www.thediplomat.com](http://www.thediplomat.com), June 1, 2018; James D.J. Brown, "Abe's Russias Trip Highlights Foreign Policy Failings," [www.asia.nikkei.com](http://www.asia.nikkei.com), May 31, 2018

93. *Ibid.*

94. Stephen Blank, "Paradoxes Abounding: Russia and the South China Sea Issue," Anders Corr, Ed., *Great Powers, Grand Strategies: The New Game In the South China Sea*, Annapolis, MD. Naval Institute Press, 2018, pp. 248-272

advanced in 2017-18 regarding Korea did nothing to arrest nuclear proliferation while it did aim to reduce U.S.-ROK capabilities and readiness and was thus a non-starter. For all its rhetoric of partnership with the current South Korean government, work on the major projects of Park's Eurasian Initiative, which clearly has major repercussions for North Korea and its future ties to South Korea and Russia, has not begun. Neither is there anyone in Washington who will trust Moscow as far as Korea is concerned. Indeed, even President Trump, perhaps the most pro-Russian figure in the Administration, expressed suspicion concerning Lavrov's mission in Pyongyang (and probably with good reason).<sup>95</sup>

## Conclusions

The consequences of Moscow's failure to register a strong impression on what is Asia's most urgent security issue transcend the Korean Peninsula. In the South China Sea, China demands the surrender of Rosneft and by extension the Russian government to its demands for a veto over all drilling projects in those waters, something that contradicts important and long-standing Russian interests in Southeast Asia and with its partner, Vietnam.<sup>96</sup> On the critical issue of China's Belt and Road Initiative and the supposed tie-in to the Eurasian Economic Union, the keystone of Putin's vision of Eurasian integration, the evidence suggests that rhetoric aside, China will exclude Russia from all but a few crumbs of the rich opportunities that are potentially going to open up in regard to the vision of intercontinental trade and Eurasian

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95. "Trump 'Did Not Like' Meeting Between North Korean Leader & Russian Foreign Minister," <https://www.rt.com/usa/428503-trump-like-lavrov-kim>, June 1, 2018; Fred Weir, "As Singapore Summit Nears, Russia Worries Trump and Kim Won't Cut a Deal," *Christian Science Monitor*, [www.csm.com](http://www.csm.com), June 6, 2018

96. "China Challenges Rosneft Drilling In Disputed Waters," Retrieved From *BBC Monitoring*, June 7, 2018

economic integration.<sup>97</sup> And as we have seen, China has long since preempted Russia in the race to gain access to Korean ports and intercontinental trade through the Arctic. Likewise, Russia's marginal standing in the Korean crisis comes through clearly when the process is closely scrutinized.

As noted above, the fundamental purpose of Russia's Korean policy is to preserve peace in Korea and Asia generally, as peace is indispensable to any development of Siberia and the RFE on the basis of foreign and domestic trade and investment. Peace is in turn a necessary precondition for Russia to play the role it covets in East Asia. Only if Russia can play the role of peacekeeper can it actively help create and sustain the multipolar world that its officials and analysts either believe exists or should come into being. Accordingly, Moscow's Korean policies are not just part of its overall Asian program but are also an essential component of promoting this multipolar world order. Only in this context can we fully grasp Moscow's goals and motives on the Korean Peninsula.

For Russia, the Korean Peninsula appears to be particularly key and the Six-Party Talks, by virtue of their inherent multilateral design, formally embody key requirements and preconditions for multipolarity. Russian officials acknowledge that Asia is not only the dynamo of the global economy but also postulate an emerging "polycentric world order" largely composed of rising Asian powers.<sup>98</sup> Furthermore, Russian leaders insist that the West is declining and that the Asian powers (among whom it includes itself) are rising.<sup>99</sup> However, Russian foreign policy aims to consolidate Russia's position as what Foreign Minister Lavrov calls a premier center of power and influence of the new

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97. Stephen Blank, "Russia's Pivot To Asia: The Multilateral Dimension," National Bureau of Asian Research, June 28, 2017, [http://www.nbr.org/downloads/pdfs/eta/workingpaper\\_Blank\\_062817.pdf](http://www.nbr.org/downloads/pdfs/eta/workingpaper_Blank_062817.pdf)

98. Sergei Lavrov, "Russia and ASEAN Can Do a Great Deal Together," *International Affairs*, LVI, No. 6, 2010, pp. 13-14

99. "Russian FM Sees End of Western Dominance in Economy, Politics," [www.china.org.cn](http://www.china.org.cn), August 25, 2015

polycentric system despite constant Western resistance to this trend.<sup>100</sup> Accordingly, Russian writers have long viewed Western policies as manifestations of the desire to prevent Russia's supposedly foreordained rise and preserve unipolarity. As the Valdai Club stated in 2009,

Russia views itself as a pole of a multipolar world, which conducts independent domestic and foreign policy based on its own interpretation of national interests and its own model of development. At the same time, Washington's global strategy boils down to a search for ways of restoring unipolarity by this or that means.<sup>101</sup>

Accordingly, Russian leaders led by Putin, invoke U.S. decline and Russia's rise claiming that, "We do not want to return to confrontations between blocs. We do not want to split the world into various military and political groups. But Russia has sufficient potential to influence the construction of a new world system."<sup>102</sup> Thus Russia is a "system-forming" power in its own right, both globally and in Asia.<sup>103</sup> Not content with merely a regional role, Russia sees itself as an integral global power that is essential to constructing this global order. Or as Sergei Yastrzhemskiy, Putin's foreign policy advisor said in 2007, "Russia should play its role whenever we have relevant interests."<sup>104</sup>

Yet events have shown that Moscow is hardly a "system-forming power" in Northeast Asia unlike China and the U.S. Not only does

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100. Moscow, *Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation*, in Russian, January 23, 2013, FBIS SOV, January 23, 2013

101. Sergei Karaganov, Timofei Bordachev, and Dmitri Suslov, Eds., *Reconfiguration, Not Just a Reset: Russia's Interests in Relations with the United States of America*, Moscow: Valdai Discussion club, 2009, p. 10

102. President Vladimir Putin, "Speech and the Following Discussion at the Munich Conference on Security," February 10, 2007, [www.kremlin.ru/eng/speeches/2007/02/10/0138](http://www.kremlin.ru/eng/speeches/2007/02/10/0138)

103. Paradorn Rangisarn, *Russia As An Aspiring Great Power in East Asia: Perceptions and Policies From Yeltsin to Putin*, London and New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009

104. "Interview With Sergei Yastrzhembskiy," Moscow: *Rossiyskaya Gazeta*, in Russian, February 22, 2007, *Open Source Center, Foreign Broadcast Information Service, Central Eurasia* (Henceforth FBIS-SOV), February 22, 2007

North Korea not need Moscow to talk to Washington or Seoul but also even if Kim feels he needs Chinese support as his three visits may suggest, that will not directly benefit Moscow. China clearly still retains a major influence on North Korea, as Kim Jong Un's three visits there suggest, and it may have used its influence to engage in what ended as a temporary setback to the process.<sup>105</sup> By virtue of its economic and military power, China will undoubtedly continue to play a major role in the ultimate disposition of the issues arising out of the "peace process." But we cannot say the same about Russia. Even if the various infrastructural programs materialize, the Trans-Siberian and Trans-Korean railways and gas pipeline, somebody will have to foot the bill, and it is unlikely Russia can do that now any more than it could fifteen years ago.<sup>106</sup>

On the other hand, as is the case elsewhere, Moscow retains the formidable capability, along with Tokyo, to play the role of a spoiler and disrupt progress towards a peaceful resolution of the current Korean knot of issues.<sup>107</sup> Japan most likely has no appetite to play that role given the danger posed to it by China and a resurgent North Korea if things go wrong. But playing the spoiler is a role that comes naturally to Russia whether in Europe or elsewhere. Hitherto, it has not played that role in Northeast Asia due to weakness, and the fact that this is the only region where it directly collides or must contend with the vital interests of both China and the U.S. But that does not mean that if it is sidelined from the future proceedings that it will not resort to some such action rather than just sulk in its tent. It will undoubtedly sulk and nurse its grievances as we have seen elsewhere. But what action it will take if it is marginalized in Korea and beyond in Asia remains to be seen.

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105. Jane Perlez, "Canceling Of Trump-Kim Meeting Shakes Asia But Could Help China," <https://www.nytimes.com/2018/05/24/world/asia/trump-xi-jinping-north-korea.html>, May 24, 2018

106. Elizabeth Wishnick, "Russian-North Korean Relations: A New Era?," Samuel S. Kim and Tai Hwan Lee Eds., *North Korea and Northeast Asia*, Lanham, MD. : Rowman and Littlefield Publishers. 2002, P. 145; and Yoshinnori Takeda, "Putin's Foreign Policy Toward North Korea," *International Journal of the Asia-Pacific*, VI, No. 2, 2006, p. 202

107. Artyom Lukin, "From the 'Diplotainment' Of Summits To Six-Party Talks."

The alliance with China appears to be the only offer on the table now for Moscow has almost completely burned its bridges with Washington. But that relationship hardly offers Moscow an opportunity to recoup its losses in the Korean peace process. Instead, it offers it the prospect of further subordination to Beijing. Russian observers can claim that they know the stakes and will not fall victim to such a policy of subordination to China. But as long as the ruling elite believes its privileges and power to be at stake due to attacks from the West and sees in China an ideologically like-minded guarantor of its tenure in power (not least through judicious bribes), it will probably continue to "lean to one side." Yet China clearly also fears being marginalized to some degree by the process now underway and knows well that North Korea resents its tutelage. Finally, this configuration presents Washington with an enormous strategic opportunity. It can use its power to convene a multilateral program of economic revival for North Korea that minimizes China's long-term influence over the DPRK and helps it become more independent of China while also being less of a threat to its neighbors and the world. Russia too, with sufficient backing, could play a secondary role in this design. But first it would have to settle its differences with Washington and move away from Beijing.

While the U.S. government has already grasped the nettle of offering economic assistance, it is not yet definitively clear what form such a package might take. Trump's statements against a government program of aid and assistance, should not, therefore, be taken as definitive.<sup>108</sup> But Washington's combined economic, political, and military leverage could, if wisely deployed, reshape the structure of Northeast Asia in a more beneficial way for all combined and enhance U.S. and other parties' interests at the same time. One can only wonder whether the U.S. will have the vision, skill, and forbearance to seize that opportunity and with it redraw the security map of Northeast Asia in a way that not only enhances peace and security but also advances

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108. Perlez, "A Trump-Kim Deal Could Send China's Trade With North Korea Soaring."

Washington's as well as even both Korea's interests.<sup>109</sup>

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109. Stephen Blank, "A Way Out of the North Korean Labyrinth," <http://www.keia.org/publication/way-out-north-korean-labyrinth>, March 22, 2018



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## **Testing the Importance of Information Control to Pyongyang: How North Korea Reacts to the Diplomatic, Information, Military and Economic Tools of Statecraft**

**Scott Fisher**

Applying big data and sentiment analysis to 15 years of North Korean state media reports, this paper tests the importance that Pyongyang places on information control. By comparing Pyongyang's responses to four categories of foreign policy tools: diplomatic, information, military, and economic (the DIME construct), this research found that North Korea reacts far more negatively to information and military tools than to diplomatic or economic tools. The broader findings demonstrate the efficacy of information as a tool for pressuring authoritarian states, and provide democratic states an option for responding to influence or cyber campaigns launched by authoritarian, state-level peers.

**Keywords:** North Korea, information control, sentiment analysis, big data, military exercises

In 2015, North Korean soldiers planted landmines on the Southern side of the North-South border in an area where South Korean soldiers were known to patrol, eventually maiming two South Korean soldiers. South Korea retaliated by turning on loudspeakers capable of reaching into North Korea, a move that may have initially seemed odd, or weak, to outsider observers unfamiliar with the North.

However, shortly after the loudspeakers were switched on, “North Korea’s top negotiator called South Korea’s [use of] loudspeakers a ‘declaration of war.’ His colleague, North Korea’s deputy permanent representative to the United Nations, called the broadcasts ‘psychological warfare.’”<sup>1</sup> A former North Korean propaganda official said the broadcasts were “akin to a peaceful version of the nuclear bomb.”<sup>2</sup>

In the end, it worked. Within two weeks, the South had received a rare ‘expression of regret’ over the incident from the North, in exchange for Seoul shutting off the speakers.

International press and human rights organizations commonly rank North Korea at or near the bottom of rankings measuring freedom of the press and freedom of information. In *the 2017 World Press Freedom Index* compiled by Reporters Without Borders, North Korea ranked last, 180 out of 180 countries surveyed.<sup>3</sup> In Freedom House’s ranking of *Freedom in the World 2017*, North Korea received a 3 out of a possible score of 100 (with 100 as most free, 0 as least free), ranking ahead of Syria and Tibet while tying Eritrea and Turkmenistan.<sup>4 5</sup> North Korea’s rank was similar on Freedom House’s 2017 ranking of freedom of the press, scoring 98 out of a possible 100 (confusingly, in this report, 0 is most free and 100 is

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1. Baek, Jieun, *North Korea’s Hidden Revolution: How the Information Underground Is Transforming a Closed Society* (New Haven Yale University Press, 2016), pp. 187-188.

2. *Ibid.*

3. Reporters Without Borders, “2017 World Press Freedom Index,” <<https://rsf.org/en/ranking>> (date accessed September 12, 2018).

4. Freedom House. “Freedom in the World 2017.” <<https://freedomhouse.org/report/freedom-world/freedom-world-2017#anchor-one>> (date accessed September 12, 2018).

5. Puddington and Roylance, “Freedom in the World 2017 - Populists and Autocrats: The Dual Threat to Global Democracy.”

least free), tying Turkmenistan for the lowest ranking in the survey.<sup>6</sup>

This lack of freedom to access information, outside that provided by the North Korean state, is commonly noted by regionally-focused scholars and practitioners. Several cite the regime's desire to control the country's information environment as a key factor in the North's governance.<sup>7</sup> Perhaps the clearest, most concise description available on the North Korean domestic information environment arrives from a 2009 *Foreign Affairs* article:

*"North Korean leaders have taken information control to extremes unprecedented even among communist dictatorships. Since the late 1950s, it has been a crime for a North Korean to possess a tunable radio, and all radios sold legally are set only to official broadcasts. In libraries, all nontechnical foreign publications, such as novels and books on politics and history, are placed in special sections accessible only to users with proper security clearance. Private trips overseas are exceptional, even for government officials. North Korea is the world's only country without internet access for the general public (although there is a small, growing intranet system maintained by the government). These measures seek to ensure that the public believes the official portrayal of North Korea as an island of happiness and prosperity in an ocean of suffering (South Korea suffers "under the yoke of U.S. domination and subjugation, its sovereignty wantonly violated," reports the official North Korean news agency)."*<sup>8</sup>

In the same article, Lankov explicitly lays out the failures of

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6. Freedom House, "Freedom of the Press 2017: Press Freedom's Dark Horizon," <<https://freedomhouse.org/report/freedom-press/freedom-press-2017>> (date accessed September 12, 2018).
  7. See, for example, Georgetown scholar and former Director for Asian Affairs at the National Security Council during the George W. Bush administration (and briefly, President Trump's nominee for U.S. Ambassador to South Korea) Victor Cha, *The Impossible State*, (Harper Collins, 2012), p. 461, "The DPRK [North Korea] regime is only as strong as its ability to control knowledge. [...] Without control of information, there is no ideology. Without ideology, there is no North Korea as we know it."
  8. Andrei Lankov, "Changing North Korea: An Information Campaign Can Beat the Regime," *Foreign Affairs*, November/December 2009, <<https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/asia/2009-11-01/changing-north-korea>> (date accessed September 12, 2018).

previous methods to induce change in North Korea.<sup>9</sup> Military coercion is unrealistic; financial sanctions ineffective; expectations that diplomacy, patience, and goodwill can induce reforms are a false hope—instead, the only way to advance the interests of the U.S., South Korea, and their allies is to bring about pressure for change from within North Korea, and the way to do this is through cracking Pyongyang’s control over information and introducing truth and information into the North.<sup>10</sup>

Others with experience in the North, including former British ambassador to North Korea John Everard<sup>11</sup> and Park Sokeel, director of research and strategy for Liberty in North Korea (LiNK), describe similar efforts at information control by Pyongyang.<sup>12</sup> Further afield, scholars and practitioners from a variety of backgrounds discuss the foundational importance of information control to North Korea’s rulers.<sup>13</sup>

Crucially, while many have stressed the importance of information control to Pyongyang, few have attempted to test the assertion. The relative consensus on the lack of media freedom and information access, coupled with the assessed importance of information control to the North Korean regime, provides a useful research opportunity.

This research tests how Pyongyang reacts to challenges to its information control, then compares that reaction to challenges posed by diplomatic, military, and economic tools. The goal is to determine whether the North reacts more negatively to information tools like

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9. *Ibid.*

10. *Ibid.*

11. John Everard, *Only Beautiful, Please: A British Diplomat in North Korea* (Stanford University, The Walter H. Shorenstein Asia-Pacific Research Center, 2012), p. 53.

12. Andy Heintz, “In the Nuclear Standoff, Ordinary North Koreans Disappear,” Institute for Policy Studies, Washington, D.C., January 2018.

