

**Addressing North Korean Nuclear Aggression: America's Role in Deterrence and  
Assurance**

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## Abstract

The contemporary international system demonstrates clear dissonance in the ability of superpowers to confront non-conventional security threats. The nuclear threat posed by The Democratic People's Republic of Korea presents a challenge to American and international security interests. The United States must reevaluate the way it confronts adversaries in asymmetric conflict. An examination of cognitive and psychological aspects of the adversary will be conducted to assess regime strengths, weaknesses, and perceptions to address current escalations. By understanding the North Korean perception of international security, the United States can best create deterrence communications designed to send signals to both our adversary and allies regarding our intentions. This paper will focus on methods to best confront and deter North Korean aggression and nuclear ambitions. A proactive American approach will be developed to focus on incentivizing through coercion rather than emphasizing complete punishment. Methodology will focus on risk calculation and creating an approach that recognizes both long and short-term limitations and objectives to create an effective American response.

### I. Introduction: Acting in a Post-Cold War Era

The status of American national security relies on the stability of actors operating within the international system. The post-Cold War era demonstrated the restructuring of power dynamics at all levels of analysis. It signified the transition from a bipolar to a unipolar world which marked a global period of American dominance at the expense of communist ideology and economic policy. Although a strategic defeat by the United States in countering nuclear aggression of the Soviet Union, clear repercussions of a security doctrine that relied on countering an ideological threat are evident. North Korean nuclear escalations can, in part, be

traced back to both domestic and international misguided policy efforts. For decades the United States viewed foreign policy through a lens solely focused on containing and stopping the spread of communism. This approach inhibited rational decision making in regard to complex security issues, and directly undermined domestic democratic values while contributing to the fall of democratic governments internationally (Hartz 1955, 5). However, previous mishaps and overall foreign policy failures can be used in the construction of targeted responses for global challenges to US national security.

Contemporary security challenges can be derived from an American foreign policy that focused on short-term gains and escalation of ideological threats at the expense of long-term global stability. To better address threats to international stability and maintain its position as global hegemon, the United States must reevaluate the way it approaches security and methods of deterrence. This paper will focus on how to best deter North Korean nuclear aggression, which will emphasize the importance of liberalism operating within the bounds of a realist international order. Due to the emphasis of Kim Jong-un as an individual within North Korean politics, methods for the construction of an effective American response will encompass an evaluation of American presidential administrations that have overlapped with his time in power. In addition, American self-interest will be reexamined to emphasize that minor concessions must be made, which may initially hurt self-interest to ensure lasting stability and long-term prosperity.

## II. The Role of Perception

Current approaches to address North Korean nuclear capabilities focus on the American perception of international security. The lens that a superpower views the world is drastically different compared to a rogue actor vying for respect and legitimacy. The role of perception becomes essential to consider in all aspects in the construction of American foreign policy. Kim Jong-un is a volatile actor within the international system, but these actions are based on precedents long established as North Korean foreign policy. Additional focus will be placed on addressing the North Korean perspective of international relations, and will critique American actions to best comprehend lessons that can be learned from failures and outline future methods for success. Greater consideration of the Kim regime's insecurities will enable the United States to create a more targeted approach to better reduce tensions.

The Kim regime reacts aggressively, defects on agreements, and seeks to undermine traditional power structures to demonstrate frustration and anxiety about its current status in the international system. The key questions for the United States to ask are: To what extent will force work, and more so, when could force, or the threat of force, go too far? The answer to these questions are unique and individual to a specific adversary (Jervis 1976, 97). The use of deterrence communications becomes essential for the United States in maintaining credibility among allies and adversaries (Taylor, 2017). Strategies for the communication of American enmity with North Korean pursuit and testing of nuclear weapons currently relies on the use of negative sanctions, inflammatory rhetoric, international ostracizing, and perceived high security costs for North Korea as conditions for discussions to deescalate relations. Although these measures are at times necessary, the levels to which they have intensified have tremendously increased potential risk at the cost of future stability.

