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Exercice Solo Flight

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PRINCIPLED REALISM: A RADICAL CHANGE IN US FOREIGN POLICY?

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PRINCIPLED REALISM: A RADICAL CHANGE IN US FOREIGN POLICY?

Introduction

President Donald Trump was elected in 2016 by running on an “America first” platform that, while targeting a domestic audience, held implications for the entire international community. At the time, the message inferred by the American people was that America would act in its own interest on the world stage as well as demand more from its allies, though how these ideas would become manifest in a coherent foreign policy was not ultimately clear. Likewise, the mainstream press largely branded the proposed Trump administration foreign policy as wildly divergent from previous administrations’ efforts on the world stage. More clarity emerged in December of 2017 with the release of the administration’s National Security Strategy (NSS), which describes their foreign policy as one of “principled realism”. Though the term is not necessarily new, understanding its meaning in the context of the modern day United States is necessary when considering the Trump administration’s actions on the international stage. To date, the current administration’s foreign policy of principled realism represents only a small change of course in applied US foreign policy, but one that has garnered notable, if limited, results with respect to deescalating North Korean aggression.

Principled Realism Defined

In today’s digital age, it is difficult for one to deduce a coherent definition of US foreign policy without a comprehensive review of that policy. In order to understand the policy’s true nature, one must observe what the administration writes and speaks about the policy as well as the tangible actions they take as part of implementing the policy. For starters, we must recognize the fact that neither the word “principled” nor “realism” is necessarily new with respect to describing international relations. Indeed, the classic version of “realism” dates back many

centuries to the height of the Greek Empire and is even represented in the Treaties of Westphalia. Authors Tim Dunne and Brian Schmidt describe realism as “the most dominant theory in international relations”.¹ Furthermore, they highlight that realists focus on “maximizing interests of the state”, are skeptics of the idea that “universal moral principles exist”, and recognize that relative power between states is important at the international level.² In the context of the modern United States, realists who are also internationalists believe that the US should strive to be at the center of world finance and security power structures in order to advance US interests.³ The term “principled”, on the other hand is mostly regarded as a reference to a more values based world order known as “liberalism” which highlights human values and common political institutions (such as democracy) as centerpieces for the international order.⁴ In the context of the United States, internationalists believe that the US should lead the world and advance US interests by spreading its values of human rights, democracy, peace, and prosperity, most often through international organizations.⁵ With these traditional definitions in mind, a review of what the current administration has conveyed in print regarding principled realism is in order.

Principled Realism in Text

The term “principled realism” first appeared in an official US government document with the release of the 2017 National Security Strategy (NSS), which describes the strategy as being “guided by outcomes, not ideology”.⁶ In addition, the document describes the strategy in terms

¹ Dunne, Tim and Brian Schmidt. “The Globalization of World Politics”. Oxford University Press: 2011. Pg 85.

² Ibid, pg 86.

³ Mead, Walter Russell. “The Jacksonian Revolt: American Populism and the Liberal Order.” *Foreign Affairs* 96, no. 2 (Mar, 2017): 2-7. <https://search.proquest.com/docview/1888749591?accountid=9867>.

⁴ Smith, Steve, et al. “Foreign Policy: Theories, Actors, Cases.” Oxford University Press: 2012.

⁵ Mead, Walter Russell. “The Jacksonian Revolt: American Populism and the Liberal Order.” *Foreign Affairs* 96, no. 2 (Mar, 2017): 2-7. <https://search.proquest.com/docview/1888749591?accountid=9867>.

⁶ “2017 National Security Strategy of the United States”. <<https://www.whitehouse.gov/wp-content/uploads/2017/12/NSS-Final-12-18-2017-0905.pdf>>. Accessed 18 March 2019. Pg 1.

that would resonate with realists when it says that the policy is “based upon the view that peace, security, and prosperity depend on strong, sovereign nations that respect their citizens at home and cooperate to advance peace abroad.”⁷ Likewise, it invokes liberalism when it says the policy is “grounded in the realization that American principles [of life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness] are a lasting force for good in the world”.⁸ Broadly, the strategy aims to secure US interests through four efforts: 1) “protect the American people, the homeland, and the American way of life” 2) “promote American prosperity” 3) “preserve peace through strength” and 4) “advance American influence”.⁹ A broad understanding of principled realism based on the NSS alone is a foreign policy that, even if begrudgingly, engages the world through liberal international institutions, but that does so seeking to promote US national interests.