13. For example, see Victor Cha’s, *The Impossible State: North Korea, Past and Future* (New York, NY, Harper Collins, 2012); U.S. State Department North Korea specialist Patrick McEachern’s, *Inside the Red Box: North Korea’s Post-Totalitarian Politics* (New York, NY, Columbia Press, 2010); Andrei Lankov, *The Real North Korea: Life and Politics in the Failed Stalinist Utopia* (Oxford University Press, 2013), esp. p. 213-214; or B. R. Myers, *The Cleanest Race: How North Koreans See Themselves - And Why It Matters* (Brooklyn, NY, Melville House, 2010).

loudspeakers and leaflets than it does to UN resolutions, military exercises, or economic sanctions. The DIME (diplomacy, information, military, economic) framework used here is likely familiar to many readers and offers the benefit of a comparative approach.

The hypothesis is that North Korea, like other states interested in controlling their domestic information environment, will respond more negatively to the use of information tools than the other DIME tools. A finding here that North Korea reacts more negatively to information tools than sanctions, diplomacy, or military tools would have immediate policy relevance, by providing an additional response option for democratic states undergoing cyber or influence attacks from the North.

For the purposes of this research, we define *information tool* as any medium by which information can be shared, broadcast, or distributed. These tools can include radio and TV broadcasts, the internet and social media, word of mouth, film, and documents (e.g. magazines, books, and leaflets). As we saw above in the survey and descriptions of North Korea's information environment, Pyongyang bans, blocks, or attempts to disrupt many of these tools, limiting their applicability for the research included in this paper.<sup>14</sup> As a result, the research focus, in terms of information, involves two tools somewhat outside of Pyongyang's control: loudspeaker broadcasts across the border from the South into the North and leaflets sent by balloons, again from the South into the North.

To measure the North's reaction to tools in all four of the DIME categories, this paper incorporates the tools of web scraping, big data, and sentiment analysis. Web scraping is an automated process that allows researchers to gather volumes of data from websites. This data is then compiled into a database for analysis; in this case, sentiment analysis. Sentiment analysis is a method for analyzing text to help determine the range of emotions (positive, negative, or neutral) and/or feelings (anger, happiness, or sadness) expressed by a select corpus. Automated sentiment analysis involves, "the computational treatment

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14. Similar research by the author on Russian information control was able to include a wider range of tools. Research into China and Iran also shows promise for analyzing additional (e.g. cyber) tools.

of opinion, sentiment, and subjectivity in text.”<sup>15</sup> In a sense, turning text, from whatever the source, into quantifiable data, or as others have described it, “sentiment analysis is opinion turned into code.”<sup>16</sup>

By analyzing the sentiment of a report, or better, tens of thousands of reports, researchers gain a quantifiable measurement for comparing events. Using North Korean state-controlled media as a proxy for North Korean reaction to outside events, researchers gain the ability to compare Pyongyang’s responses to various DIME category tools. This comparison then allows researchers to test the assertion that information control is of vital importance to the North’s rulers.

## Sources

For the North, two types of sources were used: first was *The Korean Central News Agency* (KCNA – <<http://www.kcna.kp>> or <<http://www.kcna.co.jp>>), for decades, North Korea’s official government news organization. Second was a series of databases tracking North Korean actions (essentially, what the North did in addition to what the North *said*); these include databases of related UN resolutions (which include both diplomatic and economic tools/events);<sup>17</sup> <sup>18</sup> databases of military

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15. Bo Pang and Lillian Lee, “Opinion Mining and Sentiment Analysis,” *Foundations and Trends in Information Retrieval*, Vol. 2, No. 1-2 (2008), p. 6.

16. Mia, “Editor’s Choice: Sentiment Analysis Is Opinion Turned into Code,” *Digital Humanities Now*, 7 April 2015, <<http://digitalhumanitiesnow.org/2015/04/editors-choice-sentiment-analysis-is-opinion-turned-into-code/>> (date accessed September 12, 2018).

17. Kelsey Davenport, “UN Security Council Resolutions on North Korea,” Arms Control Association, Washington, D.C., October 2017.

18. Security Council Report, “UN Documents for DPRK (North Korea),” Security Council Report, New York, NY, September 2017, <<http://www.securitycouncilreport.org/un-documents/dprk-north-korea/>> (date accessed September 12, 2018).

exercises, missile launches, and related activities;<sup>19</sup> <sup>20</sup> and a database of select North Korean diplomatic activities and state-level negotiations.<sup>21</sup> The analysis of North Korean actions, in addition to sentiment, is included as a way of addressing concerns over a research methodology focused solely on the relatively unproven tools of sentiment analysis.

### **Korean Central News Agency (KCNA) Findings**

The Korean Central News Agency is North Korea's primary, authoritative media outlet. When the regime wishes to communicate a message to an external audience, this is often the chosen medium, whether in English, Korean, or other languages. The research here uses a dataset downloaded in late August 2017 of all KCNA reporting from January 2002 to August 2017, just over 100,000 entries/articles. This represents all data (i.e. reporting) available on the website at the time of the scrape (August 2017).

To determine the KCNA's baseline sentiment, the text of every report was analyzed for sentiment on a five-point scale (very positive, positive, neutral, negative, and very negative);<sup>22</sup> text with no sentiment (primarily dates or place names) was excluded. Once the analysis was complete, the findings were output to data visualization software to

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19. CSIS, "Beyond Parallel," Washington, D.C., Center for Strategic and International Studies, 2018, <<https://beyondparallel.csis.org/databases/>> (date accessed September 12, 2018).

20. Center for Nonproliferation Studies, "The CNS North Korea Missile Test Database," James Martin Center for Nonproliferation Studies at the Middlebury Institute of International Studies at Monterey, November 2017, <<http://www.nti.org/analysis/articles/cns-north-korea-missile-test-database/>> (date accessed September 12, 2018).

21. CSIS, "Beyond Parallel," Washington, D.C., Center for Strategic and International Studies, 2018, <<https://beyondparallel.csis.org/databases/>> (date accessed September 12, 2018).

22. This research used MeaningCloud service/software (<https://www.meaningcloud.com/>) to conduct the sentiment analysis. MeaningCloud was selected from the many similar services for its ease of use; its selection here is not intended as an endorsement and is noted only to provide disclosure and context.

create the illustrations shown below.<sup>23</sup> In the illustrations, very positive is P+, positive is P, neutral is NEU, negative is N, and very negative is N+. It is helpful to note that not all topics created very positive or very negative sentiment; some illustrations will therefore lack those elements of the scale (Colored-graph version is available on KINU English website—very positive: green, positive: blue-green, neutral: grey, negative: orange, very negative: red). To assist clarity, the illustrations list the scale level (P+, P, NEU, etc.), their respective percentages, and also use size to convey the relative differences between sentiment levels—the greater the size, the larger the percentage of reporting containing that sentiment. The analysis and associated illustrations are examined on a comparative basis using the four DIME tools.

Overall, baseline KCNA reporting is more positive, at 68% (the sum of the P and P+ reporting), than negative, at 22% (the sum of the N and N+ reporting; though not visible in the graph below, very negative, N+, sentiment was a relatively miniscule, 0.83%). This finding alone is interesting, because it contradicts the common narrative of the North as a cranky, belligerent state, publicly grating to friends, verbally hostile to foes.

The same data is shown below, broken down monthly by the polarity (positivity-negativity) and number of reports. Note positive reporting is always higher than negative reporting, and very positive reporting is always higher than very negative reporting. Also note the large spike in overall reporting starting in 2011 and lasting into 2012.

South Korea held National Assembly elections in April 2012 and a presidential election in December 2012; the South Korean naval vessel Cheonan was sunk in March 2010 (reportedly by a North Korean torpedo); the shelling of Yeonpyeong Island by the North (with return artillery fire by the South) occurred in November 2010; and Kim Jong-il, North Korea's leader at the time, died in December 2011. These are all important events that occurred on or around the peninsula during this

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23. For data visualizations, this research used Tableau (<https://www.tableau.com/>). Tableau was selected for its ease of use and for offering free access to students and faculty. Inclusion here is not intended as an endorsement and is noted only to provide disclosure and context.



Figure 1: Sentiment of KCNA reporting, January 2002 to August 2017

All KCNA Reporting from Jan 2002 to Aug 2017

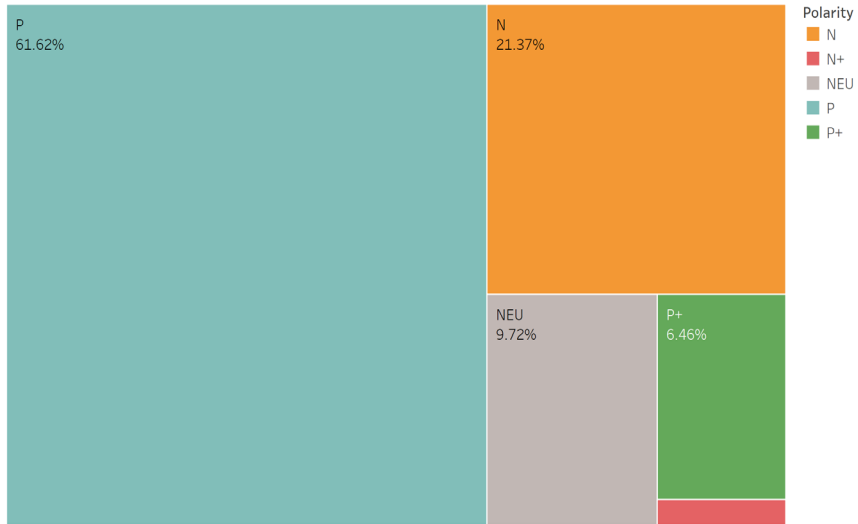
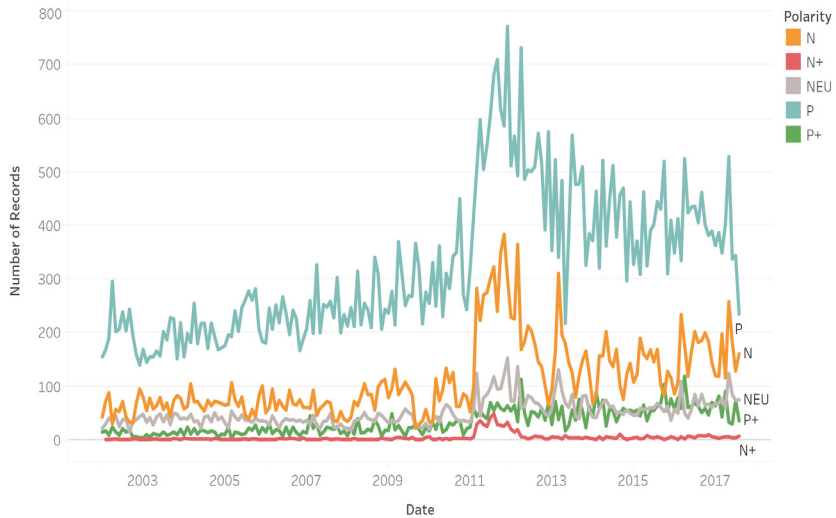


Figure 2: Polarity of KCNA reporting, January 2002 to August 2017

Polarity of KCNA Reporting by Month, Jan 2002 to Aug 2017



approximate time period; however, this research found neither correlation nor causation between these events, separately or in aggregate, and the spike in reporting noted above. This sudden increase in reporting remains an area for future research.

With baseline sentiment for KCNA reporting established, assessments of Pyongyang's reactions to the DIME category tools become possible. By comparing the 68% positive finding (positive and very positive combined) with the tools below, the research assesses the tools' effectiveness, beginning with U.S. and South Korean military exercises.

## Military

For the military category, three terms were used to examine KCNA sentiment during the 2002-2017 time period surveyed: *military exercise*, *foal*, and *ulji* (the search returned both lower-case and capitalized spelling of the terms—for example, foal and Foal, ulji and Ulji).<sup>24</sup> This captured reporting and sentiment on military exercises in general, plus the specific (and separately held) joint South Korean and U.S. Foal Eagle and Ulji Freedom Guardian (also known as Ulji Focus Lens) military exercises. It is important to note that when transliterating from the Korean, Pyongyang uses a J, and gets Ulji, whereas in the South (including in U.S. references to the exercises) Seoul uses a CH and gets Ulchi. Therefore, a researcher looking at the exercises in English is more likely to get results from either the northern or southern side of the DMZ depending on the spelling of Ulji/Ulchi. This research uses the North's spelling, since the focus is on Pyongyang.

As shown below, military-related terms generated some of the most negative sentiment. First is the illustration of KCNA reporting on *military exercise*, followed by *Ulji* and *Foal*.

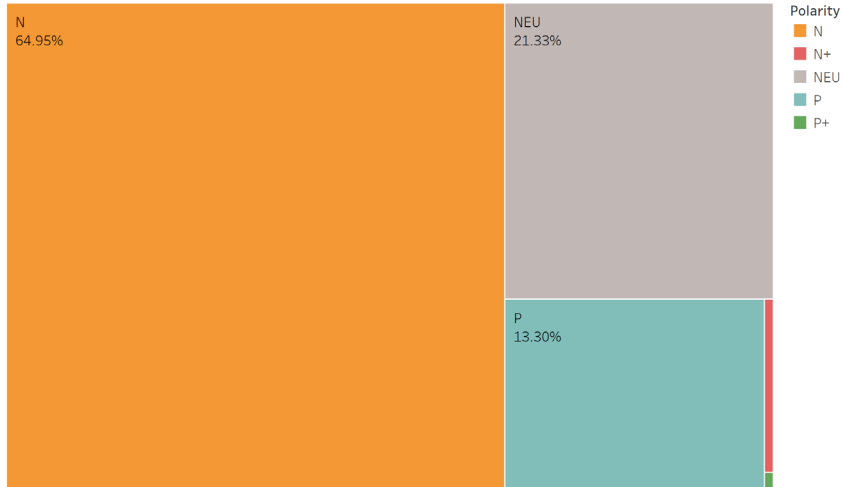
The amount of very negative (N+) and very positive (P+) reporting is barely visible in the lower-right of the image. At 0.39%, the very

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24. The results curated to ensure terms (*e.g. foal*) were only used in reference to the research topic.

Figure 3: Sentiment of reporting on ‘military exercise’, January 2002 to August 2017

2002-2017 KCNA - ‘military exercise’



negative sentiment is negligible, but combines with negative (N) sentiment to provide an overall figure of slightly over 65% for the general term *military exercise*. For the two named exercises, the negative results are somewhat higher, per below.

The negative sentiment for Ulji Focus Lens (or Ulji Freedom Guardian) is just under 70%, while that for the Foal Eagle is 74%—both among the highest levels found in this research and similar research done on Russia. These initial findings align with expectations, that military activities by adversary states are viewed more negatively by the targeted state(s) than activities like diplomacy, economic sanctions, or information campaigns.

In an attempt to explore and confirm these findings, the next examination looks at sentiment by month, for the 15 years analyzed. If Pyongyang’s views on military exercises are indeed quite negative, then periods with military exercises should have elevated levels of negativity. Fortunately for the research here, joint U.S. – South Korean exercises are nearly always held in March and August, and only in those two

Figure 4: Sentiment of reporting on 'ulji', January 2002 to August 2017

2002-2017 KCNA - 'ulji'

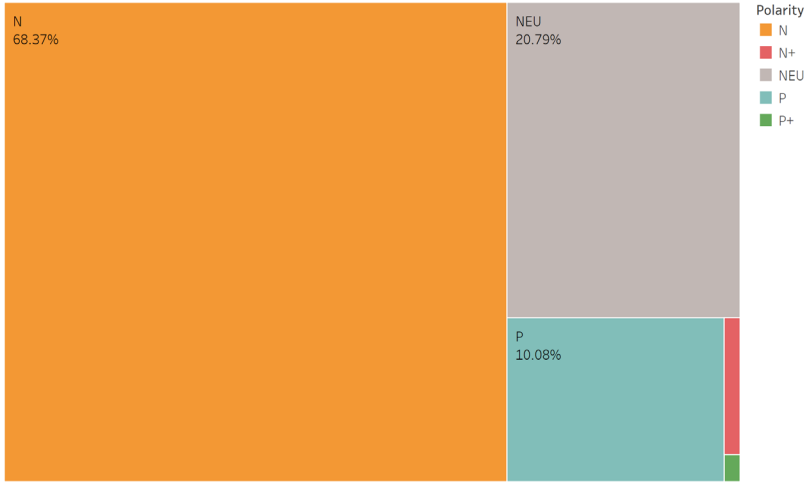
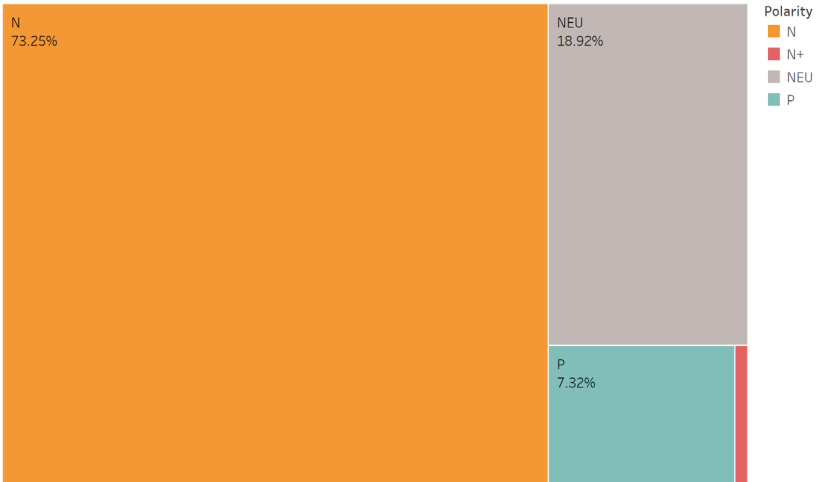


Figure 5: Sentiment of reporting on 'foal', January 2002 to August 2017

2002-2017 KCNA - 'foal'



months.<sup>25</sup> Some years may witness a start or end date that strays just outside these months; however, the majority of the annual exercises occur in March and August. Therefore, March and August should have elevated levels of negative reporting compared to other months.