Initial stability of the international system is essential to further a prosperous dialogue with North Korea. This cannot be achieved through mistrust and arbitrary standards set for potential negotiation. Therefore, the condition set by the Trump Administration stating that North Korea must disband its nuclear program as a prerequisite for American negotiations should be dismissed (Moore 2008, 10). By setting standards for discussion that rely on North Korea giving up its key protector of security (its nuclear weapons program), the United States inhibits its long-term self-interest and any chance for future successful outcomes. American engagement with North Korea at this point in its development of its nuclear program is essential to actively influence the current situation.

The fact that North Korea has successfully developed and tested nuclear weapons signifies the need for an effective and targeted American response that requires direct engagement regardless of notions of American image and superiority. Refusal by the United States to engage North Korea directly allows the Kim regime to undermine American status and credibility by engaging other actors through outside channels. This has been done both legally by seeking diplomatic relations with South Korea and illegally by trading with other rogue actors and black market channels. These efforts will ultimately increase in intensity should the United States refuse to act.

The lack of consistency in American actions toward North Korea and other adversaries presents a clear challenge to build a relationship of trust and credibility. Contemporary examples of this lack of policy cohesion are evident when comparing the approaches of the Obama and Trump Administrations. Certain levels of policy inconsistency lie in the transition of power that is natural and inherent within democratic systems and therefore unavoidable. However, the

drastic change in stance between these two presidents is significant, and create circumstances for increased miscalculation and misunderstanding by the Kim regime. Under President Obama, the United States followed a path of “strategic patience” that relied on “maintaining the current sanctions regime and waiting for North Korea to change (Choi, 2016, 57).”

This approach failed to recognize the consequences of refusing to actively engage and effectively counter North Korean aggression. Although a small state with increasingly diminished economic capability, North Korea has demonstrated its resolve to forgo human rights, comforts, and development in exchange for heightened measures designed to protect its national security: nuclear weapons. The Obama Administration’s reliance on strategic patience reflects a failure to comprehend the mindset and global perception of the Kim regime. In addition, it relied on North Korean internal reform, which under increased negative sanctions only solidified the Kim regime’s unwillingness to comply with global demands largely seen as derivative of the United States (Kong 2017, 15). The emphasis on this strategy relied on waiting out the Kim regime. The United States has essentially been waiting for the Kim regime to fall since North Korea’s inception in 1948. While the Obama Administration was correct to approach the situation with caution, as to not incite further hostilities, the combined use of negative sanctions canceled out any gains that could have been made.

The transition into the Trump administration has been marked by a significant shift from waiting on North Korea to change internally to a “maximum pressure” approach that emphasizes the need to not only uphold current punishments of North Korean behavior, but to increase the levels at which they are applied. This is designed to be done through both diplomatic and military means. While it does not call for regime change, the goal of this approach is

denuclearization as a condition for diplomatic engagement. This approach has resulted in a clear divide between two American policy approaches within the Trump administration (Rogin 2017). President Trump increasingly engages in inflammatory rhetoric toward North Korea while members of his cabinet have displayed an unwillingness to follow suit.

Not only is the provocative nature emanating from the White House problematic within itself, but the inconsistent nature of American tone toward North Korea increases the likelihood of potential misinterpretation and disproportionate response. Jervis notes, “A major determinant of the effect of threats is the intention of the other side (Jervis 1976, 101).” The lack of transparency between actors decreases the ability to come to a mutually beneficial outcome. A contributing factor to North Korean refusal to cease nuclear proliferation lies in their perception of American foreign policy. Any effort by diplomatic officials within the United States to engage North Korea in a potential dialogue has been undermined by a constant flow of inconsistent hostile messages by President Trump. The maximum pressure approach currently applied by the United States will not achieve its objective. If anything, it will exacerbate current problems, weaken US credibility, and potentially create a scenario of increasing hostility that may provoke a damaging, and potentially nuclear, response by North Korea.

