

Inside the White House: The Future of US-DPRK Policy

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For the incoming Trump administration, the challenges posed by North Korea are enormous. Pyongyang already has the capability to strike its neighbors with nuclear warheads — and in a few years will be able to hit the United States. Before the US presidential election the prospect was for a sharp increase in tensions and a major confrontation, perhaps actual war. Trump's victory provides breathing space and a chance to rethink American policy along more realistic lines — freezing North Korea's strategic programs, reducing tensions on the peninsula, and expanding US-DPRK and inter-Korean contacts. Seoul also has an opportunity to reformulate its unification policy and make a greater contribution to the alliance.

Key Words: North Korea, missiles, nuclear weapons, Kim Jong Un, Perry Process, Trump administration

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I. Introduction

Before Trump's win, the United States seemed headed for a sharp increase in tensions and a major confrontation with North Korea. Hillary Clinton's anticipated victory seemed certain to result in stepped-pressure on Pyongyang, which, depending on its reaction, could have led to an actual war. Trump made many contradictory statements about North Korea during the campaign and the overall direction of his policy toward Pyongyang is still unclear. The ambiguity is amplified by his lack of foreign policy experience, the uncertain dynamics of his cabinet, and his often improvisational style.

The victory of Donald Trump caught everyone off guard. Whether Democrat or Republican, most experienced foreign policy hands expected Hillary Clinton to prevail and lined up against Trump, many of them put off by his *ad hominem* attacks and lack of knowledge about foreign policy issues.

Trump will arrive in the White House without a set ideological stance or foreign policy agenda. The only constant has been his tendency toward neo-isolationism and intense focus on national interest. Throughout the campaign, Trump voiced doubts about the benefits of US alliances, especially those with an asymmetry of burdens and responsibilities. Besides having little tolerance for perceived "free riders," Trump is skeptical of commitments that no longer seem to have a clear rationale, especially those he perceives to be relics of the Cold War. It is clear from his statements that he sees Washington's traditional "alliance management" approach to security as having fostered dependency and created potential "moral hazards" such as their expectation that if they behave irresponsibly and get into trouble then Washington will bail them out. As his cabinet and policies are shaping up, it appears that his approach overall will be more realistic, hard-nosed, and improvisational than that of any other US president in modern history.

If his campaign statements are any indication, Trump will place a low priority on human rights. His campaign rhetoric on Islam and illegal immigrants was far from politically correct. Ironically, North

Koreans may share his views on some of these issues. However, he will have to take into account the sizable human rights constituency in the US Congress. Overall, his potential de-emphasis of human rights may open up some space for improvement in US-DPRK relations.

Trump, who has little experience in foreign policy, may be inclined to rely on his charisma and deal-making skills to fearlessly tackle difficult issues like North Korea. His business experience may make him instinctively want to understand the concerns of others and try to establish a degree of rapport with adversaries first before resorting to confrontation. This inclination will be reinforced by his desire to distinguish his policies from those of the Obama administration. Overall, Trump is likely to be more spontaneous, free-wheeling, and unpredictable — a quality he prides himself on and sees as a useful negotiation tactic, at least in the market.

Of course, whether states and inter-state relations are analogous to corporations and market dealings and amenable to similar management approaches is an important question. As the essential task of states is to construct and maintain those areas of life that markets do not, or if they do, often fail, suggests that the applicability of this experience may fall short of what it takes when playing hard ball with dictators or authoritarian leaders, or even with allied market democracies for whom values only partially overlap with those espoused by the United States government.

There was a lot of armchair psychoanalysis about Trump's personality and behavior during the campaign. His twitter feeds provided a real-time look into his emotional state — with little self-censorship or concern about political correctness. Many of the psychological assessments written about him centered on his supposed narcissism and alpha-male traits. Trump employs flattery and light banter in his interactions with others — a characteristic Russian President Vladimir Putin picked up on and sought to exploit. At the same time, Trump often came across as thin-skinned, responding on Twitter to perceived slights as the world looked on in amusement or, in the case of diplomats who might have to work for him, with alarm.