In the image below, the KCNA data from 2002-2017 is aggregated and broken down by polarity and by month.<sup>26</sup> Though somewhat complex, the illustration shows March has the most negative sentiment (N) of any month; August has the third most negative. In terms of very negative (N+) sentiment, August is first and March is second. Both of these findings are in line with expectations that months with military exercises would be the most negative.

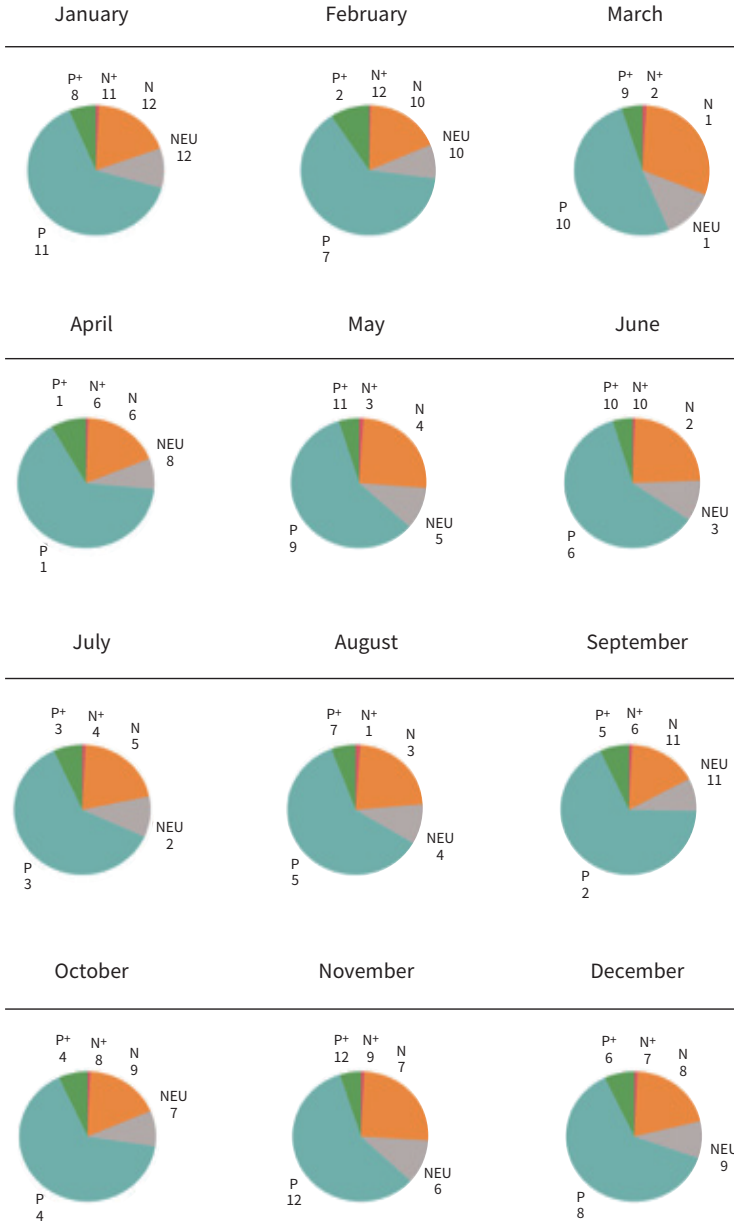
Interestingly, positive (P) sentiment is highest in April and September—the two months directly *after* the exercises complete. Both of these findings support the idea that Pyongyang responds very negatively to U.S.–South Korean military exercises. Second, it also appears to support claims by the North and others that the annual exercises are an important negative factor in relations between North and South Korea, and between the North and the United States.

It is important to note that other researchers have found this not to be the case, that instead, Pyongyang’s reactions to the annual exercises are based more on current relations with the U.S. than actual sentiment toward the specific exercises.

“A new study by *Beyond Parallel* shows that annual U.S.-ROK [Republic of Korea] military exercises [...] do not provoke North Korea. The study’s findings demonstrate that these summer and fall exercises, like the spring Foal Eagle and Key Resolve exercises, have a ‘null effect’ on North Korean provocations from 2005 to 2016. This is despite periodic claims by Pyongyang and the media that these annual military exercises provoke

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25. “CSIS, “*Beyond Parallel*,” Washington, D.C., Center for Strategic and International Studies, 2018, <<https://beyondparallel.csis.org/databases/>> (date accessed September 12, 2018).
  26. The numbers described per each month in Figure 6 indicate the ranking of that month’s polarity out of all months of the year. So, for example, a number 1 next to “N” in March would indicate March has the highest level of negative sentiment out of any month of the year, for all years combined from 2002-2017.

Figure 6: Sentiment by month of all KCNA reporting, January 2002 to August 2017



North Korean belligerence.”<sup>27</sup>

This incongruity of findings creates an interesting opportunity for future research.

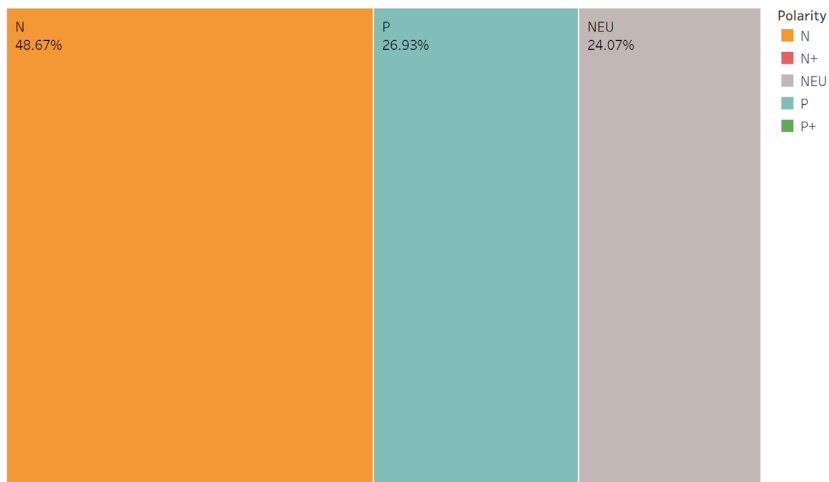
### Economic

For this category, the term sanction was used as a proxy for North Korea’s sentiment toward the economic category of DIME, based on outside states targeting Pyongyang with economic sanctions. Interestingly, there is almost no very negative (.18%) or very positive (.15%) sentiment, as shown below.

At 49%, this finding shows the North responds 15-20% less

Figure 7: Sentiment of reporting on ‘sanction’, January 2002 to August 2017

2002-2017 KCNA - ‘sanction’



27. Victor Cha, Lee Na Young, and Andy Lim, “DPRK Provocations and U.S.-ROK Military Exercises, 2005 to 2016,” *Beyond Parallel*, Washington, D.C., Center for Strategic and International Studies, August 2016, <<http://beyondparallel.csis.org/us-rok-exercises-not-provoke-dprk/>> (date accessed September 12, 2018).

negatively to economic sanctions than it does to military exercises. However, nearly all recent sanctions on the North have come as part of diplomatic measures, largely from the UN. This made disaggregation of economic from diplomatic measures difficult—the term *sanction* is often used in reports that discuss diplomatic measures, so the findings include a mix of diplomatic and economic tools. Even with the combination, however, the negativity levels are 15-20% lower than with military exercises.

## Diplomatic

Thanks to the length of time available in the KCNA data, the research was able to look at recent United Nations Security Council (UNSC) resolutions (2270 in March 2016 and 2371 in August 2017), as well as older resolutions: 1718 (from 2006), 1874 (2009), and 2087 (from 2013). First, a graph shows reaction to all diplomatic efforts (resolutions 1718, 1874, 2087, 2270, and 2371) combined, followed by separate graphs looking at each resolution independently.

Three unique points are evident in the data above. First, neutral sentiment often, and overall, outweighed positive or negative sentiment. Second, there is no *very negative* or *very positive* sentiment expressed for any of the resolutions throughout the entire 15-year time period. Third, there are spikes in reporting based on resolution timelines and announcements, with some variance in sentiment levels—we will examine this variance below, when looking at each resolution individually.

The first resolution in our dataset is UNSC Resolution 1718, passed on October 14, 2006. UNSC 1718 expressed “grave concern” over North Korea’s nuclear program and test and imposed sanctions.<sup>28 29</sup> Noting

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28. Security Council Report, “UN Documents for DPRK (North Korea),” *Security Council Report*, New York, NY, <<http://www.securitycouncilreport.org/un-documents/dprk-north-korea/>> (date accessed January 9, 2018).

29. United Nations, Security Council, UNSC Resolution 1718, October 14, 2006. S/RES/1718.



Figure 8: Combined sentiment of reporting on UNSC resolutions, January 2002 to August 2017

2002-2017 KCNA - Combined UNSC Resolutions

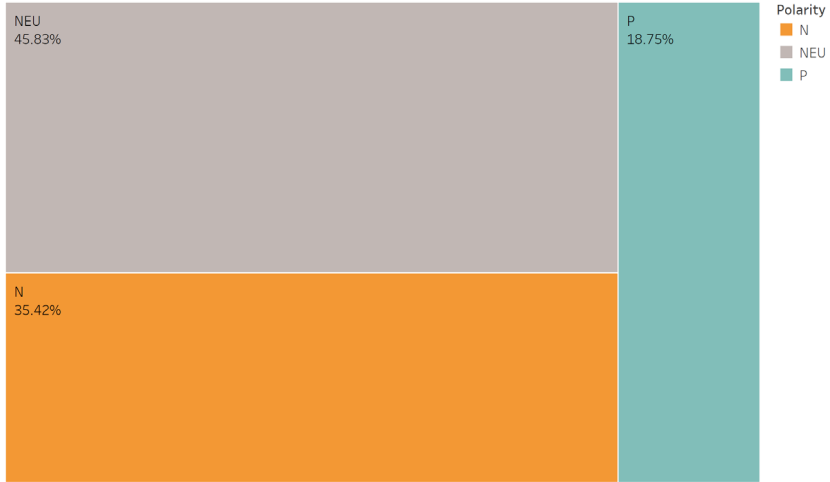
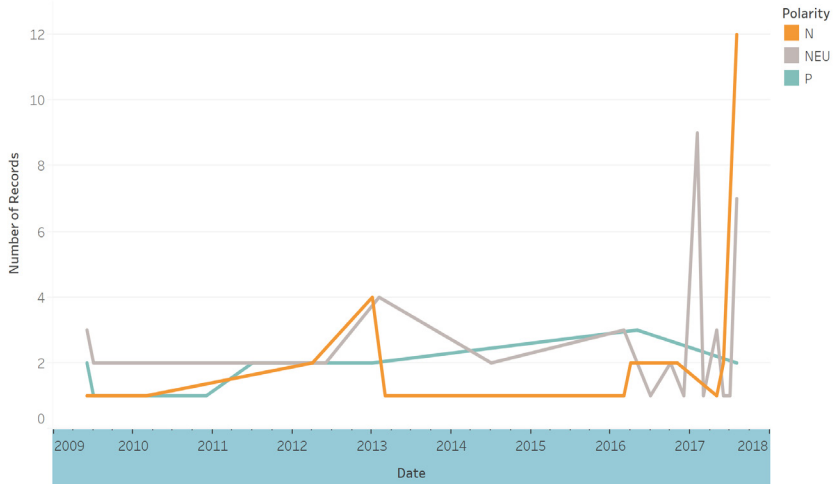


Figure 9: Timeline of combined sentiment of reporting on UNSC resolutions, January 2002 to August 2017

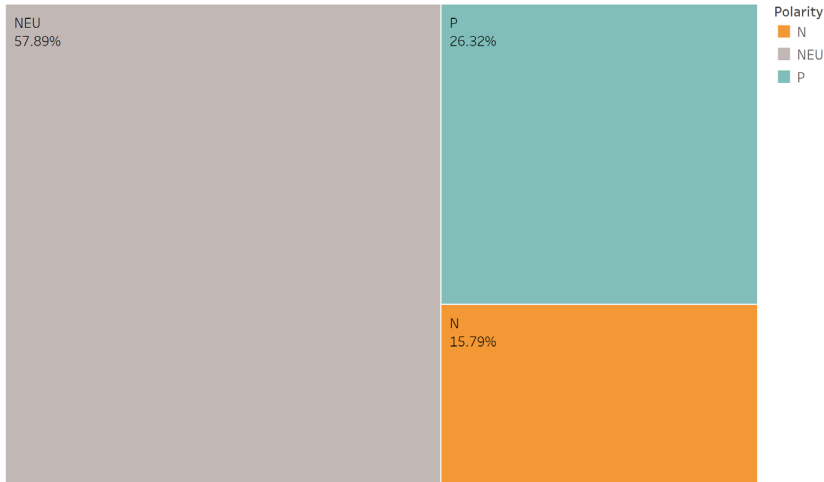
2002-2017 KCNA - Combined UNSC Resolutions Timeline



this, the resolution is a combination of both diplomatic and economic tools.

Figure 10: Sentiment of reporting on UNSC resolution 1718

2002-2017 KCNA - UNSC '1718'



The main sentiment expressed in reaction to this resolution is neutral, with negative sentiment the least expressed. As we will see throughout this section, neutral sentiment is often quite large, especially in comparison to the other DIME categories. Additional research is required to understand why this outcome was so neutral, especially given the combination of two tools of statecraft (economic sanctions and diplomacy).

The next resolution in our chronological order is UNSC Resolution 1874, from June 12, 2009, which greatly expanded sanctions on the North, while again expressing “grave concern” in response to a nuclear test conducted by Pyongyang.<sup>30 31</sup>

30. Security Council Report, “UN Documents for DPRK (North Korea),” *Security Council Report*, New York, NY, <<http://www.securitycouncilreport.org/un-documents/dprk-north-korea/>> (date accessed January 9, 2018).

31. United Nations, Security Council, UNSC Resolution 1874, June 12, 2009.

Figure 11: Sentiment of reporting on UNSC resolution 1874

2002-2017 KCNA - UNSC '1874'

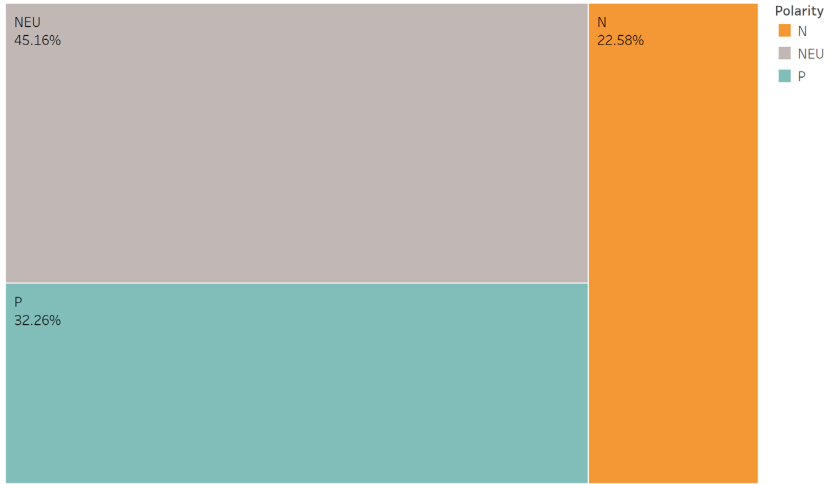
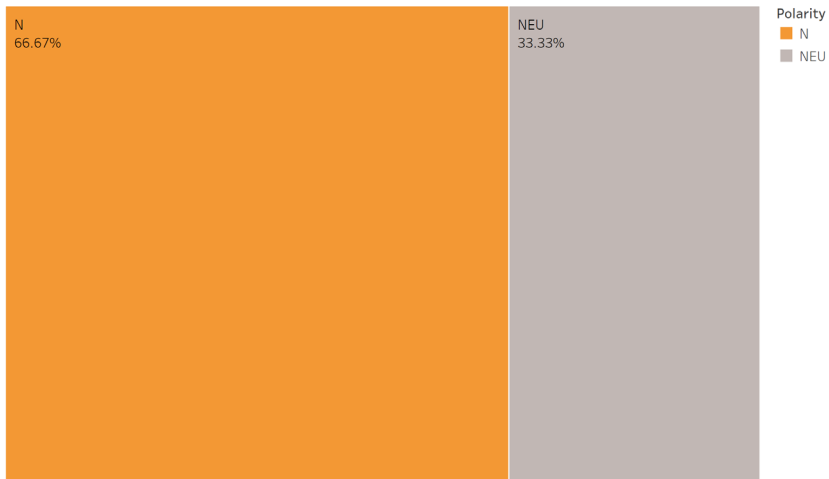


Figure 12: Sentiment of reporting on UNSC resolution 2087

2002-2017 KCNA - UNSC '2087'



Again, the results show neutral as the most common sentiment, with negative as the least common. The next resolution, 2087, shows Pyongyang reacting more in accordance with expectations, with negative becoming the dominant sentiment. Resolution 2087 differs from the previous two in at least two aspects: it occurred after Kim Jong-il had died (December 2011) and his son Kim Jong-un had taken power in the North; second, it came in response to a ballistic missile launch and test rather than a nuclear test. As with the other resolutions, however, 2087 combines both sanctions and diplomatic pressure.<sup>32 33</sup>

North Korea's response here was much more negative than with previous resolutions, with no positive sentiment at all and negative sentiment at nearly 67%—even more negative than *military exercise*. This result is an outlier compared to the other reactions to Security Council resolutions.