Notably, the NSS uses the phrase “America first” to describe the strategy seven times in contrast to using the phrase “principled realism” only twice.¹⁰ This serves as a temptation to many to interpret principled realism is a façade for what will ultimately be an isolationist approach. In keeping with this sentiment, main stream press coverage of the current administration’s foreign policy focuses on the “America first” aspect and for reasons that are outside the scope of this paper, tend to speculate that the current administration’s foreign policy will quickly digress into one of strict isolationism. Regarding this concern, Josef Joffe, professor of political science at Stanford University in a 2017 article cautions that even if President Trump desires to be an isolationist, “reality bites”.¹¹ Using the Korean Peninsula as an example, Joffe

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ “2017 National Security Strategy of the United States”. <<https://www.whitehouse.gov/wp-content/uploads/2017/12/NSS-Final-12-18-2017-0905.pdf>>. Accessed 18 March 2019. Pg 4.

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ Joffe, Josef. “Of Allies and Adversaries: Donald Trump’s Principled Realism”. *Strategika: Conflicts of the Past as Lessons for the Present*, no. 45 (09, 2017): 1-4. https://www.hoover.org/sites/default/files/issues/resources/strategika_45_web.pdf>. Accessed 18 March 2019.

highlights that as “North Korea stoked the fires of aggression, Trump tightened the alliance bonds with Japan and South Korea” and the US Military’s Terminal High Altitude Area Defense (THAAD) system “went to South Korea in May 2017 to signal to Pyongyang: The United States will defend Seoul against your missiles.”¹² An objective view of the NSS tends to leave the reader with a feeling that principled realism represents a balance between the realist and internationalist schools of thought. For this reason, it is also useful to examine what the current administration has said publicly about principled realism.

Principled Realism in Speech

Likely, the highest profile speech involving principled realism was that given by President Trump on 25 September 2018 at the UN General Assembly. Though popular media coverage of the speech has largely branded it an “America first stump speech,” an objective review of his message can provide some insight into the foreign policy itself.¹³ In the speech, he invokes the term directly when he says, “America’s policy of principled realism means we will not be held hostage to old dogmas, discredited ideologies, and so-called experts who have been proven wrong over the years, time and time again.”¹⁴ This is a rather bold comment that seems to signal that a large change is required in order to meet the United States’ interest. He goes on to state that “America is governed by Americans. We reject the ideology of globalism, and we embrace the doctrine of patriotism.”¹⁵ Similarly, he says “America will always act in our

¹² Ibid.

¹³ Wright, Robin. “Trump’s Speech at the UN Triggers Laughter - and Disbelief”. <<https://www.newyorker.com/news/news-desk/trumps-speech-at-the-un-triggers-laughterand-disbelief>>. Accessed 19 March 2019.

¹⁴ “Remarks by President Trump to the 73rd Session of the United Nations General Assembly, New York, NY”. <<https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefings-statements/remarks-president-trump-73rd-session-united-nations-general-assembly-new-york-ny/>>. Accessed 14 April 2018. Pg 6.

¹⁵ Ibid, 8.

national interest”.¹⁶ Standing alone, these comments appear to signal a strong realist tendency that may even border on isolationist, but more context is required.

As the speech progresses, the President adds more substance on specific topics, such as trade when he states “we believe that trade must be fair and reciprocal” and that the “the United States will not be taken advantage of any longer.”¹⁷ Continuing on the world economy, he highlights WTO violations by China that have resulted in a ballooning US trade deficit and claims “those days are over... we will no longer tolerate such abuse”.¹⁸ Next, combining both economic and security concerns, the President shifts his focus toward OPEC nations who, in his own words are “ripping off the rest of the world, and I don’t like it”.¹⁹ On that note, he comments, “we defend many of these nations for nothing, and they take advantage of us by giving us high oil prices... we want them to stop raising prices, we want them to start lowering prices, and they must contribute substantially to military protection from now on”.²⁰ Finally, with respect to the significance of international organizations, the President assailed the UN Human Rights Council when he said it has become an “embarrassment to this institution” as well as the International Criminal Court proclaiming that the US would provide no support to either organization until true reform is undertaken.²¹ These statements contain large implications for America and the world and require further consideration.

The President’s speech received a great deal of criticism with some commenting that it highlighted a “growing gap between the White House and the world” and others went so far as to

¹⁶ Ibid, 9.

¹⁷ Ibid, 6.

¹⁸ Ibid, 7.

¹⁹ Ibid, 9.

²⁰ Ibid, 8.

²¹ Ibid.

comment that it proved the President had become the “laughingstock of the world”.²² Again, an objective review is required to ascertain what this speech tells us about principled realism as a foreign policy in action. In the context of the speech, principled realism seems rooted in the idea that certain components of the current global order are no longer meeting US national interest. In order to fix this, the global trade system requires more reciprocity. The global energy system requires an overhaul, an action that will directly affect the global security apparatus. Finally, global institutions require modernization to increase their effectiveness and deal with perceived encroachment on national sovereignty. These monumental statements understandably worry traditional liberal internationalists. A fair estimate of principled realism as articulated in this speech is that it is more rooted in the realist tradition than that of the liberalist. For this reason, it is valuable to examine some of the tangible actions taken by the current presidential administration while implementing this approach to foreign policy.