Trump also showed himself to be an astute judge of personalities

and able to quickly size up situations. His off-the-cuff assessment of North Korean leader Kim Jong Un as “someone we can’t play games with because he really does have missiles and he really does have nukes (Evans, 2016) is a case in point. Rather than type-casting him along conventional lines, Trump focused on Kim’s ruthlessness and consolidation of power at a very young age, in face of opposition from a powerful figures, including his uncle, who rose to the top under Kim’s father and grandfather. Trump did not miss the point that the younger Kim was a proven leader who has come out on top in these power struggles.

Uncertainty surrounds many aspects of Trump’s foreign policy. Unlike most previous presidents, whose positions were well known before taking office, Trump is a shape-shifter who defies easy classification. As one analyst put it, figuring out his ideology is like “trying to nail Jell-O to a wall.” (Enten, 2016) Throughout the campaign, Trump was extremely conservative on issues like immigration and gun control, moderate on some social issues, and progressive or left-leaning on trade. Further complicating an appraisal of Trump’s ideology is that he has already modified many of the positions he took during the campaign. Finally, there is the question of the extent to which he will grow into his new job.

II. Trump’s National Security Team

Trump’s picks for his national security team will tell us a lot. Most of the foreign policy establishment vociferously opposed him during the campaign. Although many are now trying to reconcile, Trump is scrambling to put together his team of advisors apparently without much consultation with Washington’s power players. Working without a large organizational machine to address the transition and political appointees, he has been forced to invest a lot of time in interviewing a diverse group of candidates ranging from early supporters to “never-Trump” Republican heavyweights, and everything in between.

During his business career, Trump surrounded himself with strong individuals who often had views that diverged with his own and each other. He seemed to do this both to generate creative tension but also to make sure that significant differences were pushed up to his level for decision.

On many issues, Trump's ultimate stance will depend on staffing patterns that are still in flux. Trump's initial appointments were people who worked with him during the campaign — most notably retired Army general Michael Flynn who was named as his national security adviser. Although the National Security Advisor position does not require Senate confirmation, Flynn could be problematic. His tenure at the Defense Intelligence Agency was marred by controversy over his excessively top-down leadership style, his animosity towards Iran, and his alleged disdain for contrary opinions. His experience was primarily in picking targets at the tactical level rather than strategic thinking. The traditional role of the national security advisor is to ensure that divergent opinions and recommendations are presented to the President for decision (Rosenberg et al., 2016). Whether Flynn is able to serve in this manner, or instead uses his position to serve as gatekeeper to keep out views from the Oval House that are incompatible with his own, remains to be seen

Trump chose Republican congressman Mike Pompeo from Kansas to head the Central Intelligence Agency. He was first in his class at West Point and the editor of *Harvard Law Review*. He is a three-term Congressman from Ohio and a leading conservative voice on national security issues. Trump tapped South Carolina Governor Nikki Haley as U.N. ambassador. She was a supporter of Marco Rubio during the primary campaign and a strong critic of candidate Trump. Retired Marine Corps general James Mattis was named for Secretary of Defense. He has bipartisan support and should be able to get Congressional exemption from 7-year cooling-off period legally required. His name was put forward as an alternative to Trump by some conservatives in a bid to derail Trump's candidacy, yet he was hired.

The list of people he is interviewing for Secretary of State keeps expanding. Apparently unsatisfied with his initial choices, increasingly

aware of the importance of the job, or just wishing to prolong suspense, well into December 2016, Trump had interviewed several batches of candidates for Secretary. Among the new names are former Utah Governor Jon Huntsman, ExxonMobil Chief Executive Officer Rex Tillerson, and retired admiral James Stavridis. Also rumored as of time of writing to be in the running are California Republican Congressman Dana Rohrabacher and Democratic Senator Joe Manchin. Earlier candidates reportedly still under consideration include former Massachusetts governor Mitt Romney, Republican Senator Bob Corker, former New York mayor Rudolph Giuliani, retired general David Petraeus, and former UN ambassador John Bolton (Borger, 2016).

It is unknown who will ultimately provide strategic vision on North Korea. Trump himself has sent contradictory messages. Even after Trump completes his security team, there is the question of the coordination mechanism to set overall policy direction. It will be a while before the dynamics of this diverse set of advisors establishes itself. Who will rise to the top among this team of rivals is anyone's guess.

Thus, allies, partners, friends, and enemies of the United States are presented with massive uncertainty as to the foreign policy of the Trump Administration, with the possibility of radical departures from the past. Trump understands that markets like predictability. It's not clear that he understands that for the most part, states like stability and order, not revolutionary change or challenges the status quo.