The next resolution, UNSC 2270 from March 2016, again combines diplomatic pressure with economic sanctions, condemning the North for violating previous resolutions by conducting a nuclear test and using ballistic missile technology.<sup>34 35</sup> However, as shown below, the North's response remains predominantly neutral.

Finally, the last resolution in our dataset is UNSC Resolution 2371, from August 2017. This resolution again toughened sanctions and condemned North Korea's use of ballistic missile technology.<sup>36 37</sup> Like

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S/RES/1874.

32. Security Council Report, "UN Documents for DPRK (North Korea)," *Security Council Report*, New York, NY, <<http://www.securitycouncilreport.org/un-documents/dprk-north-korea/>> (date accessed January 9, 2018).

33. United Nations, Security Council, UNSC Resolution 2087, January 22, 2013. S/RES/2087.

34. Security Council Report, "UN Documents for DPRK (North Korea)," *Security Council Report*, New York, NY, <<http://www.securitycouncilreport.org/un-documents/dprk-north-korea/>> (date accessed January 9, 2018).

35. United Nations, Security Council, UNSC Resolution 2270, March 2, 2016. S/RES/2270.

36. Security Council Report, "UN Documents for DPRK (North Korea)," *Security Council Report*, New York, NY, <<http://www.securitycouncilreport.org/un-documents/dprk-north-korea/>> (date accessed January 9, 2018).

Figure 13: Sentiment of reporting on UNSC resolution 2270

2002-2017 KCNA - UNSC '2270'

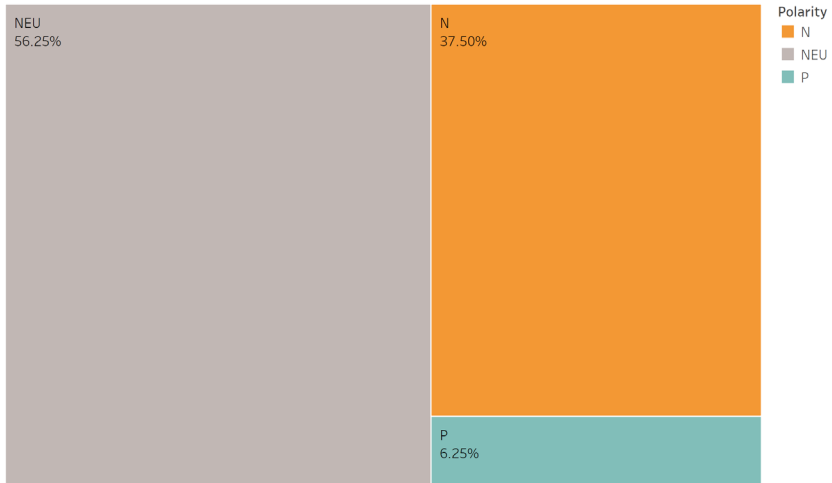
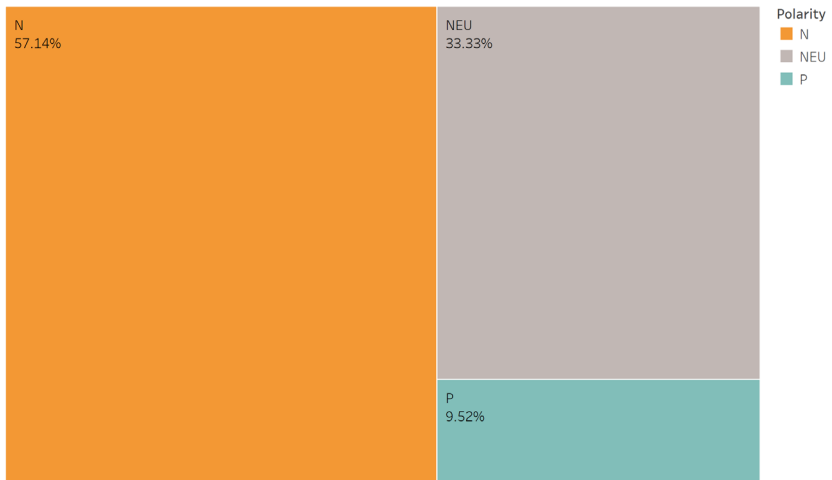


Figure 14: Sentiment of reporting on UNSC resolution 2371

2002-2017 KCNA - UNSC '2371'



resolution 2087 above, 2371 focuses on punishing the North for ballistic missiles, rather than nuclear tests. Also, as shown below, 2371 has more negative than neutral sentiment.

Two cases are too limited of a dataset from which to draw conclusions, but the only UN resolutions surveyed that focused on missiles, rather than nuclear tests, were also the only ones to see negative sentiment outweigh neutral sentiment. If these examples were to hold true under additional testing, a finding that the North reacts more strongly to criticism of missile testing than nuclear testing would be a salient, policy-relevant finding.

Overall, the North's response to UN resolutions that combined diplomatic and economic pressure was predominantly neutral, making these measures the least negative of the three tools examined thus far. Negative sentiment outweighs neutral sentiment in only two cases, both focused on missile testing and launches.

## Information

Finally, the KCNA research turns to the information category, examining the North's reaction to the use of loudspeakers, what it terms *psychological warfare*, and the term *leaflet*. This last term is in reference to leaflets sent over the border, often by NGOs using large balloons, from the South into the North.

First, two notes on *loudspeaker* and *leaflet* before viewing the illustrations: for the *loudspeaker* search term, curation was necessary to remove a large number of false positives from the search results. The KCNA commonly discusses "agitation teams" sent to the countryside or factories to encourage workers to increase output; these teams often use loudspeakers as part of their work (e.g. exhorting laborers to greater production), resulting in their appearance, and subsequent removal from, the search results. Additionally, in KCNA parlance, "right-wing

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37. United Nations, Security Council, UNSC Resolution 2371, August 5, 2017. S/RES/2371.

Figure 15: Sentiment of reporting on 'psychological warfare', January 2002 to August 2017

2002-2017 KCNA - 'Psychological Warfare'

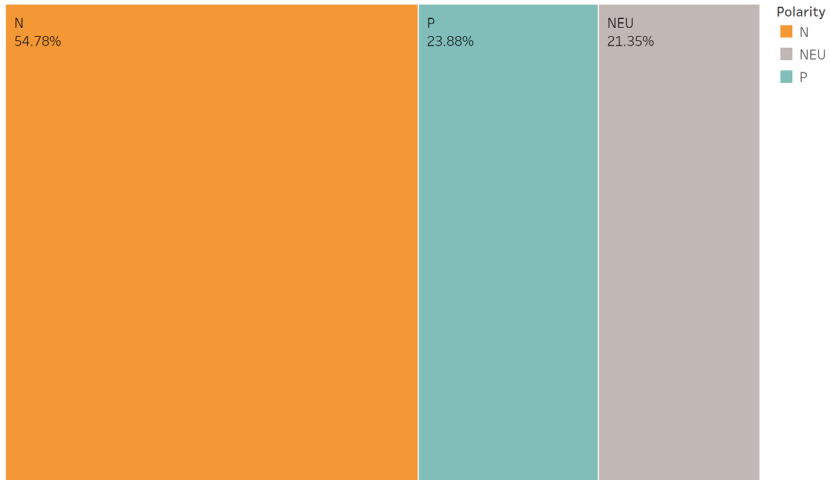
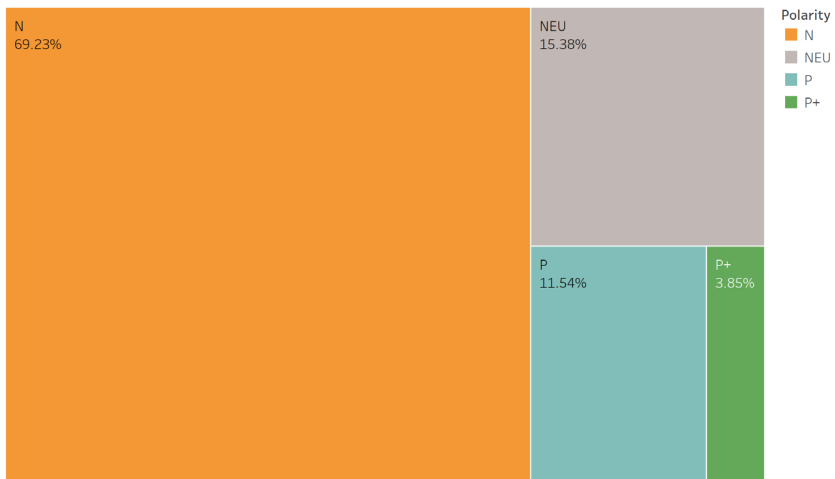


Figure 16: Sentiment of reporting on 'loudspeaker', January 2002 to August 2017

2002-2017 KCNA - 'loudspeaker'



Japanese gangsters” commonly harass the offices of Chongryon<sup>38</sup> in Japan using loudspeakers mounted on vans parked in front of the association’s buildings. These results were also removed from the research.

Second, the term leaflet also required manual curation of the data to remove stories discussing the use of leaflets in South Korea and Japan. In both countries, demonstrators commonly distribute brochures and one-page handbills (both often referred to by the term *leaflet* in North Korean media) as part of their demonstrations. Stories referencing these activities were removed from the data.

From the graphs, at 69% loudspeaker was more negative than *psychological warfare* (55%), with *leaflet* in the middle at 58%. This ranks loudspeaker as the second-most negative finding in the North Korea study, behind only the Foal Eagle military exercises. The elevated levels of negativity in the information category, compared to the baseline, the diplomatic, and the economic categories, support the introduction’s survey of scholarship that stressed the importance of information control to Pyongyang.

*Loudspeaker* remained relatively steady throughout the period surveyed; however, *psychological warfare* had more pronounced spikes, per the graph below, which also shows a significant negative spike in August 2015. This was the month Seoul resumed loudspeaker broadcasts into the North in an ultimately successful effort to win some form of apology from Pyongyang for planting landmines that maimed Southern soldiers along the DMZ.

The timeline for *leaflet* is also interesting, capturing the improvement in relations between the North and South in the early 2000s, before turning negative at the end of the decade. The largest spike was in November 2014, after a ‘leaflet-scattering operation’ launched from the South resulted in an exchange of gunfire across the border in October 2014.

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38. Chongryon (<http://www.chongryon.com/>) is an association of Korean residents in Japan, many with ancestral ties to the northern half of the peninsula, who often favor Pyongyang over Seoul.



Figure 17: Sentiment of reporting on 'leaflet', January 2002 to August 2017

2002-2017 KCNA - 'leaflet'

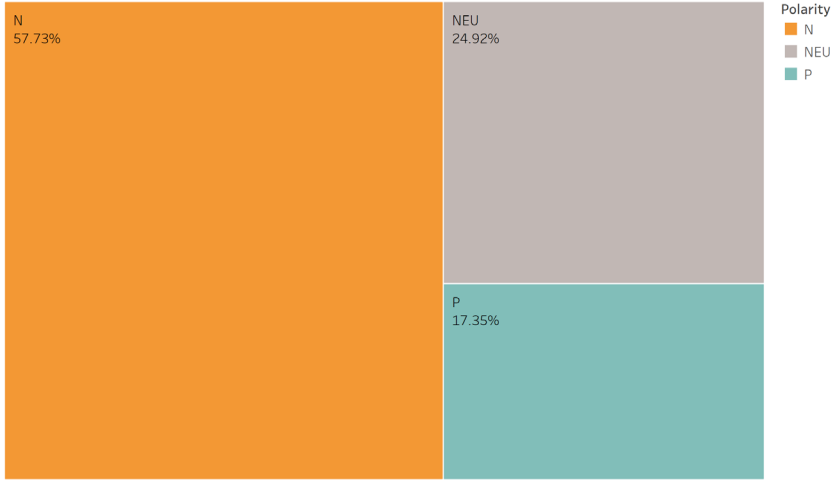


Figure 18: Timeline of sentiment of reporting on 'psychological warfare', January 2002 to August 2017

2002-2017 KCNA - 'Psychological Warfare' Timeline

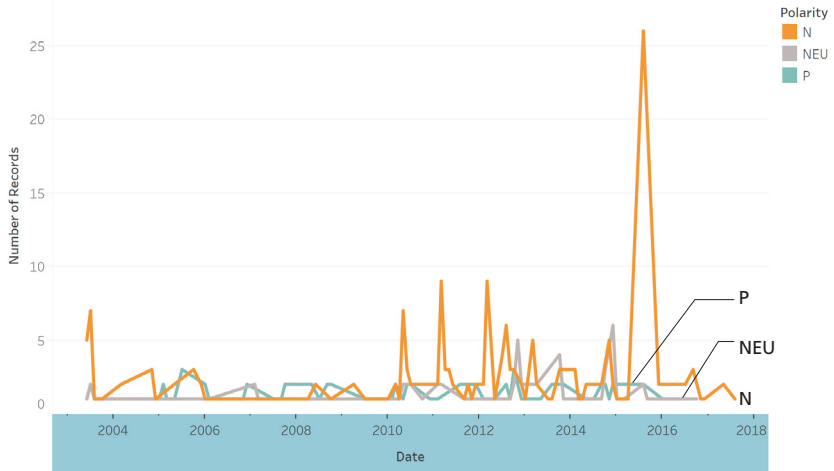
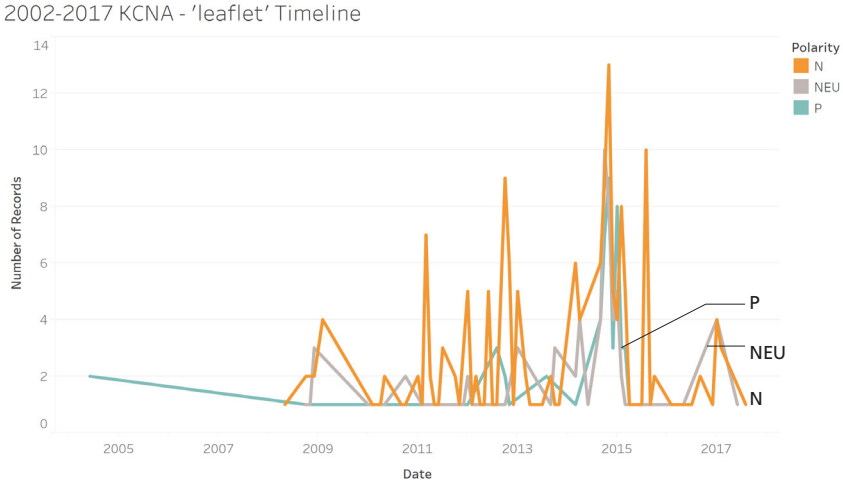


Figure 19: Timeline of sentiment of reporting on 'leaflet', January 2002 to August 2017



### Sentiment Conclusion

The results for the KCNA show the Foal Eagle military exercises generated the most negative sentiment from the North. The second-highest negative reaction was generated by *loudspeaker*, which garnered a more negative reaction than sanctions, the broad term military exercises, and the diplomatic and economic search terms.

While the sentiment, at 58% negative, was not as high for *leaflet* as some of the other terms, it generated a military response from the North that resulted in an exchange of gunfire across the border.<sup>39</sup> Similarly, South Korea’s decision to use loudspeakers in August 2015 generated a military response from the North (artillery fire into the South) and led to an exchange of artillery fire across the border.<sup>40</sup> We will look at North

39. Choe Sang-hun, “Koreas Exchange Fire After Activists Launch Balloons Over Border,” *The New York Times*, October 2014, <<http://www.nytimes.com/2014/10/11/world/asia/koreas-exchange-fire-after-activists-launch-balloons-over-border.html>> (date accessed September 12, 2018).

40. Yonhap, “(5th LD) Two Koreas Exchange Shells over Western Border,” Yonhap,

Korean actions in response to the four DIME tools in greater detail below, but note here that information tools, unlike any of the other DIME tools, generated two separate military responses from the North.

In addition to the finding that Pyongyang reacts most negatively to the military and information tools of statecraft, the study also found that North Korean sentiment is most negative during March and August, the months that normally feature joint U.S.–South Korean military exercises. Sentiment then swings to the highest monthly positive levels in April and September, the months immediately following the exercises.

The findings from the KCNA support the hypothesis that Pyongyang exhibits a strongly negative reaction to having its information control challenged. Only the military tools of statecraft rivaled those of information, which proved more negative than diplomatic and economic activities.