Dueling Examples of US Foreign Policy in Action?

The lense of time provides the most objective context through which to analyze a presidential administration’s success or failure. Therefore, expectations should be tempered when analyzing a sitting presidential administration’s foreign policy, even one as salient as the application of “principled realism” toward the Democratic People’s Republic of North Korea (DPRK). To make up for a hindsight deficit, additional context is required, and may be reasonably achieved through comparing the current president’s approach to that of his predecessor, President Obama.

It comes as no surprise that the threat of a nuclear-armed North Korea is counter to US interests in the Indo-Pacific region and that of its allies. For this reason, numerous US

²² Wright, Robin. “Trump’s Speech at the U.N. Triggers Laughter - and Disbelief”. <<https://www.newyorker.com/news/news-desk/trumps-speech-at-the-un-triggers-laughterand-disbelief>>. Accessed 4 April 2019.

administrations have worked diligently to slow North Korea's progress toward developing these weapons with various approaches such as closer military ties with allies in the region, various economic sanctions, and a number of diplomatic efforts.²³ Despite these efforts, North Korea successfully tested its first nuclear device in its northern province of Hamgyong in October of 2006.²⁴ The DPRK went on to test 5 more weapons over the course of the next decade concluding with their latest test, a hydrogen bomb which produced their largest explosion yet, in September of 2017.²⁵ Though the United States has tended to view a nuclear-armed North Korea as a regional issue in the past, the advent of North Korean ballistic missile technology that can potentially reach the west coast of the United States has elevated the problem to one that is existential.

The DPRK first launched a ballistic missile in 1984. As its technology and capability grew, the DPRK tested many more missiles with both frequency and success rising sharply in the early 2000s. According to The Nuclear Threat Initiative, whose stated goal is to protect future generations from the effects of weapons of mass destruction, since 1984, the DPRK has launched 118 strategic ballistic missiles.²⁶ "Strategic missile" is defined as one that is "capable of delivering a payload of at least 500 kilograms (1102.31 pounds) a distance of at least 300 kilometers (186.4 miles)."²⁷ Historically, North Korea's strategic missiles are best described as theater ballistic missiles, or those that pose a threat to regional neighbors versus the rest of the world. This region, of course, is home to a number of vital US allies, including South Korea,

²³ Davenport, Kelsey. "Chronology of U.S.-North Korean Nuclear and Missile Diplomacy". <<https://www.armscontrol.org/factsheets/dprkchron>>. Accessed 6 April 2019.

²⁴ "A Timeline of North Korea's Nuclear Tests". <<https://www.cbsnews.com/news/north-koreas-nuclear-tests-timeline/>>. Accessed 17 April 2019.

²⁵ Ibid.

²⁶ "The CNS North Korea Missile Test Database". <<https://www.nti.org/analysis/articles/cns-north-korea-missile-test-database/>>. Accessed 7 April 2019.

²⁷ Ibid.

Japan, and Australia as well as being home to the Hawaiian Islands, and US territories such as Guam and the Marshall Islands. However, North Korea tested two new missiles in 2017, the Hwasong-14 and the Hwasong-15, both of which are thought to be true intercontinental ballistic missiles capable of striking North American targets.²⁸ The fact that this security priority spans multiple US administrations provides an opportunity to compare foreign policy approaches to North Korea.

President Obama took office in January 2009, which is just over two years after the DPRK tested its first nuclear weapon and at the time, had attempted 23 missile tests in its history. On 1 April, the DPRK elevated tensions by attempting a series of eight ballistic missile tests over the course of 2009, the most launches attempted in any single year at the time.²⁹ They also detonated their second and much more powerful nuclear weapon on 25 May, which reportedly caught the US and South Korea off guard.³⁰ Out of these chaotic beginning months of the Obama Presidency rose their foreign policy approach toward North Korea, which they branded as “strategic patience”.

Then Secretary of State Hillary Clinton described the policy as “strategic patience in close coordination with our six party allies,” which was based on the fundamental premise that “the US would not engage in negotiations with North Korea until the latter first shows the concrete evidence of committing to denuclearization.”³¹ The “Six Parties” was a multilateral negotiation forum introduced in 2003 after North Korea withdrew from the Nuclear Non-

²⁸ “Missiles of North Korea”. <<https://missilethreat.csis.org/country/dprk/>>. Accessed 12 April 2019.

²⁹ “The CNS North Korea Missile Test Database”. <<https://www.nti.org/analysis/articles/cns-north-korea-missile-test-database/>>. Accessed 7 April 2019.