III. First Test Likely North Korea

North Korea may well be Trump's first major test. If his litigious business style is any guide, Trump will not respond well to a direct challenge from Kim Jong Un aimed at testing his resolve. There is some reason to think that Kim Jong-un understands this and will not directly confront Trump at the outset. The smart move for Kim would be to lie low and observe Trump's behavior at the start. Contrary to popular perception, North Korea is not just a provocation machine. Its

foreign policy moves are often reactive, even cautious, and are calculated to send signals, or even to boost internal cohesion.

At some point early in the Trump administration, it is likely that there will be a major review of North Korea policy. The Obama administration's policy of strategic patience is almost universally regarded as a failure and there is a consensus that Trump will need a new approach.

Hillary Clinton campaigned on the promise to greatly increase pressure on North Korea in the hope that this would force the regime to abandon its nuclear and missile programs. Before Trump's victory, it was a given that both Seoul and Washington would greatly increase the pressure on North Korea — with all options, including even pre-emption, being on the table (Shorrock, 2016). Her foreign policy team seemed oblivious to the problems this approach would face in getting a Chinese buy-in, how difficult it would have been to sell to South Korea, and the real danger that pressing the Kim regime into a corner might prompt it to strike out, as a tightening American trade restrictions on Imperial Japan did in 1941.

Trump's election at least opens the possibility of a major shift in US policy on North Korea. Trump has come down on both sides of the North Korea issue during the campaign, suggesting that he would be willing to talk to Kim Jong Un without preconditions but also that the best approach would be to lean on China to pressure North Korea into giving up its nuclear weapons, a view in line with the Obama administration's policy but heedless of the complexities of the PRC-DPRK relationship (Power, 2016).

Pyongyang's behavior during the presidential transition will have a big impact. Trump likely will respond sharply if Pyongyang conducts nuclear and missile tests to lay down markers for the new administration. However, rather than another round of "provocations" to test the new administration, it is more likely that he will try to engage Washington diplomatically. In recent bilateral Track II contacts, North Korean representatives expressed their frustration with the Obama administration and their hope to reengage without preconditions. North Korea's preference would probably be to begin

this process behind-the-scenes. In return for a relaxation in US pressure, they might offer to freeze nuclear and missile tests. Though it is a tougher nut to crack, they might also agree to freeze satellite launches. But this agreement would involve technical matters that would have to be worked out in detail ahead of time in expert-level talks. Given uncertainty about Trump and the possibility of a progressive government emerging in Seoul, Pyongyang may adopt a wait-and-see posture rather than providing the occasion for another “North wind” with unpredictable consequences.

As North Korea assesses its strategy, it may try to play a card in the form of the release of three American detainees, including a University of Virginia student who stole a propaganda poster while visiting Pyongyang. A precedent is the release at the start of the Obama administration of two female American journalists imprisoned for illegally entering North Korea. Despite extremely tense relations following the DPRK’s second nuclear test and a series of missile launches, North Korea saw an advantage in engaging the new administration. After a series of secret meetings, Kim Jong Il agreed to release the journalists to Bill Clinton, his preferred interlocutor, provided he visited Pyongyang. Kim welcomed Clinton with all the fanfare befitting a state visit — which played well both domestically and internationally.

IV. South Korean Political Drama

Trump has a new problem in Korea — President Park Geun Hye’s accelerating political collapse. He will find it difficult to strike the right note in dealing with an ally as damaged by cronyism and corruption scandals as President Park. Contrary to expectations, it is her presidency rather than Kim Jong Un’s rule that suddenly seems in danger of collapse.

Park’s policy on North Korea initially was surprisingly moderate — especially for a conservative leader. With everything that has transpired, it is forgotten that she had long held pro-engagement views.

While still a junior lawmaker, she visited North Korea in her capacity as chair of the Europe-Korea Foundation but with the backing of the Roh Moo Hyun government. She reportedly had a four-hour private meeting with Kim Jong Il and was able to get Kim's agreement to a range of matters important to the South Korean government.

The "Trustpolitik" policy Park originally advocated towards North Korea was a sharp departure from the hardline policy of her predecessor, Lee Myung-bak. It envisioned a step-by-step process, based on a "functionalist model" of integration that aimed at gradually building trust. Reminiscent of Kim Dae Jung's sunshine policy, it also recognized that, from time to time, it would be necessary to fall back on a hard-line policy.