## Actions

Aside from expressing varying sentiment, what does North Korea actually do in response to the outside use of tools in the four DIME categories? Can any of these activities even be linked to outside use of a DIME tool? To answer these questions, this section will focus on ‘kinetic incidents’ between North and South Korea. A kinetic incident is defined as the use of small arms, artillery, or naval weaponry by at least one side, during the period under survey here, January 2002 to August 2017.<sup>41</sup>

According to a database of North Korean ‘provocations’<sup>42</sup> maintained by the *Beyond Parallel* research project at the Center for

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August 20, 2015, < <http://english.yonhapnews.co.kr/search1/2603000000.html?cid=AEN20150820011155315>> (date accessed January 12, 2018).

41. As a reminder, our KCNA data covers January 1, 2002 to August 2017.

42. It is important to note that *Beyond Parallel* and CSIS use the term provocation for a broad range of North Korean activities (rocket testing, firing short-range missiles, artillery fire near the DMZ/border) that may simply be part of North Korea’s routine military development, training, and exercise activities and unrelated to ‘provoking’ outside countries. Rather than *provocation*, the research here uses the terms *incident* and *activity* to describe similar North Korean actions.

Figure 20: Timeline of kinetic incidents involving North Korea, January 2002 to August 2017

*Beyond Parallel* Kinetic Incident Database, 01-2002 to 08-2017

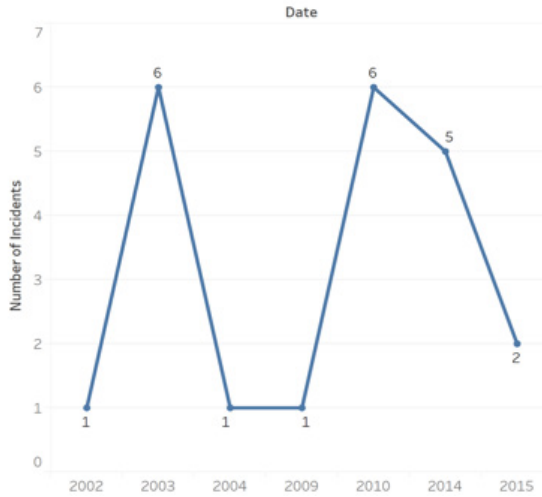
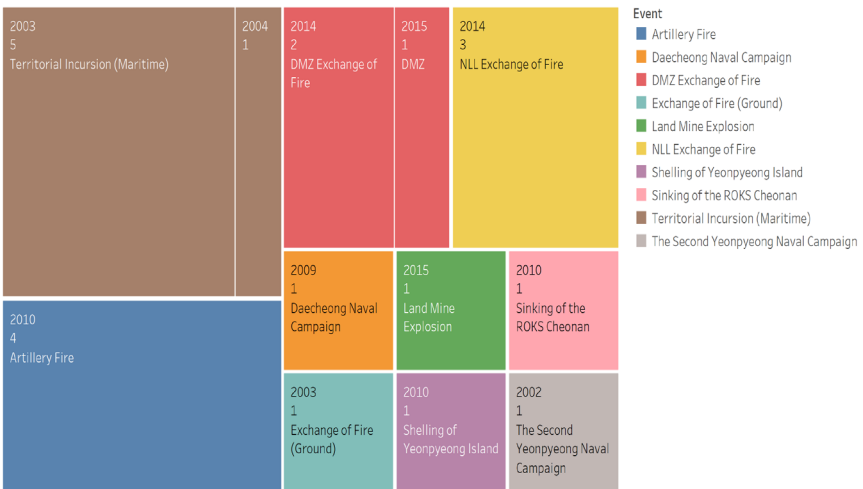


Figure 21: Types of kinetic incidents involving North Korea, January 2002 to August 2017

*Beyond Parallel* Kinetic Incident by Type



Strategic and International Studies (CSIS), kinetic incidents as they are defined here took place 22 times between 2002 and August 2017.<sup>43</sup> The most recent incident occurred in August 2015, meaning approximately two incidents occurred per year from 2002-2015 (a November 2017 incident of shots fired by the North at one of its soldiers attempting to escape across the border to the South is outside our timeline).

The timeline below shows that 2003 and 2010 each contained six incidents, 2014 contained five, and all other years contained between zero and two. Further below, we can see the incidents broken down by type, number, and year.

From the graph, we can see six of the 22 incidents are classified as maritime territorial incursions (all occurring in 2003-4). This reflects a dispute between the North and South over the sea border between the two countries in the West (Yellow) Sea. The North does not agree with the current position of this sea border, also called the Northern Limit Line (NLL), and both fishing vessels and naval craft from the North routinely travel south of the line and into waters claimed by South Korea, often during peak fishing seasons. From the data, in six incidents the presence of South Korean naval vessels (including warnings by ship-mounted loudspeakers) was not sufficient to dispel the North's ships and warning shots were fired (bringing the incident into this research). For all six of these incidents, the warning shots resolved the situation and no further action occurred.

Though shots were fired, these incidents resulted in no casualties or property damage. An examination of the timing and related reporting finds no reason given for the incidents' timing or cause, rather, they appear to be part of an ongoing border dispute and unrelated to the specific use of any DIME tools.

Related to the maritime incursions, though more serious, are the three exchanges of fire in the NLL, all in 2014 (top-right corner, above). In these incidents both sides fired at or near the other, though there were no casualties or property damage. Like the incidents above, where only

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43. CSIS, "Beyond Parallel," Washington, D.C., Center for Strategic and International Studies, 2018, <<https://beyondparallel.csis.org/databases/>> (date accessed September 12, 2018).

one side fired, there is no clear reason given or assessed for their timing or cause. Again, they appear to be part of an ongoing border dispute that is unrelated to the use of any specific DIME tools.

We have examined 9 of the 22 incidents and found no connection to the use of foreign policy tools. The next set of incidents, four episodes of artillery fire (all from 2010), are similar. Each incident appears to involve North Korea conducting artillery drills by firing near and/or into the sea around the NLL. Three of the four incidents occurred in January (on consecutive days from January 27-29, 2010), following the November 2009 Daecheong Naval Campaign (above, in the middle) that saw a North Korean naval vessel damaged (with reports of one North Korean sailor killed and three wounded) after crossing the NLL into the South's waters and engaging South Korean naval vessels.<sup>44</sup> Based on this timing, and lack of a reoccurrence, these four (a similar exercise/incident occurred in August 2010) artillery incidents could be a warning for the South and training for the North's artillery forces in case they are needed to support a future engagement near the NLL. Making these four incidents, like the nine already examined, more related to the disputed border than the use of a particular DIME tool.

The Daecheong Naval Campaign, which resulted in North Korean casualties and possibly produced the artillery incidents examined above, also appears related to the disputed border. The timing of this incident, a week before President Obama was due to start a week-long visit to Asia that included meetings with the South Korean president to discuss North Korea's nuclear weapons program, may have a connection to diplomacy, but the tie is unclear.<sup>45</sup>

So far, of the 14 incidents examined, there is one possible connection to diplomacy. The next category of incidents, exchanges of gunfire in the DMZ, changes that, finally making a clear connection to one of the

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44. Choe Sang-hun, "Korean Navies Skirmish in Disputed Waters," *The New York Times*, Seoul, Korea, November 2009, <<http://www.nytimes.com/2009/11/11/world/asia/11korea.html>> (date accessed September 12, 2018).

45. Choe Sang-hun, "Korean Navies Skirmish in Disputed Waters," *The New York Times*, Seoul, Korea, November 2009, <<http://www.nytimes.com/2009/11/11/world/asia/11korea.html>> (date accessed September 12, 2018).

DIME categories. The 20 August 2015 exchange of artillery fire in/ around the DMZ, the most recent incident in our dataset, was an explicit North Korean response to, and targeting of, loudspeakers the South had started using to broadcast across the border.<sup>46</sup> The South's use of the loudspeakers, which had been silent for years under a previous North-South agreement during sunnier times on the peninsula,<sup>47</sup> came as a response to the early August planting of land mines by the North that wounded two South Korean soldiers on the South's side of the DMZ.<sup>48</sup>

In addition to the attack over the loudspeakers, the exchanges of fire in the DMZ also included a 10 October 2014 incident when North Korean soldiers fired small arms (machine guns) at leaflet-filled balloons being sent into the North from the South by an NGO. South Korea responded by engaging with its own small arms fire.<sup>49</sup> Prior to the engagement, the North had warned the South, saying Pyongyang would consider a launch of the leaflet balloons, "a declaration of war."<sup>50</sup> As with the loudspeaker incident discussed above, this incident is a response to the use of information as a tool to influence the North.

The final exchange of fire in the database occurred nine days after the incident over the leaflets. In this case, after issuing warnings, the South fired on a group of North Korean soldiers moving toward the South's side of the DMZ on October 19, 2014. The North briefly returned

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46. Choe Sang-hun, "North and South Korea Trade Fire Across Border, Seoul Says," *The New York Times*, August 20, 2015, <<http://www.nytimes.com/2015/08/21/world/asia/north-korea-and-south-korea-exchange-rocket-and-artillery-fire.html>> (date accessed September 12, 2018).

47. CNN, "Koreas Agree to Military Hotline," *CNN*, Seoul, South Korea, June 4, 2004, <<http://www.cnn.com/2004/WORLD/asiapcf/06/03/koreas.agree/index.html>> (date accessed September 12, 2018).

48. Choe Sang-hun, "South Korea Accuses the North After Land Mines Maim Two Soldiers in DMZ," *The New York Times*, August 10, 2015, <<http://www.nytimes.com/2015/08/11/world/asia/north-korea-placed-mines-that-maimed-2-south-korean-soldiers-at-dmz-seoul-says.html>> (date accessed September 12, 2018).

49. Choe Sang-hun, "Koreas Exchange Fire After Activists Launch Balloons Over Border," *The New York Times*, Seoul, South Korea, October 10, 2014, <<http://www.nytimes.com/2015/08/11/world/asia/north-korea-placed-mines-that-maimed-2-south-korean-soldiers-at-dmz-seoul-says.html>> (date accessed September 12, 2018).

50. *Ibid.*

fire, but there were no reported casualties or damage to property.<sup>51</sup> Coming so soon after the leaflet balloons and related exchange of fire, this incident may also be linked to the leaflets, though any connection is not explicit.

Out of 18 incidents examined, one had a possible tie to diplomacy, one a possible tie to information, and two had explicit ties to information. Next, the research turns to the four remaining incidents: the 2002 Second Yeonpyeong Naval Campaign, a 2003 exchange of groundfire, 2010's Shelling of Yeonpyeong Island and the Sinking of the ROKS Cheonan. For ease of reference, the chart is shown once more, below.

The Second Yeonpyeong Naval Campaign, June 29, 2002 (the first was in June 1999), was one of the deadliest confrontations between the North and South since the Korean (6/25) War, with 13 North Koreans reportedly killed and 25 wounded, while the South suffered 6 killed and the loss of a patrol boat.<sup>52</sup> This incident also occurred in/around the disputed NLL sea border, but came at a time (2002) of generally better relations between the two countries—though during a peak in the fishing/crabbing season when tensions in the area can run higher than normal. It is unclear what caused this incident, but it does not appear related to the use of a foreign policy tool.

Next, a 17 July 2003 exchange of groundfire in/near the DMZ that resulted in no casualties for either side, is also unclear in its exact cause. KCNA records show no statement on the incident by the North, with the timing apparently unrelated to any outside activities.

Finally, 2010 saw two deadly incidents between the North and South. First was the March sinking of the South Korean naval corvette Cheonan by a torpedo, allegedly fired by the North. The ship was just

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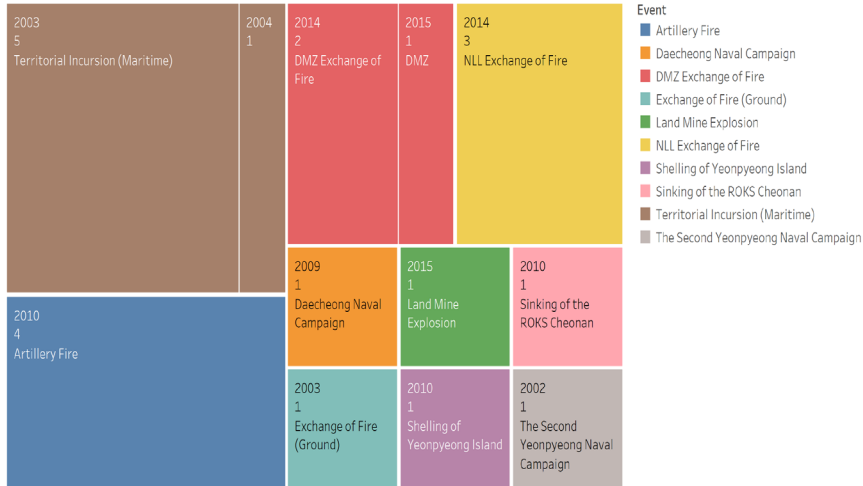
51. Choe Sang-hun, "Gunfire Exchanged across Korean Boundary," *The New York Times*, Seoul, South Korea, October 19, 2014, <<https://www.nytimes.com/2014/10/20/world/asia/gunfire-exchanged-on-korean-boundary.html>> (date accessed September 12, 2018).

52. "CSIS, "Beyond Parallel," Washington, D.C., Center for Strategic and International Studies, 2018, <<https://beyondparallel.csis.org/databases/>> (date accessed September 12, 2018).



Figure 22: Types of kinetic incidents involving North Korea, January 2002 to August 2017

Beyond Parallel Kinetic Incident by Type



south of the NLL at the time it was attacked, but the North denied involvement. A clear finding for why the attack occurred awaits future research, possibly post-reunification. The second incident, the Shelling of Yeonpyeong Island in 2010, again involved an area near the disputed NLL sea border. In this incident, North Korea shelled Yeonpyeong Island, near the NLL, killing four South Koreans and wounding others, while an unknown number of North Koreans were wounded or killed after South Korean Marines returned artillery fire.<sup>53</sup> This incident, occurring a few months after the sinking of the Cheonan and several maritime incursions by the North across the NLL, is also unclear in its cause. As one of the few times the North has targeted a civilian area of the South since the end of the Korean War, it is a serious incident but lacks a clear motive. As with the sinking of the Cheonan, a clear finding

53. Yoo Jee-ho, "Marines Recall Yeonpyeong Shelling with Anger, New Perspective," *Yonhap*, Yeonpyeong Island, South Korea, November 21, 2011, <<http://english.yonhapnews.co.kr/national/2011/11/18/12/0301000000AEN20111118002400315F.HTML>> (date accessed September 12, 2018).

for why the shelling occurred awaits future research with better access to North Korean archives.

From this examination of kinetic incidents between the North and South from 2002-2017, several points are clear:

1. Nearly all of the incidents occurred in and around the disputed sea border between the North and South;
2. 2010 was the peak year in terms of both the number of incidents and their seriousness, with the sinking of the Cheonan and the artillery barrage of Yeongpyeong Island killing a total of 48 military personnel and 2 civilians in South Korea alone;<sup>54</sup>
3. Most importantly for the research here, only 2 of the 22 incidents can be explicitly tied to a foreign policy tool; in this case, the information category, as the North reacted violently to South Korean leaflets and loudspeakers. Two other incidents have possible ties to a category, one to diplomacy and one to information, but lack the explicitness of the loudspeaker and leaflet incidents.

## Conclusion

The findings show North Korea reacts as negatively to two information tools as it does to military exercises in the South. Further, the North reacts more negatively to the information tools surveyed than to economic sanctions, UN resolutions, or a combination of sanctions and resolutions. Both the sentiment analysis of North Korean state media and the analysis of 'kinetic incidents' support previous scholarship, outlined at the start of the paper, regarding the critical

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54. The sinking of the Cheonan killed 46 South Korean sailors (see: Anna Fifield, "S. Korea Agrees to End Broadcasts as North Expresses Regret for Provocations," *Washington Post*, Tokyo, August 24, 2015, <[https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/asia\\_pacific/north-korea-hates-those-loudspeakers-because-they-make-fun-of-kim/2015/08/24/439f6039-3f37-490b-9fa1-e3b8022893e6\\_story.html?utm\\_term=.22ecaee52e73](https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/asia_pacific/north-korea-hates-those-loudspeakers-because-they-make-fun-of-kim/2015/08/24/439f6039-3f37-490b-9fa1-e3b8022893e6_story.html?utm_term=.22ecaee52e73)> (date accessed September 12, 2018); the shelling of Yeonpyeong was responsible for the remaining casualties.

importance of information control to North Korea's rulers. Information is of such importance to Pyongyang that threats targeting only the fraction of the populace living within range of South Korean loudspeakers and leaflet balloons produce a level of negativity and violent reaction unsurpassed by any other tool of foreign policy.

These findings support the hypothesis that North Korea responds more negatively to the use of information tools than the other DIME tools. While military exercises produced a negative reaction on par with information, they did not generate the kinetic responses found with leaflets and loudspeakers.

In terms of the research approach, the overlap between the sentiment analysis and 'kinetic actions' sections, especially in terms of information tools, lends credence to the methodology and findings. The findings are also in line with related research conducted by the author on other authoritarian states (Russia and China). Why the North, inter alia authoritarian states from Eritrea to Iran, China to Russia, reacts so strongly to information tools, even the relatively minor ones examined here, raises several interesting questions, not least of which is why does the North react this way? Are information tools viewed as a greater threat to regime stability than sanctions or UN resolutions? Are such tools viewed as a possible precursor to an invasion? Commonly used during the Cold War, both on the Korean Peninsula and more generally in West-Soviet relations, did the decline in their use after the start of the Sunshine Policy in the South (and end of the Cold War) inadvertently sharpen their impact when reintroduced? Could Cold War era scholarship on the use of information tools assist in answering the questions raised here? Exploration of these questions awaits future scholarship.