³⁰ “A Timeline of North Korea's Nuclear Tests”. <<https://www.cbsnews.com/news/north-koreas-nuclear-tests-timeline/>>. Accessed 17 April 2019.

³¹ Hyun, Kim. “Comparing North Korea Policies of The Obama and Trump Administrations.” *Nanzan Review of American Studies*, vol. 39, Jan. 2017, pp. 45–69. EBSCOhost, <search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=31h&AN=133548402&site=ehost-live&scope=site>. Accessed 8 April 2017. Pg 50.

Proliferation Treaty and included North Korea, South Korea, Japan, China, Russia, and the US.³² In action, the policy took the form of US and Six Party nations imposing increasingly tougher diplomatic and economic sanctions in response to North Korea's nuclear weapon or missile tests. A classic example of these sanctions can be found in the first tangible step taken by the Obama administration, which was to engage the UN Security Council for action. In June of 2009 the UNSC unanimously passed Resolution 1874 to further impose economic sanctions such as allowing UN member states to "inspect its cargo and destroy any goods suspected of being connected to its nuclear program, and extending the arms embargo on it".³³

Results from the strategic patience approach during the Obama administration's first term are mixed. On one hand, no missiles launches or nuclear tests occurred during 2010 and 2011, but at the same time North Korea kept overtly developing both capabilities.³⁴ If the goal were for the DPRK to commit to denuclearization, then more action is required. Indeed, the core principle of strategic patience, that Washington would not enter bilateral negotiations with North Korea until it gave up its nuclear ambitions broke down at least four times. In December 2009, July 2011, October 2011, and February 2012, US special representatives met with their Pyongyang counterparts in an effort to bring North Korea back to the Six Party negotiating efforts.³⁵ Additionally, in April 2011, former US President Jimmy Carter traveled to Pyongyang as part of a delegation that met with North Korea's foreign minister with hopes of restarting Six Party Talks. Finally, in February 2012 the US engaged in bi-lateral negotiations once more,

³² Davenport, Kelsey. "Chronology of U.S.-North Korean Nuclear and Missile Diplomacy". < <https://www.armscontrol.org/factsheets/dprkchron>>. Accessed 6 April 2019.

³³ Hyun, Kim. "Comparing North Korea Policies of The Obama and Trump Administrations." *Nanzan Review of American Studies*, vol. 39, Jan. 2017, pp. 45–69. EBSCOhost, <search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=31h&AN=133548402&site=ehost-live&scope=site>. Accessed 8 April 2017. Pg 49-50.

³⁴ "The CNS North Korea Missile Test Database". <<https://www.nti.org/analysis/articles/cns-north-korea-missile-test-database/>>. Accessed 7 April 2019.

³⁵ Hyun, Kim. "Comparing North Korea Policies of The Obama and Trump Administrations." *Nanzan Review of American Studies*, vol. 39, Jan. 2017, pp. 45–69. EBSCOhost, <search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=31h&AN=133548402&site=ehost-live&scope=site>. Accessed 8 April 2017. Pg 51.

reaching the “Leap Day Agreement”. Under the agreement, North Korea would “implement a moratorium on long-range missile launches, nuclear tests and nuclear activities at Yongbyon, including uranium enrichment activities” in exchange for “240,000 metric tons of nutritional assistance.”³⁶ Unfortunately, this agreement did not materialize, and through a series of escalating events, the situation began to deteriorate.

In April of 2012, the DPRK launched a satellite into orbit via a multi-stage rocket that was banned under international sanctions. This action was quickly followed by escalating US sanctions and kick started a strategic tit-for-tat engagement between the US led international community and North Korea that would become the norm for the remainder of the Obama administration’s term of office. Unbelievably, in the period from April 2012 to the end of the Obama administration’s second term in January 2017, North Korea launched 65 missiles and tested three more nuclear weapons.³⁷ Along the way, the Obama administration answered many of these events with ever strengthening diplomatic and economic responses such as UN Resolutions 2087 and 2094, which expanded measures to “seize and destroy material suspected of being connected” to DPRKs weapons program.³⁸ Additionally, resolutions 2270 and 2331, passed in in 2016 expanded the “arms embargo to include small arms and light arms” as well as banned North Korea imports of precious metals and cut their largest export, coal, by nearly 60%.³⁹ Though these final economic sanctions levied on North Korea by the international

³⁶ Victoria Nuland, “U.S.-DPRK Bilateral Discussions”. <<https://20092017.state.gov/r/pa/prs/ps/2012/02/184869.htm>>. Accessed 28 April 2019.