Understanding the role of pre-existing beliefs becomes essential to consider to avoid this irreversible form of escalation (Jervis 1976, 187). The *juche* ideology of North Korea demonstrates its commitment to self-sufficiency in the face of international condemnation largely in the form of economic isolation and the freezing of diplomatic relations. North Korea holds the United States as personally responsible for these hardships, and channels that frustration into the pursuit of nuclear weapons. The risk of miscalculation with a maximum

pressure approach is no longer viable as North Korea has demonstrated its commitment and ability to nuclear advancement (Kim 2007, 94). New measures are needed to center on coercion through economic and diplomatic means that are therefore insured by a superior American military capability. This requires a careful analysis of risk limitation, hedging strategy, and negotiation methods based on credible deterrence (US Department of Defense 2018, 24).

### III. Risk Calculation and Hedging Strategy in Regard to Deterrence

Small concessions by the North have been typical throughout bilateral relations between the United States and North Korea. Due to the variance in conditions and leaders they were offered under, it becomes difficult to directly identify a viable strategy to consistently bring them to the negotiating table. However, upon further analysis, a general theme among limited North Korean cooperation lies in their consideration of marginal costs versus benefits (Mankiw 2015, 124). Furthermore, the Kim regime recognizes the need to engage the global community, specifically the United States as its hegemon, to ensure continued survival. The Kim regime has typically done this through seemingly erratic behavior that shifts from active engagement to provocative and damaging actions, both designed to get attention from the global community. This notion is incredibly important to consider in American policy in that periods of North Korean outreach to the global community are possible, and can therefore be capitalized on for American strategic interests and global stability.

These gains can only be made through engagement. The United States must actively recognize North Korea as a legitimate actor within the international community (Moore 2008,16). In taking this step, it becomes important to note that this would not weaken US credibility or position to negotiate. Instead, it is a first step within an approach designed to use pressure



through coercion; placing the burden of responsibilities fundamental for legitimate state actors on North Korea. Rather than increasing pressure on North Korea, the United States should seek to utilize the international system to its benefit as a global hegemon and use it to entice and incentivize North Korea for valid membership. Once this status is achieved, the weight of responsibilities for the Kim regime will increase to maintain its position and status. Increased provocative action would harm North Korean interests as it would no longer be a viable strategy for membership among legitimate state actors within international relations.

The mindset of Kim Jong-un then becomes important to consider when calculating levels of risk involved in this approach. In order to effectively deter North Korea from becoming increasingly hostile and therefore uncooperative, the United States must actively recognize what is motivating our adversary in their choice to engage actors through unconventional means. The Kim regime has long felt threatened by the influence and perceived encroachment by the United States within Southeast Asia. This fear has not only instilled the importance of nuclear weapon development for North Korea, but it has increased its confidence in pursuing aggressive action despite the potential for retaliation and antagonization of allies.

The reality of current escalations of American-North Korean relations is growing increasingly severe, but it is more important to consider the perception these events through the lens of our adversary. The perceived risk of both action and inaction by North Korea must be calculated and weighed against those of our own (Taylor 2016, 4). The United States should seek to dissuade North Korea by convincing them that both their efforts to achieve their objective will not be successful, and that they will be denied any benefits hoped to be gained. In determination of risk, these conditions must be considered for both parties involved in conflict. North Korea

views this as a fight for survival of the regime and legitimacy among the international community (Knopf 2010, 5). The United States is secure in both of these attributes and has a monopoly on the use of global force. While current signals emanating from North Korea as a rogue actor are severe security concerns, the current capabilities of the United States ensure its survival if faced with a North Korean nuclear attack.

The unequal distribution of power within this equation presents clear advantages to the United States, however the fact that North Korea has possession of nuclear weapons undermines the superiority of American hegemony. Lack of perceived stability by the Kim regime in its current status within North Korea may entice them to attack the United States to inflict as much damage as possible despite an inability to survive an inevitable retaliatory strike by the United States. This notion increases the stakes that the United States must hedge its bets against, and draws particular attention to the negative consequences of placing too much emphasis on establishing a strong hedging strategy at the expense of clear deterrence signals and communications.