Finally, in terms of policy, these results show that information can be a key tool for use in relations with North Korea. Specifically, in negotiations with Pyongyang, proposals based on the economic or diplomatic tools of statecraft are less likely to impact the North's decision-making calculus than military or information tools. Second, in terms of deterrence, the demonstrated sensitivity of the North to information tools may offer an option for deterring and punishing cyber

and related attacks—a salient finding for those in the South and elsewhere facing North Korean cyber and information campaigns.

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## **In Search of Diaspora Connections: North Korea's Policy towards Korean Americans, 1973-1979\***

**Kelly Un Kyong Hur**

Since the 1950s, North Korea considered the “overseas compatriot” or *haeoe dongpo*\*\* issue an important policy agenda under the perception that they could provide political and ideological support and legitimacy for the regime. From the early 1970s, North Korea began to expand the diaspora policy that went beyond the Koreans in Japan to the United States to promote a “worldwide movement of overseas compatriots.” Concomitantly, North Korea launched a public diplomacy campaign toward the U.S. to gain American public support for its political and diplomatic agendas during this period. This public diplomacy towards Americans intersected with the development of a policy towards Koreans residing in the United States.

This study explores the development of North Korean policy towards Korean Americans that began to evolve in the 1970s. The historical background behind the evolution of this policy as well as specific policy objectives and strategies are depicted. Ultimately, this policy was focused on engaging with Korean Americans who could act as a link between the two countries with the aspiration that they convey North Korea's policies to the United States, improve its international image and increase global support for Korean reunification on North Korean terms. I argue that the efforts in the 1970s laid the groundwork that contributed to a formulation of a more tangible policy starting in the late 1980s and early 1990s that included hosting family reunions, group tours to North Korea, cultural and religious exchanges and promoting the establishment of pro-North Korea associations in the United States.

**Keywords:** North Korea, Korean Americans, Korean diaspora, public diplomacy, U.S.-DPRK relations

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\* This article is based on the author's doctoral dissertation, “Bukhanui Jaemidongpo Jeongchaek Yeongu: 1973-1994 [North Korea's Policy toward the Korean Diaspora in the United States: 1973-1994]” (Ph.D. dissertation, University of North Korean Studies, 2016).

\*\* Note on transliteration: The Romanization of Korean words and names in this article is based on the Revised Romanization of Korean (RR), released by the ROK Ministry of Culture and Tourism in July 2000.

## I. Introduction

Since the 1950s, North Korea considered the “overseas compatriot” or *haeoe dongpo*<sup>1</sup> issue an important policy agenda as it was pertinent to its domestic, foreign and inter-Korean policies. The Korean community abroad was perceived valuable in terms of influencing foreign relations with the resident country as well as inter-Korean relations, as these communities maintained a connection to the homeland—both South and North Korea for some—and domestic policy with a perception that they could provide political, ideological and economic support and legitimacy for the regime. In particular, North Korea began to pay special attention to Koreans residing in the United States, as North Korea began to explore ways to mend relations with the United States from the 1970s. This was in line with the public diplomacy campaign that targeted the American public to support the North Korean political and diplomatic agenda.<sup>2</sup>

North Korea’s diaspora<sup>3</sup> policy is multilayered. It is a policy towards overseas Koreans as well as a combination of strategies designed to create a global network of supporters for its unification policy as well as foreign, domestic and economic policies. Currently, the Korean diaspora is dispersed into four major areas including the United States, Japan, China, and the Commonwealth of Independent States

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1. *Haeoe dongpo* literally in Korean means overseas compatriot, brethren or people of the same ancestry derived from the Chinese character 同 “dong” and 胞 “po” where *dong* means “same” while *po* means the “womb.” Hence, literal translation of *haeoe dongpo* is brothers from the same womb from overseas. In South Korea, *jaewae dongpo* is more commonly used as seen in the Overseas Koreans Foundation (*Jaewae Dongpo Jaedan*) with the emphasis placed on *jaewae* for residing outside of the homeland.
  2. Ralph N. Clough, “North Korea and the United States,” in *The Foreign Relations of North Korea: New Perspective*, eds. Jae Kyu Park, Byung Chul Koh and Tae-hwan Kwak (Boulder: Westview, 1987), pp. 260-269.
  3. Diaspora in a contemporary sense refers to a dispersion of people from their homeland to another country or foreign land. In this article, I refer to Koreans living abroad as overseas Koreans, overseas compatriot and Korean diaspora interchangeably.



(CIS). North Korea has had a diaspora policy<sup>4</sup> since the 1950s. For the first two decades, this policy was limited to Koreans in Japan; however, starting in the early 1970s, North Korea began to expand the policy to include Koreans living in the United States. North Korea considered Koreans in America as an invaluable resource and agent to build a friendlier relationship with the United States that could act as a liaison between North Korea and the United States as well as South Korea, as a group with potential impact across both Koreas. Without a formal diplomatic relationship with the United States, North Korea needed to explore other channels of communication and access to the United States. Korean Americans that spoke both languages with shared ethnic and cultural connections represented an attractive solution. The 1970s were an exploration of such options.

The literature on North Korea's policy towards the Korean diaspora is limited in scope and number. Earlier literature focused on North Korea's policy towards Koreans in Japan and the pro-North Korea organization, the General Association of Korean Residents in Japan (also known as *Chosen Soren* in Japanese, *Chochongryon* in Korean, hereinafter referred to as *Chongryon*).<sup>5</sup> In addition, a number of comparative studies examined the differences in policy between North and South Korea.<sup>6</sup>

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4. In recent years, diaspora scholarship uses the term diaspora policy more frequently than the terms such as overseas Korean policy or overseas Chinese policy. However, as North Korea translates the term *haeoe dongpo* policy as an "overseas compatriot movement," I will interchangeably use overseas Korean policy, overseas compatriot policy and diaspora policy.
  5. Samyeol Yoo, "Bukhanui Jaeilgyopo Jeongchaekgwa Jochongryeon [North Korea's Policy towards Koreans in Japan and Choongryon]" (Ph.D. dissertation, Sogang University, 1993); Hee-gwan Chin, "Jochongryeon Yeongu [A Study of General Association of Korean Residents in Japan (Chongryon)]" (Ph.D. dissertation, Dongguk University, 1998).
  6. Yong-chan Kim, "Nambukhanui Jaeoedongpo Jeongchaek [Overseas Korean Policy of South and North Korea]," *Minjok Yeongu*, vol. 5 (2000); In-jin Yoon, "Nambukhan Jaeoedongpo Jeongchaekui Bigyo [A Comparison of South and North Korean Policies of Overseas Koreans]," *Hanguk Sahoe [Journal of Social Research]*, vol. 6, no. 1 (2005); Young-gwang Kim, "Nambukhanui Jaeoegyomin Jeongchaek Daehan Bigyoyeongu [A Comparative Study of South and North Korea's Overseas Korean Policy]" (master's thesis, Hanyang University, 1980).

However, more recent studies since the 2000s began to take note of North Korea's expanded policy and compared North Korea's policy towards overseas Koreans in China, Japan, CIS and the United States.<sup>7</sup> These studies are meaningful in that they explicated the different strategies taken for each diaspora communities and revealed a policy expansion from a regional to global level; however, it takes a piecemeal approach and Korean American policy is often treated as a subsidiary policy in comparison to other regions like Japan. In addition, these studies are limited due to a lack of a clear depiction of when and why Korean American policy first appeared and how it has changed over the years in a systematic way. In addition, it also fails to provide an in-depth analysis on factors that attributed to the formation of such policy.

In addition to the literature on North Korean overseas Korean policy, North Korea's initial engagement with Korean Americans was also discussed scarcely in connection to North Korea's public diplomacy towards the United States in the 1970s.<sup>8</sup> These studies revealed that

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7. Hee-gwan Chin, "Bukhanui Jaeoedongpo Jeongchaek Yeongu: Jaejung Chongryeon, JaeCIS Dongpo, Jaeil Chongryeon Gurigo Jaemidongpo Jeongchaek Bigyo Yeongureul Jungsimeuro [North Korean Overseas Korean Policy: A Comparison of Policy towards Overseas Koreans in China, CIS, Japan, and the United States]," *Tongil Munjae Yeongu* [The Korean Journal of Unification Affairs], vol. 23, no. 1 (2011); Jin-wook Choi, *Nambukhan Jaeoedongpo Jeongchaekgwa Tongilgwajeongeseo Jaeoedongpoui Yeokhal* [Overseas Korean Policies of North and South Korea and the Role of the Overseas Koreans in the Unification Process] (Seoul: Korean Institute of National Unification, 2007); Jeong-nam Cho, Ho-yeol Yoo and Man-gil Han, *Bukhanui Jaeoedongpo Jeongchaek* [North Korea's Overseas Korean Policy] (Seoul: Jipmundang, 2002); Ki-man Son, "Bukhanui Jaeoedongpo Jeongchaekui Daehan Yeongu [A Study on North Korea's Overseas Korean Policy]" (master's thesis, University of North Korean Studies, 2001); Dong-su Koo, "Bukhanui Haeoedongpo Jeongchaek Yeongu [North Korea's Overseas Korean Policy]" (master's thesis, Korea University, 2000).

8. North Korea's public diplomacy with the U.S. during the 1970s can be traced to the involvement with the American-Korean Friendship Information Center (AKFIC), Communist Party of USA (CPUSA), and the Black Panther Party. See Brandon Gauthier, "The American-Korean Friendship and Information Center and North Korean Public Diplomacy, 1971-1976," *Yonsei Journal of International Studies*, vol. 5, no. 3 (2014), p. 147; Benjamin Young, "Juche in the United States: The Black Panther Party's Relations with North Korea, 1969-1971," *The Asia-*

North Korea's mollified attitude toward the U.S. targeted not only Americans but also Koreans that resided in the United States.<sup>9</sup> North Korea applied similar tactics of inviting influential Americans to Pyongyang to individuals such as Korean American professors, pastors, journalists and community leaders who were considered prominent from as early as 1971.<sup>10</sup> There are no records of such visits prior to 1971. Other tactics included promoting the creation of pro-North Korea organizations by Americans and Korean Americans as well as the dissemination of North Korean propaganda materials such as the *Selected Works of Kim Il Sung*, *Rodong Sinmun* and *Pyongyang Times* to U.S. institutions, selected Americans and Korean American organizations.<sup>11</sup>

However, most scholars describe North Korea's newly sparked interest in Korean Americans during the 1970s only in terms of North Korea's public diplomacy towards the United States and do not elaborate on specific goals and strategies behind the outreach to the Korean community in the U.S. These studies have overlooked the fact that such tactics were also a part of North Korea's larger overseas Korean policy. I argue that North Korea's approach towards the Korean Americans in the 1970s encompasses both North Korea's public diplomacy towards the United States and as well as North Korea's expansion of its overseas Korean policy to the United States.

This study provides a deeper narrative of North Korea's policy towards Korean Americans. When did they first reach out to Korean

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*Pacific Journal*, vol. 13, issue 12, no. 2 (March 30, 2015); Cha-jun Kim, "1970 Nyeondae Jeonbangi Bukhanui Daemi Jeopgeun [North Korean Approach to the United States in the Early 1970s: Focus on Activities of the American-Korean Friendship Information Center (AKFIC)]," *Hyeondae Bukhan Yeongu [Review of North Korean Studies]*, vol. 20, no. 2 (2017), p. 137.

9. Jae Kyu Park, "Bukhanui Daemiguk Jeongchaek [North Korea's U.S. Policy]," in *Bukhan Oegyoron [North Korean Foreign Policy]*, eds. Byung Chul Koh, Se Jin Kim, and Jae Kyu Park (Seoul: Kyungnam University Press, 1977), pp. 123-124.

10. Myong Joon Roe, "North Korea's Diplomacy toward the United States and Japan," *Korea Observer*, vol. 10, No. 2 (1979), p. 151.

11. *Ibid.*, p. 151; Tae Tong Chong, "Midaetongryeong Seongeowa Bukgoeui Daenamjeonryak [American Presidential Election and North Korea's Strategy toward South Korea]," *Bukhan [North Korea]*, no.54 (1976), p. 227.

Americans and for what reasons? What were their goals and objectives? What tactics were used? What factors attributed to the formation of such a policy towards Korean Americans? By analyzing North Korea's official and public documents as well as personal and official documents from South Korea and the United States, I explain that initial efforts in the 1970s served as an exploratory stage to build a concrete policy in the 1980s and 1990s.

This historical analysis of North Korea's Korean American policy in the 1970s can provide a new perspective on understanding inter-Korean relations and inter-Korean competition towards the overseas Korean community as well as North Korea and U.S. relations in terms of Pyongyang's diversified efforts to engage with Washington during the 1970s. In addition, this study can serve as a preliminary study for enhancing the understanding of North Korea's diaspora policy and diaspora relations in a multidimensional perspective. North Korea's global aspirations from the 1970s were objectified in various ways. The exploration of new diaspora connections around the world was pursued as an effort to build a global support base for its unification and economic policies that could also act as a channel of communication to improve relations with the resident country of the diaspora.

## II. Historical Overview of North Korea's Overseas Korean Policy

### *Overseas Korean Policy: From Inception to the 1960s*

North Korean diaspora policy or policy towards Koreans living abroad is referred to as the "movement of overseas compatriots" (or *haeoe gyopo undong*).<sup>12</sup> North Korea describes the overseas compatriot issue as a "special component of our nation's problem which was created by imperialists that invaded the weak nation-state...and forced

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12. North Korea does not use the term policy. Instead it uses the word *undong* that means movement. The Encyclopedia Publishers, *Joseonmal Daesajeon [The Great Korean Encyclopedia, 24]* (Pyongyang: Encyclopedia Publishers, 2001), p. 643.

overseas migration that imposed unspeakable and brutal political repression and economic plunder.”<sup>13</sup> North Korea attributes the onset of the Korean diaspora problem to the invasion by imperialists and colonial rule that forced overseas migration and oblige the overseas compatriots to work for the “revolutionary feats for the country.”<sup>14</sup> In essence, this movement started with the creation of *Chongryon* in May 25, 1955.<sup>15</sup> Therefore, North Korea’s policy towards Koreans in Japan focused on mobilizing all Koreans under *Chongryon*. The main objective was to provide protection as North Korean citizens,<sup>16</sup> advocate national rights, provide educational support, and “repatriate” Koreans in Japan to the homeland (North Korea) and in return demand “patriotic acts” from the overseas Koreans to support North Korea’s national unification policy, anti-South Korean movements, and an overall pledge to support the regime.<sup>17</sup>

The three overarching goals of North Korea’s overseas Korean policy are: provide national rights as North Korean citizens, contribute to the state development, and participate in the national reunification movement.<sup>18</sup> The details of the strategies are outlined as follows.

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13. Workers’ Party of Korea Publishing House, *Widaehan Suryeong Kim Il Sung Dongjiui Bulmyeolui Hyeokmyeongupjeok 18: Haeogyopo Munjaeui Bitnaneun Haegyol [Immortal Revolutionary Achievement of the Great Leader Kim Il Sung 18: A Brilliant Solution to Overseas Korean Issues]* (Pyongyang: Pyongyang General Printing Factory, 1999), p. 16.

14. *Ibid.*, p. 16.

15. In-jin Yoon, “Nambukhan Jaeodongpo Jeongchaekui Bigyo [A Comparison of South and North Korean Policies of Overseas Koreans],” *Hanguk Sahoe [Journal of Social Research]*, vol. 6, no. 1 (2005), p. 38.

16. This is the most prominent difference between Korean diaspora in Japan with other countries. Most Koreans abroad eventually took the citizenship of the host country; however, many resident Koreans in Japan did not, and if they did not take South Korean citizenship, they were considered *chosenseki* or *joseonjeok* which was basically a stateless status as Japan does not recognize North Korea as a state.

17. *Ibid.*, p. 38.

18. Son, “A Study on North Korea’s Overseas Korean Policy,” p. 34.

Table 1: North Korea's Major Goals and Strategies towards Overseas Koreans

Policy Goals	Strategies
National rights as North Korean citizens	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Education Support</li> <li>- Visit fatherland campaigns</li> <li>- Repatriation to fatherland</li> <li>- Citizenship granted to those that move to North Korea</li> </ul>
Contribution to state development	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Utilize the achievements and capabilities of overseas compatriots</li> <li>- Support the fatherland in all means</li> <li>- Encourage investment by overseas compatriots</li> <li>- Incorporate overseas compatriot to strengthen diplomacy towards the West</li> </ul>
Promotion of the National reunification movement	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Support Anti-U.S., Anti-ROK government activities</li> <li>- Promote dialogues on reunification and exchanges between overseas compatriots</li> <li>- Form organizations and associations to support the fatherland</li> <li>- Strengthen international solidarity among compatriot organizations and international supporters</li> </ul>

Source: Ki-man Son, "A Study on North Korea's Overseas Korean Policy," p. 34.