³⁷ “The CNS North Korea Missile Test Database”. <<https://www.nti.org/analysis/articles/cns-north-korea-missile-test-database/>>. Accessed 7 April 2019.

³⁸ Hyun, Kim. “Comparing North Korea Policies of The Obama and Trump Administrations.” *Nanzan Review of American Studies*, vol. 39, Jan. 2017, pp. 45–69. EBSCOhost, <search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=31h&AN=133548402&site=ehost-live&scope=site>. Accessed 8 April 2017. Pg 53.

³⁹ *Ibid.*

community sound rather draconian, in effect, they were only partially successful due to China's reluctance to enforce them.

Any US foreign policy actions directed toward North Korea that do not also include considerations for China, are fundamentally flawed. Hyun Kim, Professor of Political Science at Kyung Hee University in Seoul highlights this sentiment when he says the US "policy of strategic patience [also] failed to convince China to put diplomatic pressure and strictly implement U.N. sanctions against North Korea to the extent that the country could suspend its nuclear program and return to the negotiation table."⁴⁰ He goes on to comment, "China tended to be supportive, rather than critical, of North Korea, as a main trading partner and longstanding ally."⁴¹ Similarly, Bruce Klingner, Senior Research Fellow at the Heritage Foundation testified before the US House of Representatives in 2016 that China is an "enabler of North Korean misbehavior," and supported North Korea in the UN by "resisting stronger sanctions; watering down resolution texts; insisting on expansive loopholes; and minimally enforcing resolutions."⁴² That said, guaranteeing China's buy-in with regard to North Korean sanctions is not as simple as its need is obvious. There is a wide range of other issues that the US must consider with respect to China, not the least of which is the military component.

China has long considered a heavy US troop presence in the Western Pacific to be part of a larger containment strategy, much as the one used against the Soviet Union during the Cold War.⁴³ Though containment of China is not a formally stated US foreign policy objective, one can observe a large US military presence in the region, most of which are critical to maintaining

⁴⁰ Ibid, 54.

⁴¹ Ibid, 54.

⁴² Klingner, Bruce. "Creating a Comprehensive Policy Response to North Korean Threats and Provocations". <<https://www.heritage.org/testimony/creating-comprehensive-policy-response-north-korean-threats-and-provocations>>. Accessed 1 May 2019.

⁴³ Hemmings, John. "The Myth of Chinese Containment". <<https://www.lowyinstitute.org/the-interpreter/myth-chinese-containment>>. Accessed 2 May 2019.

the current balance of power between North and South Korea. The United States has had an enduring military presence in South Korea since 1950 when first dispatched to help repel an attack from the Communist North. This did not change under the Obama Administration's policy of strategic patience; rather they maintained what has become a new normal level of approximately 30,000 US troops. However, they did use the military instrument of national power a number of times during their two terms in office. First they strengthened military ties with South Korea by developing a new joint war plan that also addressed North Korea's nuclear and missile facilities as well as its top leaders."⁴⁴ Next, they "decided to deploy the Terminal High-Altitude Area Defense (THAAD) system, an advanced missile defense system, to the US forces in Korea in order to reinforce defense capabilities of the alliance against North Korea's ballistic missile threats."⁴⁵ Finally, they executed several shows of force, especially after North Korea's fourth and fifth nuclear weapon tests, which included the deployment of strategic bombers, F-22 stealth fighters, and a nuclear submarine. By in large, the Obama administration maintained a military posture in the region similar to that of their predecessors.

The Trump administration entered office in January of 2017 following North Korea's most threatening year on record with 24 rocket launches and 2 nuclear tests occurring in 2016 alone.⁴⁶ The threats did not subside. North Korea launched 21 more rockets and conducted a final nuclear test in 2017.⁴⁷ Notably, two of the missiles launched are believed to be Hwasong-14 intercontinental ballistic missiles (ICBMs), thought to be capable of striking targets in North America. Faced with this hostile reality, the Trump administration declared a

⁴⁴ Hyun, Kim. "Comparing North Korea Policies of The Obama and Trump Administrations." *Nanzan Review of American Studies*, vol. 39, Jan. 2017, pp. 45–69. EBSCOhost, <search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=31h&AN=133548402&site=ehost-live&scope=site>. Accessed 8 April 2017. Pg 53.

⁴⁵ *Ibid*, 54.

⁴⁶ "The CNS North Korea Missile Test Database". <<https://www.nti.org/analysis/articles/cns-north-korea-missile-test-database/>>. Accessed 7 April 2019.