States rely on hedging strategies to account for the increasing uncertainties as a result of international anarchy, which is both unavoidable and inevitable within geopolitics (Mearsheimer 2001, 157). While hedging seeks to lower overall risks, the potential problems it can create in regard to effective communication among adversaries becoming increasingly important to note in light of current nuclear tensions. While an effective hedging strategy allows an actor to distribute risk across a variety of platforms, it can also send unintended signals to adversaries and raise the chance of misperception. This becomes especially dangerous when applied with a nuclear platform. The nuclear triad of the United States far exceeds North Korea in its capability

and arsenal size, and can be used as a strong deterrent against future aggression. However, this fact along with seemingly inconsistent American foreign policy not only toward North Korea, but other actors as well, alters initial risk calculations.

The fall of Muammar Gaddafi not only ignited the Middle East, but sent clear aftershocks that penetrated the global community at varying levels. The United States' role in this was undeniable, and left lasting consequences on the potential of normalizing relations with North Korea. When viewing this situation through the lens of North Korea, the United States becomes a rogue actor intent on toppling authoritarian governments (Bandow 2015). Any hedging strategy pursued designed to intimidate North Korea by the size and capability of the American nuclear arsenal is overrunning its course. The power asymmetry is clear to both parties, and although hedging is designed to deter through reducing a potential adversary's confidence, it can also push them to act beyond rational judgement (US Department of Defense 2018, 38). Current trends indicate that American policy has heightened the Kim regime's need to pursue nuclear weapons to achieve security, and reinforced the willingness to allow its general population to suffer in response to the negative sanctions applied by the Western world.

The North Korean Foreign Ministry stated the initial disarmament agreement made between the United States and Libya as "an invasion tactic to disarm the country (McDonald 2011)." North Korea believed the initial benefits offered to Libya in acceptance into the global community to be insincere on all fronts. North Korea saw this measure to provide a false sense of security to a struggling dictatorship. The unintended message sent from Washington to the global community is that it cannot be trusted. The ability of the United States as global hegemon

enables it to not only export force at the global level, but influence as well. In deterring North Korean nuclear aggression, the United States must address both.

The risks of misperception as a result of a hedging strategy designed to undermine an adversary's confidence are amplified in regard to North Korea. Due to the anarchic nature of the international system, the competing factions and influences vying for dominance increase the likelihood for the misinterpretation of intentions. It is important for the United States to diversify risk, but this comes with limitations (Khil 2011, 82). Outside influences including inflammatory rhetoric emanating from the executive and legislative branches, the lack of policy consistency toward North Korea, and the use of military and nuclear strategy designed to hedge have weakened the American position. Therefore, US capacity to hedge toward North Korea should be reevaluated to the extent that it cannot inhibit the ability of effective communication. Displaying increased military capability and presence within Southeast Asia has come at a cost. The first line of defense to strengthen and increase US position to hedge must recognize the limits of deterrence and viable measures that can therefore be used to counterbalance these effects.

#### IV. Deterrence Communications & Psychological Factors

The gaps within the perceptions that parties of a dispute view and understand the same issues, events, policies, and people become key to understanding behaviors of conflict and interactions. By recognizing these differences, one can attempt to remedy the inability of deterrence to transform hostile relations into peaceful ones, as the main objective of a successful deterrence strategy is to stop an adversary from pursuing an undesired course of action (Waltz 1954, 160). A balance must be made between the usage of negative sanctions and coercion

through enticement to force the adversary into a cost-benefit analysis that results within a desired range of outcomes. The cognitive factors by which an adversary engages its decision-making process relies on internal and external forces which can be exploited for personal gain.

Beyond the individual adversary, the United States should seek to better understand motivations behind its own actions, as indirect and unconscious overall attitudes of policy makers often result in undesirable or unforeseen effects that can be damaging to American interests. This process will be difficult as past mistakes and clear failures must be analyzed in a way that is uncomfortable, distressing, and not politically popular (Drezner 2003, 649). This is necessary as the United States is most capable of addressing North Korean nuclear aggression by first making necessary changes within its own policies to better bring about change in North Korean actions. The psychological reality of the Kim regime is based on the lasting effects of embarrassment and devaluation of status and capabilities by the international community.