After being elected president, Park continued on this path until her 2014 Dresden speech (Frank, 2014). Predicated on a German model of unification through absorption, the speech had remarkably little to say about trust building. Its overall impact on North Korean elites could only have been to harden their resistance to South Korean-led unification. Recent revelations about Choi Soon-sil's role in touching up Park's speeches has spurred speculation that her close friend and confidant may have been responsible for the tone and message of the Dresden address, which represented a shift from Park's previous unification rhetoric.

President Park Geun-hye has now lost most of her political support. She may be forced to resign soon or even impeached if the non-mainstream faction joins the opposition in supporting an impeachment vote. If impeached, Park would be suspended immediately from official duties. With no established mechanism to facilitate a leadership transfer, a power vacuum could persist for months. Park has not been presiding over cabinet meetings and was even forced to bow out of the APEC summit in Peru, instead dispatching her prime minister. In the still unfolding situation, President-elect Trump phoned Park a day after his election to assure her of Washington's continued support — a gesture that ordinarily would seem perfectly normal, but given the gathering momentum for Park's impeachment, looked exceedingly odd.

It was only a few months ago the Park administration was saying that North Korea was wobbling and headed for collapse. Now the shoe is on the other foot, with Park's presidency crumbling. The change in her designation by the prosecution from "witness" to "co-conspirator" was a turning point. Even Park's own faction in the ruling party is urging her to bow out gracefully rather than putting the country through a prolonged and disruptive impeachment process. Regardless of how and when she goes, a power vacuum has now been created with Park reduced to a politically "vegetative state."

With her leadership fatally weakened, Park will be unable to have much influence on the new Trump administration's thinking on North Korea. Any interim leader who emerges will be in a weak position to represent the country's interests internationally — especially in comparison with Japan, as the Korean public is already keenly aware. Ironically, given that the United States and South Korea have often found themselves at odds over their respective North Korea policies, the paralysis of the ROK government may open space for the Trump Administration to reorient its approach unencumbered by South Korean concerns that it will be entangled in American confrontations with the North or left out in the cold by US-North Korean rapprochement. The risk is that the situation in the South may also convince the North that it can push hard on the South in ways that force Trump to respond in the harshest possible manner, foreclosing a major potential shift in US policy toward the North.

V. Lessons from the Past

Just two months before the US presidential election in September 2016, North Korea conducted its fifth nuclear test, its biggest yet. Experts believe that North Korea has now accumulated enough fissile material for 20-30 bombs and can produce about seven bombs-worth of material annually going forward. It probably has mastered the technology to mount nuclear warheads on its short-range and medium-range missiles. Doing so would give it the ability to hit targets with

nuclear weapons anywhere in South Korea, Japan, and Northeast Asia, greatly complicating the military picture. In five or so years, it will be able to fire a nuclear-tipped missile that can reach the continental United States. Amid all the hand-wringing about these developments, little attention has been paid to the fact it was the United States that first developed nuclear weapons and has relied on them routinely since then for deterrence.

The latest nuclear test is a sobering reminder of how difficult it is to deal with North Korea — the only country in almost two decades to test nuclear weapons. Given the continuing importance and urgency of the issue, it is worth considering in some detail the history of US policy towards North Korea. For over three decades, the United States has seesawed between engagement and confrontation in dealing with North Korea.

It was the Reagan Administration that first attempted to engage North Korea 1988 with its so-called “modest initiative.” Concerned that North Korea might violently disrupt the Seoul Olympics, the United States declared that if Pyongyang refrained from doing so, Washington would expand economic, cultural, and economic exchanges with North Korea and permit substantive discussions between diplomats of the two sides. As in the case of the Soviet Union, Reagan apparently believed in the power of trade and economic opening to gradually erode the controls of totalitarian governments.

Continuing on this path, President George H. W. Bush tried to reshape the Cold War strategic landscape by announcing plans to unilaterally withdraw forward-deployed US naval and land-based tactical nuclear weapons worldwide, including several hundred in South Korea.

The Clinton years saw mounting tensions as North Korea accelerated its missile program and declared it was withdrawing from the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT) and IAEA. The United States was on the verge of deciding whether to attack North Korea’s nuclear facilities when former US President Jimmy Carter visited Pyongyang in June 1994. Carter defused the crisis by striking a deal with Kim Il Sung under which Pyongyang would “freeze” its nuclear weapons

program and resume high-level talks with the United States. Kim's sudden death three weeks later put this process on hold.