⁴⁷ *Ibid*.

new approach toward North Korea that they branded as “strategic accountability”. This new approach was described by administration officials as one of “maximum pressure and engagement” to bring about the denuclearization of the regime.⁴⁸

An August 2017 news article by then Secretary of State Rex Tillerson and then Secretary of Defense James Mattis succinctly laid out the core tenants of the strategic accountability approach. First, the US “is applying diplomatic and economic pressure on North Korea to achieve the complete, verifiable and irreversible denuclearization of the Korean Peninsula”.⁴⁹ Second, the US will build on the already strong alliances with South Korea and Japan to ensure the plan is “backed by military options”.⁵⁰ Third, the US will engage China in an effort to “hold nations accountable to their commitments” to isolate North Korea.⁵¹ Finally, the US is willing to enter negotiations with North Korea if certain denuclearization conditions are met.⁵² These priorities are not glaringly different from those of the Obama administration; therefore a more in depth review is required.

The Trump administration’s economic sanctions began by leaving all Obama era sanctions in place. Building on that foundation, the new administration added unilateral sanctions against those nations who provide North Korea with crude oil as well as placed bans on all North Korean vessels docking in US ports and “goods produced by North Korean workers overseas from entering the US.”⁵³ On the multinational front, the US led the adoption of UNSCR 2371, which included a complete ban on North Korean exports of coal and other

⁴⁸ Pennington, Matthew. “Trump Strategy on NKorea: ‘Maximum Pressure and Engagement’”. <<https://www.apnews.com/86626d21ea2b45c79457a873a747c452>>. Accessed 3 May 2018.

⁴⁹ Mattis and Tillerson: “We’re Holding Pyongyang to Account”. Washington: Federal Information & News Dispatch, Inc, 2017. <<https://search.proquest.com/docview/1940610618?accountid=9867>>. Accessed 26 April 2019.

⁵⁰ Ibid.

⁵¹ Ibid.

⁵² Hyun, Kim. “Comparing North Korea Policies of The Obama and Trump Administrations.” *Nanzan Review of American Studies*, vol. 39, Jan. 2017, pp. 45–69. EBSCOhost, <search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=31h&AN=133548402&site=ehost-live&scope=site>. Accessed 8 April 2017. Pg 56.

⁵³ Ibid, 59.

valuable minerals, which accounted for about one third of the nation's exports.⁵⁴ As a response to North Korea's September 2017 testing of a hydrogen bomb, the US approached the UN again with a draft resolution calling for a near total oil embargo of the country. After negotiating with Russia and China who opposed the total ban, the Security Council passed UNSCR 2375, which called for a ban on up to 30% of North Korea's oil imports.⁵⁵

Though these sanctions are substantive, the Trump administration was not immune from the key handicap that also plagued the Obama administration: the fact that multilateral sanctions were only effective if China respected and followed them. The Trump administration has engaged very carefully on this issue, and for very good reason. Separately, and in parallel, the Trump administration has been negotiating a bi-lateral trade agreement with China since late 2017, that to date is still unfinished. These trade negotiations are not only tense enough to cause large swings in international markets, they include billions of dollars' worth of tariffs in what is often regarded as a trade war between the two largest economies in the world. As a result, the Trump administration has observed China's lack of enforcement of several UNSCRs, such as 2375 and 2371, with limited response, but has also held them accountable through other means.⁵⁶ One example is an executive order signed in September of 2017 that authorized the US Treasury department to impose sanctions on "any foreign financial institution that knowingly conducts or facilitates any significant transaction" with North Korea and any person involved in North Korea

⁵⁴ Ibid.

⁵⁵ Sengupta, Somini. "After U.S. Compromise, Security Council Strengthens North Korea Sanctions." New York Times Company. < <https://www.nytimes.com/2017/09/11/world/asia/us-security-council-north-korea.html>>. Accessed 4 May 2017.

⁵⁶ Hyun, Kim. "Comparing North Korea Policies of The Obama and Trump Administrations." Nanzan Review of American Studies, vol. 39, Jan. 2017, pp. 45–69. EBSCOhost, <search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=31h&AN=133548402&site=ehost-live&scope=site>. Accessed 8 April 2017. Pg 60.

industry, port operations, or import/export functions.⁵⁷ At its core, this executive order was built on the sentiment that “financial institutions must choose between doing business with the United States or facilitating trade with North Korea”.⁵⁸ By most accounts, the Trump administration has been more aggressive in their pursuit of Chinese firms and North Korean citizens working in China in accordance with the executive order than holding the Chinese government accountable for undermining multilateral sanctions.⁵⁹

With regard to applying the military instrument of power in the region, the Trump administration has taken several actions of note. First, despite the increasing threat from North Korea in terms of rocket launches and nuclear weapon tests in 2017, in June 2018, Secretary of Defense Jim Mattis chose to leave US troop levels on the Korean Peninsula roughly the same at 28,500 troops.⁶⁰ Next, as part of negotiations with Pyongyang, the Trump administration chose to halt two major, reoccurring military exercises between the US and South Korea; Foal Eagle and Key Resolve. Though the administration emphasizes the money that will be saved by cancelling the exercises, the move is widely accepted to be a step toward deescalating tension on the Peninsula.⁶¹ Finally, the Trump administration has followed through with the Obama era effort to install the THAAD missile defense system. Though contentious with both the North Koreans and the Chinese, the Trump administration declared “China's demand for the U.S. and

⁵⁷ “President Donald J. Trump Increases Pressure to Cut off Funding for North Korea”. <<https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefings-statements/fact-sheet-president-donald-j-trump-increases-pressure-cut-off-funding-north-korea/>>. Accessed 3 May 2019.