Kim Jong-un's concept of national security emphasizes the need for a massive military and weapons buildup to protect against encroaching US influence within the region. Should the United States fail to recognize the commitment of North Korea to achieve its objective despite the use of negative sanctioning and international isolation, the potential for nuclear conflict increases significantly (Kim 2007, 88). The United States must actively work to understand the reality of our adversary through lenses unfiltered by partisan lines and preconceived notions. It becomes increasingly irresponsible to believe that North Korea will view US attempts at deterrence exactly as they were designed. Levels of misperception are standard within international relations and often unavoidable. However, this does not negate from the severity to which the current American deterrence strategy has deviated from desired outcomes, and places

increasing pressure to re-evaluate initial understandings of national interest and viable conclusions.

Kaplowitz discusses the relevance of assessing how and why adversaries react based on perception. This leads to a discussion of a “firm-but-cooperative strategy” designed within a liberal framework to emphasize the lasting stability that can be achieved through mutually agreeable terms over zero-sum outcomes. (Kaplowitz 1990, 40). This is entirely relevant in creating a deterrence strategy that recognizes the merit of not only stopping aggressive North Korean action, but creates a foundation for future negotiation and discussion that does not defer to arbitrary standards. By establishing terms that are initially favorable to both parties, the United States is able to gain strategically in that it achieves an active voice in discussion, and forces North Korea to take responsibility for its actions. By legitimizing the North Korean state and removing heightened levels of negative sanctions, the Kim regime will be under increased pressure to not only comply with global norms, but to maintain them despite limited capacity and resources.

Potential provocative outcry from North Korea as a result of the inability to sustain the status that it desperately desires will no longer be solely tied to American aggression. Instead, it will entice a more committed response from the global community in addition to North Korean allies and economic partners who may already be showing signs of displeasure with current North Korean escalations and practices. Kaplowitz notes, “A firm but effective strategy is thus meant to indicate not only the possibilities for cooperation, but the costs of belligerence (Kaplowitz 1990, 67).” In this case, the United States would be able to shift the strategic costs of noncompliance onto North Korea, and therefore gain the upper hand in future negotiations. The

message that the United States chooses to engage North Korea with requires clear and targeted deterrence communications to maximize the potential for accurate understanding and perception.

Deterrence communications should be designed to recognize one's own disproportionate vulnerability to various threats that may be employed by an adversary. By recognizing these weaknesses, a more effective deterrence approach should rely on credibility, communication, capacity, and comprehension (Taylor 2017). These principles place emphasis on clearly communicating intent that is insured by the ability to follow through on threats or promises should an adversary reject or defect on an agreement. Once the communication or signal has been sent, a level of responsibility falls upon the sender to uphold the conditions of its message to ensure maximum understanding by the adversary.

Deterrence may ultimately fail if an adversary fails to recognize what our intentions are, the extent to which we are willing to pursue a strategic objective, and the harm that we are willing to inflict (Taylor 2016, 5). The anarchic international system along with seemingly skitsophrenic US foreign policy toward North Korea throughout recent decades greatly intensifies the challenge of sending effective deterrence communications designed not only to stop North Korea from pursuing reckless action, but to coerce and incentivize the Kim regime to comply with demands. Methods to coerce and incentivize North Korea to engage the global community, specifically through limited levels of legitimate economic activity, will be further explored in a discussion of economic statecraft.

## V. Economic Statecraft & the Role of Allies

The use of economic statecraft allows for an alternative method of power to be applied while providing an actor with increased ability to access, control, and deescalate a situation

without needing to initially resort to military confrontation. The United States currently employs economic statecraft through the use of negative sanctions designed to punish North Korea for actions determined to be dangerous to the stability and survival of the international system (Baldwin 1985, 41). The United States possesses unparalleled advantages to hold significant political and economic sway in the application of negative sanctions. While this is to some extent countered by other states at the international level with the negative veto power awarded to the permanent five members of the United Nations Security Council, US influence remains unmatched.