### ***Global Expansion of Overseas Korean Policy: 1970s to 1990s***

North Korea's policy towards overseas Koreans which was exclusive to the Korean diaspora in Japan from 1950 to 1960s began to expand to the West including the United States and Europe in the 1970s. This eventually expanded to the former Soviet Union and China from the early 1990s after the collapse of the Soviet Union. This expansion of North Korea's overseas Korean policy can be divided into four major periods: 1) The 1950s that focused on creating the *Chongryon*, 2) The 1960s where policy was focused on solidifying and strengthening *Chongryon*, 3) The 1970-1980s expansion of policy to the United States and Europe, and 4) The 1990s onwards in a global expansion of the policy to include the diaspora in the former Soviet Union and China.<sup>19</sup>

From 1970s, North Korea newly identified the overseas compatriot

19. Kelly Hur, "Bukhanui Jaemidongpo Jeongchaek Yeongu: 1973-1994 [North Korea's Policy toward the Korean Diaspora in the United States: 1973-1994]" (Ph.D. dissertation, University of North Korean Studies, 2016), p. 45.

issue in the United States and Europe as a problem “engendered by the Japanese imperialists and colonialism along with reactionary “immigration” and “labor export” policies of the South Korean puppet faction under the influence of the U.S. imperialists.”<sup>20</sup> As for the goals of the overseas compatriot movement, Kim Il Sung obliged the overseas Korean community to: 1) embrace the patriotism of unification, 2) unite under the great national unity under the banner of national reunification, and 3) organize liberal overseas compatriot organizations with the goal of national unification.<sup>21</sup> This depiction of the overseas compatriot movement as stated by Kim Il Sung overzealously emphasized national unification; however, a key policy agenda is the creation of “liberal overseas compatriot organization” like *Chongryon* to also form in the U.S. and Europe domestically, but also for these organizations to unite internationally.

In essence, North Korea’s expansion of diaspora policy was necessary to create a global network under the banner of “great national unity” and “enhance international support and solidarity”<sup>22</sup> to revolutionize South Korea and achieve reunification under North Korean terms as well as gain the upper hand in inter-Korean competition. With the goals of increasing international support and solidarity for its unification policy, North Korea needed as many diaspora connections as possible and reaching out to Koreans in the U.S.—where North Korea had no diplomatic relations—was vital for resetting tactics towards the United States in the 1970s. The next section examines the factors that influenced this change.

### **III. Influencing Policy Change: External, Internal and Diaspora Factors**

The climate of international politics was in a state of rapid change in

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20. Workers’ Party of Korea Publishing House, *A Brilliant Solution to Overseas Korean Issues*, p. 327.

21. *Ibid.*, p. 329.

22. *Ibid.*, p. 329.

the early 1970s and North Korea's cold war hostilities towards the United States also began to ease. This was a period of détente between the United States and China after President Nixon's visit to China. North Korea attempted a new diplomatic offensive toward the United States and launched various public diplomacy campaigns that separated its policy towards the American government from the American people. This is evident from Kim Il Sung's interviews with two American journalists, Harrison Salisbury from *the New York Times* and Selig Harrison from *the Washington Post* who were invited to Pyongyang in 1972; the North Korean leader repeatedly emphasized, "we oppose the reactionary policies of the U.S. government but we do not oppose the American people. We want to have many good friends in the United States."<sup>23</sup> From the early 1970s, this change in tactics and North Korea's new peace offensive extended to approaching liberal Americans.<sup>24</sup> In line with this tactic towards Americans, Korean Americans were also utilized as a part of this public diplomacy and a targeted contact point for a group that North Korea could use to deliver various messages from the regime to American and Korean American communities.

North Korea also joined the U.N. system in 1973. After joining the World Health Organization (WHO) and Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU) in May 1973, North Korea opened U.N. permanent observer missions in Geneva and New York. The doors of its New York office opened on September 5, 1973.<sup>25</sup> There is no coincidence in that North

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23. Kim Il Sung, "Talk with Journalists of the U.S. Newspaper, *New York Times*, May 26, 1972," in *For the Independent Peaceful Reunification of Korea* (New York: International Publishers, 1975), p. 172; Kim Il Sung, "Talk to a Journalist of the U.S. Newspaper *Washington Post*, June 21, 1972," *Kim Il Sung Works*, vol. 27 (1986), p. 271.

24. Before 1970, delegation of the Communist Party of U.S. (CPUSA) and the Black Panther Party are reported to have visited Pyongyang. The U.S. communist party (CPUSA) was reported to have visited Pyongyang on August 20, 1969 (*Rodong Sinmun*, August 21, 1969). However, the U.S. sent delegations illegally to Pyongyang from 1968. See Brandon Gauthier, "The American-Korean Friendship and Information Center and North Korean Public Diplomacy, 1971-1976," *Yonsei Journal of International Studies*, vol. 5, no. 3 (2014), p.151.

25. *Rodong Sinmun*, September 13, 1973.



Korea's policy towards Korean Americans appeared in the same year. The presence of a North Korean delegation on the American soil had provided direct access to American and Korean American communities. This favorable condition permitted North Korea to engage the overseas Korean community in the U.S. and establish American connections. Also, the dissemination of North Korean propaganda materials and promotion of North Korea's policy agendas were made possible from this point forward.<sup>26</sup>

Internally, North Korea also began to report the activities of Korean American organizations in the *Rodong Sinmun* and the *Korean Central Yearbook* as separate from Koreans in Japan. Before 1973, North Korea's reference to Korean Americans was non-existent. However, from July 1973, North Korea began to separate *Chongryon* from Koreans in the United States and report various political protests, rallies, and petitions, appeals and statements made by Korean American organizations.<sup>27</sup> Such news appeared in the form of articles and editorials that cited Korean American newspapers from Los Angeles, New York and Washington, D.C.—*Sinhan Minbo*, *Haeoe Hanminbo* and *Hanmin Sinbo* were three major Korean American newspapers quoted in the *Rodong Sinmun*.<sup>28</sup> The *Rodong Sinmun* featured stories of Korean American organizations that condemned the South Korean government and

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26. This has alarmed the South Korean government and they responded by tracking North's activities as well as by launching propaganda activities of their own. The U.S. House of Representatives, *Investigation of Korean American Relations: Report of the Subcommittee on International Organizations of the Committee on International Relations, U.S. House of Representatives* (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, October 31, 1978), p. 43.

27. In *Rodong Sinmun*, the first article on Koreans from the United States was mentioned from May 1973. From 1973 to 1979, over 128 articles appeared in news that dealt with the political activities of Korean Americans in the U.S.

28. *The New Korea (Sinhan Minbo)* was started in 1909 but it was taken over by Kim Un Ha in 1974 and published as a monthly publication, with its office located in Los Angeles. The *Overseas Korean Journal (Haeoe Hanminbo)* was started in New York City and operated from 1973 to 1985. *Hanmin Sinbo* was started in Washington D.C. and operated from 1970 to 1984. *Hangukminjok Munhwa Daebaekgwaja Sajeon [Encyclopedia of Korean Culture]*, <<http://encykorea.aks.ac.kr/>> (date accessed October 9, 2018).

expressed support for an anti-military government, anti-dictatorship, and pro-democracy movement in South Korea. For example, Korean American community's political activities that criticized the Park Chung Hee's Yushin regime<sup>29</sup> and protests for the withdrawal of U.S. troops in South Korea<sup>30</sup> frequently appeared in the *Rodong Sinmun*.

The *Rodong Sinmun* is targeted for the domestic audience. This new tactic also had a domestic agenda to propagate to the domestic audience that there was international support for the North Korean government and unification movement even in the United States. In addition, it served as a platform for the North Korean regime to encourage the overseas Korean communities for propagation as well as of legitimization and validation for the overseas Korean organizations. Table 2 demonstrates that 128 of the 136 (94 percent) *Rodong Sinmun* articles on Korean Americans were political in nature.

Table 2: Reference to Korean Americans in the *Rodong Sinmun* by subject from 1973-1979

Subject	Number of Articles
Political	128 (94%)
Social/cultural	8 (6%)
Economic	0
Total	136

There was also the diaspora factor. The 1970s saw significant growth in Korean immigration to the U.S. after the U.S. Immigration Act of 1965 that lifted immigration restrictions from Asia. Consequently, Korean immigration to the U.S. skyrocketed from 39,000 in 1970 to 290,000 by 1980.<sup>31</sup> This growth in the size of the Korean community in the U.S. in

29. *Rodong Sinmun*, July 31, 1973; January 9, 1974; February 12, 1975; May 7, 1977; May 11, 1977; June 16, 1977; August 17, 1977; February 12, 1978; September 26, 1978; September 29, 1978; August 28, 1979; December 6, 1978.

30. *Rodong Sinmun*, August 2, 1973; March 11, 1976; February 12, 1977.

31. Jie Zong and Jeanne Batalova, "Korean Immigrants in the United States," *Migration Policy Institute*, February 8, 2017, <<https://www.migrationpolicy.org/>

combination with Pyongyang's peace offensive towards Washington in the 1970s is likely to have played a significant role in North Korea's new perception of Korean Americans as an attractive and influential diaspora force to be utilized for foreign and domestic policies.

Korean Americans who spoke both languages and shared the cultural and historical connections were uniquely advantageous. In addition, most of the Koreans during this period were first generation that remained keen to the political situation of their homeland—Korean Peninsula—than the U.S. domestic politics. These characteristics were favorable for North Korea to push and establish political and ideological ties with “liberal” Korean American organizations and promote the creation of organizations that were sympathetic to North Korea's perspectives and agendas. Without a formal diplomatic relations with the United States, building an unofficial channel of communication to deliver its message to the U.S. was imperative.

#### **IV. North Korea's Strategies towards Korean Americans (1973-1979)**

##### ***Influencing the Influential Koreans (1973-1978)***

One of the first tactics that North Korea used for public diplomacy towards the U.S. was inviting Americans to Pyongyang. This same tactic was also used for Korean Americans. However, the invitation of Korean Americans to North Korea can be divided into before and after 1977. Before 1977, the United States had restricted travel to North Korea, as well as Cuba, Vietnam and Cambodia.<sup>32</sup> U.S. citizens faced a travel ban

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article/korean-immigrants-united-states/> (date accessed October 1, 2018).

32. Travel ban to communist countries, Cuba, Vietnam, Cambodia and North Korea was lifted by the Carter administration in March 1977. Lee Lescaze, “US Lifting Travel Bars,” *Washington Post*, March 9, 1977, <[https://www.washingtonpost.com/archive/politics/1977/03/09/us-lifting-travel-bars/ade5f7f5-59be-4c26-916a-b81b34421707/?noredirect=on&utm\\_term=.a116dc0fafbe](https://www.washingtonpost.com/archive/politics/1977/03/09/us-lifting-travel-bars/ade5f7f5-59be-4c26-916a-b81b34421707/?noredirect=on&utm_term=.a116dc0fafbe)> (date accessed November 1, 2017).

to North Korea after the Korean War with exceptions made for journalists, members of the U.S. Congress, scholars, public health officials, athletes and humanitarian workers.<sup>33</sup> The Carter administration stressed that the decision in March 1977 to lift the travel ban to North Korea did not mean a change in U.S. policy toward North Korea; however, the South Korean government remained sensitive and did all it could to deter Korean Americans from visiting North Korea.<sup>34</sup> However, North Korea started to publicly and actively invite Korean Americans to North Korea through legitimate contact points since this law was lifted.

North Korea has invited Korean Americans in similar number to Americans, but they did not disclose visitation records in the 1970s. Visits to North Korea were made known only after returning to the United States, or revealed years later. Not everyone who went to North Korea returned as a North Korea sympathizer. An example is Dr. Andrew Nam (Korean name, Changwoo Nam), professor at the University of Michigan who confessed to the South Korean public in 1976 that he was conned into going to Pyongyang in 1974.<sup>35</sup> His confession revealed some key strategies behind North Korea's invitation campaign towards Korean Americans. He confessed that North Korean authorities asked him to widely disseminate North Korean reunification plans to the Korean American community and Americans as well as to a wider American public vis-à-vis seminars and conferences.<sup>36</sup> Nam acknowledged that prominent Korean Americans were invited to

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33. *Ibid.*

34. Diplomatic Archives of Republic of Korea, "United States Lifting the Travel Ban to North Korea," 725.1 US, Roll 2007-23, File 17, Frames 1-229. According to this document, in response to U.S. travel ban lift, the South Korean government established four policies including: 1) Prevent North Korea's contact with Koreans with U.S. citizenship, 2) Observe if U.S. policy towards North Korea changes, 3) Exert diplomatic efforts to prevent other countries' North Korea policy that supported the travel ban lift, and 4) Continual requests to extend the travel ban to North Korea.

35. "Korean American Professor Andrew Nam Reveals His Visit to North Korea," *Dong A Ilbo*, June 9, 1976, p. 7.

36. *Ibid.*, p. 7.

Pyongyang for a week or two, stayed at a luxurious guesthouse like the Moranbong Guesthouse and offered cash gifts in some cases<sup>37</sup> in exchange for agreeing to disseminate North Korea's unification policy and as well as relay a message to the U.S. authorities on their aspiration to sign a bilateral peace treaty with the United States.

Most Korean Americans invited by North Korea were contacted individually. In addition, the majority of the invitees were considered influential in the Korean American community. Most of them were university professors, pastors, and former politicians from South Korea. During this period, Byung Chul Koh visited Pyongyang twice in 1971 and 1972,<sup>38</sup> and Professor Kim Young-jin of George Washington University met with North Korean officials and scholars in the summer of 1973 and 1974<sup>39</sup>; Professor Cho Young-hwan of University of Arizona and Professor Dae-Sook Suh of the University of Hawaii were allowed to visit in 1974.<sup>40</sup> Some of those that visited North Korea in the 1970s detailed their visits to Pyongyang in their memoirs and autobiographies.<sup>41</sup> In the case of Choi Duk Shin, North Korea also revealed that Choi Duk Shin visited North Korea for the first time in 1978 by publishing his conversation with Kim Il Sung years later. However, three years later in

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37. Andrew Nam also disclosed North Korea's bribery attempt to him where he was offered an envelope with \$10,000. He confessed that he did not accept the bribe. "Korean American Professor Andrew Nam Reveals His Visit to North Korea," *Dong A Ilbo*, June 9, 1976, p. 7.

38. Korean Central News Agency, *Joseon Jungang Yeongam* [Korean Central Yearbook] (Pyongyang: Korean Central News Agency, 1973); "Korean American Meets Kim Il Sung and Reveals North Korea's Scheme to Attack the South in the Latter Half of 1975," *Kyunghyang Shinmun*, June 3, 1972, p. 1; "An Interview with Ko Byung Chul Who Turned to Kim Il Sung Critic from Pro-Kim Il Sung," *Dong A Ilbo*, October 1, 1974, p. 3.

39. "1974 Security Order of Korean Peninsula," *Kyunghyang Shinmun*, January 1, 1974, p. 5.

40. Park, "North Korea's U.S. Policy," p. 124.

41. Lim Chang-yong, Kwang Wook Rowe, Changboh Chee, Harold Hakwon Sunoo and Rev. Lee Seung-man later revealed their trips in their personal memoirs or publications. Kwang Wook Rowe, "Nau'i Pyeongyanghaenggwa Migukeseo Bon Jeongsanghoedam [My Trip to Pyongyang and Inter-Korean Summit Seen from the U.S.]," *Yeoksa Bipyong* [Critical Review of History], no. 52 (2000), pp. 17-24.

1981, his visit to Pyongyang received a public welcome and ceremony, which demonstrate that North Korea's policy change towards Korean American visits became public and official from the 1980s.<sup>42</sup>

North Korea targeted Korean Americans whose hometown was or had families remaining in North Korea. In addition, North Korea was very selective in deciding who to invite. American visits to the country were widely advertised domestically; however, North Korea was careful about disclosing Korean American visitors.<sup>43</sup> It is also meaningful that there is a clear distinction between foreign visitors to North Korea versus "overseas compatriot" visitors to the country.<sup>44</sup> Korean compatriots are invited and managed by a separate agency which is both a party and cabinet institution. The Korean Committee for Aiding Overseas Compatriots (*haeoe dongpo wonho wiwonhoe*)<sup>45</sup> is under the Workers' Party of Korea's United Front Department that oversees the entire overseas Korean policy and is responsible for: handling travel visas, contacting/recruiting overseas Koreans, organizing family reunions between Korean Americans with families in the North, and issuing various statements on overseas Korean issues. This organization oversaw the entire policy involving overseas activities. However, the Bureau of Reception of Overseas Compatriots (*haeoe dongpo yongjopkuk*, formerly known as *kyopo saup chongguk*) and Agency of Overseas Korean

42. Kim Il Sung, "Jaemigyopo Choe Deok Singwa Han Damhwa [Talk with Choi Duk Shin, Korean from the United States, November 18, 1978]" (Pyongyang: Workers' Party of Korea Publishers, 2000). However, Choi Duk Shin's visit to Pyongyang on June 23, 1981 was widely reported with his Pyongyang Arrival Declaration printed across page 3 and 4 of the *Rodong Sinmun*. *Rodong Sinmun*, June 23, 1981.

43. However, from 1980, North Korea began to publish the names and pictures of Korean American visitors to North Korea in the *Rodong Sinmun*.