⁵⁸ Ibid.

⁵⁹ Hyun, Kim. “Comparing North Korea Policies of The Obama and Trump Administrations.” *Nanzan Review of American Studies*, vol. 39, Jan. 2017, pp. 45–69. EBSCOhost, <search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=31h&AN=133548402&site=ehost-live&scope=site>. Accessed 8 April 2017. Pg 62.

⁶⁰ Baldor, Lolita. “Mattis says US will keep current troop levels in South Korea”. <<https://www.militarytimes.com/newsletters/daily-news-roundup/2018/06/29/mattis-says-us-will-keep-current-troop-levels-in-south-korea/>>. Accessed 2 May 2019.

⁶¹ Starr, Barbara and Jamie Crawford. “US, South Korea scale back joint military drills 'to reduce tension' with North Korea”. <<https://www.cnn.com/2019/03/02/politics/us-south-korea-military-exercises/index.html>>. Accessed 1 May 2019.

South Korea not to deploy THAAD is unrealistic [and] technically astute Chinese military officers understand the system poses no danger to their homeland.”⁶² Finally, the Trump administration has executed several military shows of force, most notably the deployment of three US aircraft carrier battle groups to take part in an exercise off the Korean Peninsula in November 2017.⁶³

Finally, in an unambiguous example of rejecting “old dogmas”, the Trump administration has chosen to engage in bilateral relations with North Korea at the executive level. This process first began by what one may describe as a strategic messaging phenomenon, when President Trump personally engaged in the North Korea dialogue via his Twitter account. Notably, in August 2017 he vowed to respond to North Korean threats with “fire and fury” and engaged in a public rhetoric with Chairman Kim Jong-un about who had the largest “nuclear button” on their desk. Likewise, on numerous occasions throughout 2017, he publicly referred to Kim Jong-un as “Little Rocket Man” leading many to comment that the President’s rhetoric was escalating, versus working to resolve the North Korea problem. Then in early 2018, a South Korean delegation extended an invitation for President Trump to negotiate personally with Kim Jong-un, which the President accepted. Next, in 2018, the two leaders and their delegations met in Singapore for the first ever official meeting between the countries two top officials. Though the agreements reached during the summit were less substantial than the US desired, it did result in the signing of a peace treaty, North Korean agreement to begin denuclearization, and the US

⁶² Mattis and Tillerson

⁶³ Lockie, Alex. “With 3 aircraft carriers nearby, Mattis lays down the law for North Korea”. <<https://www.businessinsider.com/mattis-warns-north-korea-3-aircraft-carriers-pacific2017-10>>. Accessed 2 May 2019.

deciding to reduce large-scale military exercises.⁶⁴ During the second summit, held in Vietnam in February of 2019, the US “called on Pyongyang to unilaterally surrender its entire nuclear weapons program before it would make any concessions”.⁶⁵ Pyongyang replied by demanding that “Washington lift almost all sanctions before it would discuss” any further denuclearization, resulting in an impasse.⁶⁶ Though the long-term impact of this failure to reach an agreement is unclear, obviously North Korea’s development of a nuclear capability is a high priority under the Trump administration’s policy of principled realism that has produced some, if limited results.

Analysis of Two Approaches

It is difficult to examine the Obama policy of strategic patience and the Trump policy of strategic accountability without observing some glaring similarities. First, they share the same goal, which is the complete nuclear disarmament of the Korean Peninsula along with the same qualification that the US does not seek regime change or an immediate reunification of the Korean Peninsula. In terms of international relations theory, Professor Hyun Kim points out that both “focus on the pressure strategy of imposing diplomatic pressure and sanctions [which] is consistent with the realist prescription of taking punitive measures as a part of carrot-and-stick diplomacy.”⁶⁷ Likewise, they both place a large emphasis on pursuing multilateral sanctions through the United Nations Security Council, which suggests an alignment with the liberal internationalist perspective. Furthermore, one could make an argument that each administration’s use of US military power is similar in nature. In the case of DPRK aggression,

⁶⁴ Lim, Jonathan. "The Singapore Summit Joint Statement: An Incremental Movement Toward Peace on the Korean Peninsula." *North Korean Review* 14, no. 2 (Fall, 2018): 101. <<https://search.proquest.com/docview/2161594014?accountid=9867>>. Accessed 21 April 2019.