American and international usage of sanctions and economic statecraft in regard to North Korea have precedents based in isolation, deprivation, and forced seclusion from the global economy (Haggard and Nolan 2010, 554). Recent sanctions including UN Resolutions 2375 and 2397 passed by the Security Council have sought to further tighten North Korea's access to resources and hard currency needed for nuclear development (UN Security Council 2017). While internal conditions within North Korea may have grown increasingly dire, the overall objective to stop North Korean nuclear proliferation has failed. Upon further analysis, efforts largely led by the United States designed to punish North Korea for nuclear testing, development, and hostile rhetoric have also resulted in failure. Economic statecraft is a powerful tool that enables states, especially those economically developed, to impose conditions on an actor designed to deter an undesired behavior. The problem in American policy lies in its current understandings of effective economic statecraft, and overall failure to recognize the strategic gains presented through the employment of positive sanctions.



In consideration of positive sanction application by the United States as an alternative to consistent and ineffective levels of negative sanctions, the “baseline” of understanding of the targeted adversary becomes necessary to recognize (Baldwin 1971, 23). The United States should analyze and assess Kim Jong-un’s current understanding of North Korean security relative to the international community, and therefore compare this to the position or status that he most values. Positive sanctions enacted by the United States would then imply promised improvements in North Korean economic and security conditions corresponding to initial baseline assumptions and expected outcomes. Baldwin also notes, “Expectations of power relations should specify from whose point of view the situation is being viewed. (Baldwin 1971, 24)” In the determination of how positive sanctions should both be applied and constructed, a necessary condition for a successful outcome relies on North Korea actively perceiving and understanding American intent.

Rather than force North Korea into both economic and political exile as a result of aggressive actions, the United States can gain by actively engaging North Korean requests. North Korea desperately seeks recognition as a legitimate state actor and rejects what it views as disproportionate levels of punishment that it has experienced as a result of American antagonism. The use of negative sanctions by both the international community and United States have been applied at unequal levels, as the manner and strength of which these sanctions are applied remain at discretion of the independent actor. Lack of coordination inhibits successful outcomes as negative sanctions require greater weight behind them to be perceived as legitimate and behavior altering (Baldwin 1985, 135).

Regardless of the level of application, the use of negative sanctions have legitimized North Korea's role as a rogue state and therefore entitles it to the behavior that coincides with this status. North Korea is able to act aggressively, undermine agreements, and engage in behavior not acceptable for a legitimate state actor due to imposed isolation measures. Further increases in negative sanctions by the United States would have little to no positive effect (Baldwin 1985, 130). Rather, North Korea should be allowed to engage in limited levels of legitimate economic activity. By allowing the Kim regime increased, but still relatively minor, access to the global economy, North Korea will be thrust into a system of economic interdependence.

Compliance to global norms regarding state conduct and action then act as a requirement for further and increased levels of economic participation. North Korea will face international pressure to comply to these necessary demands and will therefore limit its ability to place the initial validity of its rogue and aggressive actions on specific adversaries, largely the United States. The indirect method of pursuing positive sanctions will create internal pressure for North Korea to conform rather than relying on external threats from the United States that increase the likelihood of misperception and potential military conflict.

To effectively construct and apply positive sanctions toward North Korea, an analysis of promise versus threat is necessary. The most meaningful difference lies in the ability of the United States to create a flexible response not based on military escalation (Gaddis 1982, 231). Promises have greater strategic value to the United States relative to the use of threats in that withholding a promised reward is not the same as punishing. By placing greater weight on the use of threats through negative sanctions, the United States is unable to account for a greater

range in outcomes that are largely affected by a variety of uncontrollable factors. If the United States uses promises to coerce North Korea, they do not necessarily have to expect any level of compliance, but has the incentive to do so (Baldwin 1985, 188-189).

This places less pressure on the United States to escalate with military responses or rely on a complex hedging strategy. Promises allow for hedging to take the form of scaling down a promise which can then be reworked to rectify previous errors or mistakes. The stakes are less intense and enables a greater likelihood for a rational response. The excessive use of threats as currently employed by the United States toward North Korea creates hedging strategies that are likely to increase tensions, and if the message is misperceived, the costs of error are far greater and may reach levels that cannot be de-escalated. When addressing the likelihood of success, positive sanctions are better options for situations where the chance of success is minimal, which is entirely accurate in American-North Korean relations.