44. Charles Armstrong, *The Koreas* (New York: Routledge, 2014), p. 72.

45. It is unclear when the Korean Committee for Aiding Overseas Compatriots (*haeoe dongpo wonho wiwonhoe*) was first established. However, this organization was first mentioned on April 25, 1957 as the organization responsible for delivering educational funds and scholarships to the Central Educational Committee under the General Association of Korean Residents in Japan (Chongryon). "Educational Aid and Scholarship Was Sent for Children of Korean Residents in Japan," *Choson Minbo*, April 25, 1957.

Table 3: Korean Americans that Visited North Korea in the 1970s<sup>46</sup>

Date	Name of Visitor	Affiliation/Occupation	Purpose of Visit
1971, Aug. 1973	Kwang Wook Rowe	Dentist/Chairman for the Committee in the U.S. for Peaceful Unification of Korea	
Oct. 1971	Byung Chul Koh	Professor/ University of Illinois at Chicago	Meeting with Kim Il Sung
Apr. 12, 1972	Byung Chul Koh	Professor/ University of Illinois at Chicago	Meeting with Kim Il Sung
Apr. 15, 1972	Changboh Chee	Professor/Long Island University	
Jan. 1, 1974	Young Chin Kim	Professor/ George Washington University	
1974	Chang Young Lim	Professor and Chairman of <i>Miju Minju Kukmin Yeonhap</i>	
Mar. 1, 1974	Young-hwan Cho	Professor/University of Arizona	
Mar. 16, 1974	Changwoo Nam	Professor/University of Michigan	
Apr. 29, 1974	Dae-Sook Suh	Professor/University of Hawaii	
1975	Harold Hakwon Sunoo	Professor/Central Methodist College	
August 10, 1975	Young Jin Kim	George Washington University	Invitation
1978	Seung-man Lee	Reverend/ Presbyterian church	
1978	Duk Shin Choi	Former ROK foreign minister and ambassador to West Germany	
April 1979	Table tennis players, coaches, interpreters, journalist, and staff -In Sook Na (player) -Hye Ja Park (player) -Dal Joon Lee (coach) -Young Il Ko (interpreter)		35 <sup>th</sup> World Table Tennis Championship
April 1979	“Overseas Compatriot Visitors from the United States” -Hyong Sik Kim and Young Il Ko		35 <sup>th</sup> World Table Tennis Championship

Source: Diplomatic Archives of Republic of Korea, “Timeline of U.S.-ROK Relations 1968-1982,” 725.1 U.S., Roll 2012-0026, File 4, Frames 1-73; The Institute for East Asian Studies, *North Korean Handbook*, Seoul: The Institute for East Asian Studies, 1980, p. 236; Jae Kyu Park, “North Korea’s U.S. Policy,” in *North Korean Foreign Policy*, eds., Byung Chul Koh, Se Jin Kim, and Jae Kyu Park, Seoul: Kyungnam University Press, 1977, p. 124; *Rodong Sinmun*; *Dong A Ilbo*, and *Kyunghyang Shinmun*.

Affairs (*haeoe dongpo saupguk*) is a cabinet institution that handles the domestic duties and internal activities involving overseas Korean work.<sup>47</sup>

### ***The 35<sup>th</sup> World Table Tennis Championship in Pyongyang (1979)***

The 35<sup>th</sup> World Table Tennis Championship was held in Pyongyang from April 25 to May 6, 1979. This was the first international sports event held in North Korea that invited the U.S. team. In addition to American players, there were a handful of Korean American players, coaches, interpreters and journalists that participated in this event. This event is significant as the first international sports event in North Korea with American participation. It was also the first public invitation for Korean American group under the name, "Group Visitors from Koreans in the United States to the Fatherland" that was widely covered for several weeks in the *Rodong Sinmun*.<sup>48</sup> This was the first group of visitors from the United States that included ethnic Koreans who were either permanent residents or citizens of the U.S.

The American team and visiting group consisted of players, coaches, interpreters, journalists, and a homeland visiting group from the United States. Jeon Chung Rim, in his memoir, *Over the Hill of Time*, reminisced about his participation at the 1979 World Table Tennis Championship where he confessed that although he was there under the journalist status, his main purpose was reconnecting with his family in North Korea that he was separated for nearly three decades.<sup>49</sup> Na In-sook and Park Hye-ja attended as U.S. female players while Lee Dal-jun was a coach and Ko Young-il participated as an interpreter. The

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46. This table was created based on personal accounts and declassified diplomatic documents.

47. Kelly Hur, "North Korea's Policy toward the Korean Diaspora in the United States," p. 45.

48. *Rodong Sinmun*, April 26, 1979; Diplomatic Archives of Republic of Korea, "Timeline of U.S.-ROK Relations 1968-1982," 725.1 US, Roll 2012-0026, File 4, Frames 1-73.

49. Chung Rim Jeon, *Saewolui Eondeok Wieseo [Over the Hill of Time]* (Seoul: Hankyoreh Newspaper, 1996).



group was taken to major tourist attractions and met with various North Korean authorities from various party organizations.<sup>50</sup> Furthermore, during their visit, North Korea held a public rally<sup>51</sup> and a banquet at the People's Cultural Palace in Pyongyang, to launch a widely propagated public welcome for the group.<sup>52</sup>

The details of the family reunion of Ko Young-il deserve special attention. As mentioned above, Ko attended as an interpreter, but his main objective for the trip was to reunite with his family in North Korea.<sup>53</sup> For North Korea, this served as a good opportunity to propagate the event to the North Korean domestic audience as a victory that Koreans from the U.S. were visiting the homeland as a group specially formed "to achieve reunification of the fatherland."<sup>54</sup>

The 35<sup>th</sup> World Table Tennis Championships in 1979 can be regarded as a turning point for North Korea's policy towards the Korean Americans. After this event in 1979, North Korea began to openly recruit "homeland group visits" for the purpose of organizing reunions for separated families and homeland tours for Koreans residing in North America from 1980. Between 1970 and 1978, the average number of Korean American visitors to North Korea was about three, but after the

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50. "U.S. Team Interpreter Ko Young Il Visits North Korea with a Dream of Reuniting with His Family," *Dong A Ilbo*, April 10, 1979.

51. In the rally, there were the following officials that attended: Ho Jong Suk, General Director of the Central Committee of the Democratic Front for the Reunification of Fatherland; Hong Ki Moon, Chairman of the Committee for the Peaceful Reunification of the Fatherland; Kim Sok Jun, Vice Chairman of the Central Committee of the Democratic Party of Korea; Kim Chol Min, Vice Chairman of the Central Committee of the Chondoist Chongu Party; Kim Song Ryul, Vice Chairman of the Central Committee of the Korean Christian Federation; Han Byong Hwa, General Director of the General Bureau of Overseas Compatriots; Pak Tae Ho, Chairman of the Central Committee of the Korean Buddhist Federation; and Wang Kyong Hak, Vice Chairman of the Administrative Committee of the Pyongyang City Council. "There Was a Rally that Welcomed the Visiting Delegation of Overseas Koreans from America," *Rodong Sinmun*, May 6, 1979, p. 5.

52. *Rodong Sinmun*, April 26, 1979; May 5, 1979; May 20, 1979.

53. *Rodong Sinmun*, April 29, 1979 and May 6, 1979.

54. *Rodong Sinmun*, May 6, 1979.

World Table Tennis Championship in 1979, this number grew to about 17 and displayed a steady upward trend in the 1980s. The disclosure of these visits is also worth noting. Before 1978, North Korea did not divulge information on Korean American visitors. However, from 1980, North Korea began to publicly announce and promote visits by Korean Americans to North Korea. The invitation was also opened to a wider group of people, where in the early 1970s, only influential figures in the Korean community were invited. In addition, many of them were born in the North, meaning they had a familial connection in the North. According to the International Strategy and Reconciliation Foundation's survey conducted in 2007, the number of Korean Americans separated from families in the North is estimated to be over 100,000.<sup>55</sup> North Korea targeted these groups first as it was easier to reach out to a Korean American with a familial connection and make the invitation to Pyongyang less political and ideological under the veneer of family reunion. North Korea was cautious in promoting the visits to North Korea and did not accept everyone that applied for visits. However, 1979 was marked as the start of group visits for Korean Americans and launched a new period that began to widely report these visits in the *Rodong Sinmun* from 1980s to 1990s.

### ***Building a Pro-North Korea Association in the United States***

North Korea called the national unification movement a "South Korean revolution" and a "struggle of overseas Koreans" for the purpose of the "realization of the reunification of the country."<sup>56</sup> Thus, it is linked with anti-movements toward the U.S. and South Korean government. To do so, North Korea has instructed for the "establishment of overseas Korean organization" to carry out these revolutionary

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55. "There are 104,000 Korean Americans who have Separated Families in North Korea," *NK Chosun*, March, 23, 2007, <[http://news.chosun.com/site/data/html\\_dir/2015/06/17/2015061702346.html](http://news.chosun.com/site/data/html_dir/2015/06/17/2015061702346.html)> (date accessed on March 31, 2017).

56. Workers' Party of Korea Publishing House, *A Brilliant Solution to Overseas Korean Issues*, p.329.

struggles and fight for the national unification movement.<sup>57</sup> In the 1960s, there were anti-Rhee Syngman movements by Koreans in the U.S.; however, these did not develop at an organized level. However, in the 1970s, as the immigrant population grew along with Korean American communities across the United States, various political organizations and Korean newspaper companies also began to form around major U.S. cities.

Along with the growth in the number of Korean immigrants in the 1970s, the democratization and unification movement of the Korean American community became more prominent. North Korea took notice of this change and began to approach the progressive organizations that were critical of the South Korean government. North Korea also encouraged Korean Americans to form such organizations and to model them after the *Chongryon* and follow its examples.<sup>58</sup>

One of the first two organization formed in the U.S. was the Committee in the U.S. for the Promotion of Peaceful Unification of the Fatherland (*Joguk Pyeonghwa Tongil Jaemi Chokjin Wiwonhoe*) formed in June 1972.<sup>59</sup> North Korea acclaimed that this group was formed “under the special care of Comrade Kim Il Sung,” and contributed to the formation of other overseas Korean organizations in later years. The Committee in the U.S. for the Promotion of Peaceful Unification of the Fatherland was evaluated as the first Korean American organization that actively promoted the national peaceful reunification movement in the U.S.<sup>60</sup>

North Korea also took great interest in the creation of the “Korean Congress for Democracy and Reunification in North America” (*Hanguk Minju Hoebok Tongil Chokjin Kukmin Hoei* or *Hanmintong* for short) that formed in July 1973. The *Hanmintong* Japan branch later formed in Osaka on August 13, 1973.<sup>61</sup> This organization is significant in the sense

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57. *Ibid.*, p. 329.

58. *Ibid.*, p. 333.

59. *Ibid.*, p. 329.

60. *Ibid.*, p. 329.

61. *Ibid.*, p. 329; *Encyclopedia of Korean Culture*. <<http://encykorea.aks.ac.kr/>> (date accessed on October 9, 2018). There is a discrepancy in the order of formation.

that it was formed by former South Korean government officials and politicians that left South Korea during the May 16 military coup and took political asylum in the United States from the 1960s. Former President Kim Dae-jung who came to Washington, D.C. in 1971 served as the first chairman of *Hanmintong*. This marked the beginning of the democracy movement by Koreans in the United States. Furthermore, it is also significant that this was the first nationwide Korean American organization that formed with branches established around major U.S. cities with a large number of Korean American communities.<sup>62</sup> However, after Kim Dae-jung was abducted by South Korea's Korean Central Intelligence Agency in Japan, *Hanmintong* came to a deadlock. In 1977, the remnants of *Hanmintong* along with other small organizations combined to form the United Movement for Democracy in Korea (*Joguk Minjuhwa Yeonhap Undong*). People that served as chairman of this organization were Kim Sang Don (former Seoul Mayor), Kim Jae Jun, Cha Sang Dal, Guk Young Gil, Kim Un Ha, Hong Dong Geun, Eun Ho Gi, and Yang Eun Shik.<sup>63</sup> However, *Hanmintong* did not simply merge into the United Movement for Democracy in Korea but instead, fissured into two groups. If the United Movement for Democracy in Korea was considered "rightist" in the sense that it opposed both North and South Korean regimes as dictatorship and promoted democratization to precede unification, the Democratic National Union in North America (*Miju Minju Kukmin Yeonhap*) was considered "leftist" in that it advocated unification before democratization and demanded the withdrawal of U.S. troops from South Korea. *Miju Minju Kukmin Yeonhap* was formed as union of 15 different organizations led by Lim Chang

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While North Korea claims that the *Hanmintong* Japan Branch formed first, most South Korean literature reveals that the Washington, D.C. branch opened first in July 1973.

62. *Encyclopedia of Korean Culture*, <<http://encykorea.aks.ac.kr/>> (date accessed on October 9, 2018).

63. Jong Hwan Cha, Bong Su Lee, Sang Won Park, *Miju Dongpodeului Minjuhwa Mit Tongil Undong* [Democracy and Unification Movements of Overseas Koreans in the United States] (Seoul: Nasan Publishers, 2004), p. 31.

Young, Rowe Kwang Wook, and Chi Chang Bo.<sup>64</sup> With these two groups at the center, the Korean American society fissured into two different ideological groups with *Miju Minju Kukmin Yeonhap* and affiliated individuals earning the reputation as a pro-North Korea group in the United States. This was the beginning of ideological and political division of the Korean American community that further intensified in the 1980s with the expansion of the democracy movement in South Korea.

North Korea also took notice of this movement, and while it is not clear whether these organizations were formed under the direct orders of the North Korean regime, the individuals that headed the *Miju Minju Kukmin Yeonhap* were visitors to North Korea in the early 1970s (Table 2). It is a reasonable conjecture that these individuals were informed of North Korea's unification, South Korea and U.S. policies during their visits and well understood North Korea's agenda. These early visits to North Korea are likely to have influenced their views on unification and inter-Korean relations. The activities of these organizations were often reported through the mouth of Korean American newspapers, *Sinhan Minbo*, *Haeoe Hanminbo* and *Hanmin Sinbo* and cited in the *Rodong Sinmun* from 1973 to 1979.<sup>65</sup> North Korea also began to report these activities in the *Korean Central Yearbook* from 1974 under the heading "Actualization of Independent Peaceful Reunification of the Fatherland" and reported the unification movements of Koreans in the United States in isolation from Koreans in Japan and *Chongryon*.<sup>66</sup>

North Korea described this effort as the outcome of Kim Il Sung's order to achieve "national unity" and realize the Korean American's dream to achieve national reunification. This can be confirmed in this passage:

The great comrade Kim Il Sung announced the 3 principles of the

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64. *Ibid.*, p. 31.

65. Kelly Hur, "North Korea's Policy toward the Korean Diaspora in the United States," p. 96.

66. Korean Central News Agency, *Joseon Jungang Yeongam* [*Korean Central Yearbook*] (Pyongyang: Korean Central News Agency, 1975).

reunification of the country. In order to support and meet the esteemed intentions and demands of the patriotic unification of the overseas Koreans of this region (United States), it is crucial that we achieve national unity under the banner of national reunification. In addition, with the love of the country and the nation with strong desires for national reunification by the overseas compatriots in this region, I (Kim Il Sung) decided to establish progressive overseas Korean organizations.<sup>67</sup>

These efforts in the 1970s served as the foundation for North Korea to further develop its strategy to target Korean American organizations. Although *Miju Minju Kukmin Yeonhap* was considered a pro-North Korea organization, it denied this allegation. The first official pro-North Korea organization acknowledged by both North Korea and Korean Americans was the “National Reunification Association of North America” (*Joguk Tongil Bukmiju Hyeophoe* or *Tonghyup*), which was not established until 1986. This organization later contributed to the establishment of the Korean American National Coordination Council (KANCC) in January 1997, which earned the nickname of “Second *Chongryon*” in the United States that continues to operate to this day.

## V. Conclusion

North Korea’s policy towards Korean Americans evolved under the influence of a changing international environment and Pyongyang’s foreign and domestic policies in the 1970s as well as increased Korean immigration to the United States. While the formation of a pro-North Korea organization was difficult to achieve until the late 1980s, North Korea’s various strategies and tactics to engage with the Korean Americans in the 1970s played a crucial role.

After the cold war, North Korea’s policy towards Korean Americans was modified with changing regional and international political situations. North Korea’s engagement with Korean Americans was

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67. Workers’ Party of Korea Publishing House, *A Brilliant Solution to Overseas Korean Issues*, p.329.

highly political in the 1970s, but from the 1980s and the 1990s, North Korea subdued the political agenda and began to emphasize non-political and humanitarian issues. North Korea began to reduce its political color in order to reach out to a wider group of Korean Americans and focused on family reunion campaigns for separated families; organized group tours to North Korea as well as planned various sports, religious, and cultural exchanges between North Korea and the U.S. from the late 1980s. North Korea considered the capital, network, and expertise of Korean Americans an important resource; consequently, the goal to gain political and ideological support began to shift to a more pragmatic goal of promoting economic, social and humanitarian exchanges and cooperation by the late 1980s.

The policy goals and strategies implemented during the 1970s were critical in establishing the early relationship and the future direction between North Korea and the Korean American community. This contributed to a decade-long “Unification Dialogue” between North Korea and overseas Korean organizations in the 1980s and the creation of the Pan-National Alliance for Korean Reunification in the 1990s where Korean Americans also demonstrated initiatives to join and actively shape the direction of the North Korea’s “worldwide movement of overseas compatriots” in the United States.

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