⁶⁵ Panda, Ankit and Vipin Narang. “The Hanoi Summit was Doomed from the Start”. <<https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/north-korea/2019-03-05/hanoi-summit-was-doomed-start>>. Accessed 6 April 2019.

⁶⁶ Ibid.

⁶⁷ Hyun, Kim. “Comparing North Korea Policies of The Obama and Trump Administrations.” *Nanzan Review of American Studies*, vol. 39, Jan. 2017, pp. 45–69. EBSCOhost, <search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=31h&AN=133548402&site=ehost-live&scope=site>. Accessed 8 April 2017. Pg 67.

if the Obama foreign policy can responsibly be branded as slightly more liberal than center, then a fair characterization of principled realism is that the Trump administration's approach is slightly more realist than center. It also begs the question, though, that if the policies are so similar, what then accounts for the overall de-escalation of hostilities and openness to communications on the Korean Peninsula in 2018?

Indeed, 2018 served as one of the more peaceful years in recent memory, at least by one measure. North Korea did not test a single nuclear weapon or launch a single strategic missile, a rare occurrence in the 21st century. Additionally, three executive level meetings between North and South Korean leaders took place and the first meeting between President Trump and Chairman Kim Jung-un occurred highlighting the most communication between North Korea and the outside world in decades. In total, the evidence suggests that principled realism as a foreign policy in action is just one among several factors that have converged to bring about the current situation.

First is timing. The introduction of ICBMs by North Korea in 2017 capable of reaching North America escalated the threat level to “existential” for the Americans. Any sitting president could not overlook this threat, and so it comes as little surprise that the Trump administration elevated North Korea to its top priority. Former South Korean special envoy to the US, Hong Seok-Hyun shares this sentiment in 2018 when he says, “There is not much time left. All possible means must be used to bring North Korea to the negotiating table [...] before it is too late.”⁶⁸ For additional context, the Obama administration did not have to deal with the direct North Korean threat on the United States, rather its top priority lay in the Middle East, trying to prevent a nuclear-armed Iran.

⁶⁸ Seok , Hyun Hong. “Trump’s New North Korea Strategy Might Actually Work.” *New Perspectives Quarterly*, vol. 35, no. 1, Jan. 2018, pp. 38–41. EBSCOhost, <search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=eoh&AN=44658404&site=ehost-live&scope=site>. Accessed 6 April 2019.

Next, and likely the most important factor is the Trump administration's emphasis on engaging with China. Victor Davis Hanson, Senior Fellow in Residence in Classics and Military History at the Hoover Institution observes that the Trump administration set out to counter the common narrative that China is destined to replace the US as a great power.⁶⁹ In doing so, the administration has systematically engaged China in a number of ways, most notably with regard to trade policy. Though these trade negotiations do not directly address the North Korean security threat, they lend credibility and authority to the administration's dealings with China on North Korea. Professor Hyun Kim captures this sentiment when he states the "Trump Administration has been more assertive than the Obama Administration in pushing China to fully implement U.N. sanctions and exercising pressure on North Korea in that the former has pursued an engagement policy based on incentives as well as secondary sanctions on China."⁷⁰ Whether principled realism along with other factors in the region will continue to garner even small steps toward peace on the Korean Peninsula is yet to be determined.

Conclusion

While the Trump administrations' written communication describes principled realism in terms that strike a balance between the realist and liberal schools of thought, their verbal communications tend to strike a more realist tone. In keeping with this tendency, their tangible foreign policy actions in response to an aggressive North Korea tend to align with more realist values. That said, contrary to the popular narrative that the Trump administration's principled realism represents a rapid departure from preceding US foreign policy, an objective review of their action regarding North Korea as compared to that of the Obama administration reveals far

⁶⁹ "Victor Davis Hanson at Home ". <<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JEd2TEzM0vw>>. Accessed 2 May 2019.

⁷⁰ Hyun, Kim. "Comparing North Korea Policies of The Obama and Trump Administrations." *Nanzan Review of American Studies*, vol. 39, Jan. 2017, pp. 45–69. EBSCOhost, <search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=31h&AN=133548402&site=ehost-live&scope=site>. Accessed 8 April 2017. Pg 69.

more similarities than differences. Interestingly, in the context of the Korean Peninsula, this not so radical change in foreign policy seems to have garnered some measurable, albeit limited success, in deescalating North Korean nuclear hostilities. Whether it will bear fruit on the litany of other US and international priorities remains is yet to be determined.

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