Positive sanctions also allow for positive spillover effects in that initial cooperation, regardless of the strength of agreement, may enhance the willingness of an alleged adversary to cooperate in the future rather than engage in provocative actions as they realize the marginal benefits exceed costs of not cooperating. Negative sanctions tend to disrupt the potential for future negotiations and increase the incentive for adversaries to find methods to undermine imposed isolation (Baldwin 1971, 31). North Korea has not been deterred by increasingly strict sanctions and furthermore has sought partnerships with other rogue actors within the international system. The economic relationship between North Korea and Syria demonstrates the pressing need to act decisively to prevent increased coordination.

A recent report from a panel of United Nations experts links a clandestine economic partnership North Korea and Syria as a means for both to pursue illicit activities. North Korea supplied Syria with supplies and labor necessary to produce chemical weapons while Syria provided North Korea with hard currency needed to develop its nuclear and missile programs (Schwartz 2018). The negative sanctions applied toward both actors incentivized them to undermine this punishment through outside channels. The lack of enforcement among the international community further weakened the ability of these sanctions to be successful. To prevent further development and cooperation among these actors, the United States must recognize the need to coordinate multilaterally with the international community, ensure equal levels of enforcement responsibility are placed on states, and assure allies of our intentions.

In establishing a new approach toward North Korean nuclear aggression, the role of allies is essential to consider. By assuring allies of our intentions, the United States can pursue a new course of engagement knowing that allies will not further complicate matters or feel alienated by American actions. The United States should be engaged in constant communication ensuring our intentions to the global community (Taylor 2016, 4). In addition, the US must recognize China as an essential partner in easing relations with North Korea to create a foundation for future and more comprehensive negotiations.

The historical partnership between China and North Korea should be noted in that China continues to hold significant influence over North Korean activities. While this influence and partnership have undergone transformational periods that have separated their collective interests, Chinese compliance is essential as it still holds powerful economic influence over North Korea. Efforts to stop North Korean nuclear aggression would be significantly

strengthened through Chinese and American cooperation (Choi 2016, 65). Negotiations could be furthered with China as a partner in initial discussions to encourage and leverage North Korean compliance while assuring the Kim regime of American intentions.

Diplomatic negotiations allow for a greater range of options in the face of adversarial aggression. The United States should capitalize on opportunities provided by positive sanctions and increased coordination with China to further international stability. Although the interests of the US and China differ, the underlying need to stabilize the Korean Peninsula can further solidify a collective partnership between the two actors. Negotiations can essentially begin by both the United States and North Korea initiating a dialogue that indicates a willingness to discuss problems in their relations, and future discussions can expand to include other significant actors involved and affected by these actions, similar to the framework of the Six Party Talks (Kong 2017, 4). By including outside parties to negotiations, North Korea can be held to increased standards of accountability. Coordination among the international community will diversify responsibility and establish a better foundation to deter North Korean nuclear aggression.

## VII. Conclusion

The de-escalation of North Korean relations requires a proactive American approach that recognizes the value in the sacrifice of short-term initial interests in favor of long-term strategic gain. Methods of coercion applied through the use of positive sanctions and economic interdependence will ultimately prove to be more successful in reducing current tensions. The role of perception in how the Kim regime understands the international system and the actors operating within it should form the basis for the construction of American deterrence

communications. To assure both North Korea and our allies, the United States must send clear signals unimpeded by contradictory statements emanating from various levels of government.

Too much emphasis on complex military strategies that rely on massive American military and nuclear build-up will lead to miscalculations by the Kim regime and increased potential for conflict. Diplomatic channels should first be engaged through active recognition of North Korea as a legitimate actor within the international system and therefore accountable to the responsibilities of this status. Military strength should not be over-emphasized, but should act as insurance should deterrence fail. The United States holds a clear advantage in the ability to use force relative to North Korea, but this force should be used to legitimize diplomatic channels that would enable greater latitude for negotiation. Through understanding the North Korean perception of international security, the United States can best create a coherent policy approach capable of ensuring global stability and effective deterrence of North Korean nuclear aggression.

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