After four months of negotiations in Geneva, the Clinton Administration successfully concluded the 1994 Agreed Framework under which North Korea closed its Yongbyon nuclear facilities in exchange for a promise to deliver heavy fuel oil, phase out sanctions, and furnish more proliferation resistant light water reactors (LWRs) for energy production. The LWRs would be financed and constructed through the Korean Peninsula Energy Development Organization (KEDO), a multinational consortium.

The United States also promised to move toward normalized economic and diplomatic relations.

Similar to Obama's Iran deal, the Agreed Framework was structured as an executive agreement not requiring approval from Congress. Shortly after it was signed, control of Congress shifted to the Republican party, making the Agreed Framework a "political orphan." Many suspected that North Korea was pursuing a covert nuclear weapons program. One dispute after another emerged with Pyongyang over its missile programs. Newly in control of Congress and sensing the agreement was vulnerable, Republicans balked at appropriating funds and easing sanctions. Meanwhile, information filtering into Washington about North Korea's missile progress and exports created a new source of tension. Several rounds of missile talks were held but failed — the main sticking point being North Korea's demand for compensation in return for suspending missile tests and exports. Frustrated by the lack of progress, North Korea in 1998 created a new crisis by reactivating its Yongbyon nuclear complex.

Feeling heat from the new Republican-controlled Congress, President Clinton ordered a comprehensive review of North Korean policy led by former Secretary of Defense William Perry. Dubbed the "Perry Process," the review began in November 1998 with meetings with Congressional leaders followed by several rounds of intensive consultations with academic and governmental experts followed by discussions with leaders in the region.

With this spadework done, Perry travelled to Pyongyang In May

1999 to meet with North Korean officials. He proposed a step-by-step improvement of relations as Pyongyang addressed US security concerns. Perry delivered a personal letter from President Clinton to Kim Jong Il, although he was unable to directly meet with him. The deal Perry outlined was that if North Korea resolved US concerns over nuclear and ballistic missile activities, Washington would ease sanctions, normalize relations, and provide some form of security guarantee.

After Perry's Pyongyang visit, things moved at a fast clip. In talks in Berlin a few months later, North Korea agreed to a moratorium on testing long-range missiles while bilateral talks continued. The United States agreed to ease economic sanctions and continue high-level discussions. A few days after the Berlin meeting, Perry submitted his review to Congress and released an unclassified version to the public. The report recommended "a new, comprehensive and integrated" approach that would improve relations in a "step-by-step and reciprocal fashion."

Reciprocating Perry's visit, Kim Jong Il in October 2000 dispatched his right-hand man to Washington as a special envoy. Vice Marshall Jo Myong Rok reaffirmed Kim's commitment to improving relations and personally delivered Kim's letter to President Clinton after meeting with the secretaries of state and defense. The culmination of the Perry process was a Joint Communiqué, with Washington pledging political reconciliation and Pyongyang a moratorium on missile tests. The United States and the DPRK also reiterated their commitment to the October 1994 Agreed Framework. The statement said that Secretary of State Madeline Albright would soon visit Pyongyang in advance of a possible visit by President Clinton. Shortly afterwards, Albright made a two-day visit to Pyongyang where she met with Kim Jong Il. They reaffirmed earlier understandings on missiles, nuclear transparency, normalization of relations, and a visit of President Clinton to Pyongyang. In the end, US domestic politics intervened and Clinton's planned visit to North Korea was cancelled with the too-close-to-call 2000 presidential election still up in the air and multiple court challenges underway involving the Florida vote.

Once in office, President George W. Bush proceeded to jettison engagement and adopted a policy that amounted to regime change. In his 2002 State of the Union Address, Bush lumped North Korea together with Iran and Iraq as members of an "Axis of Evil." Coming in the wake of 9/11 terrorist attack, the inclusion of North Korea was an attempt to avoid singling out Islamic states as Bush tried to put together a broad military coalition against Iraq.

Prompted by North Korea's declaration of withdrawal from the Non-proliferation Treaty (NPT), the Six-Party Talks began in August of 2003. The talks aimed at ending North Korea's nuclear program through negotiations among China, the United States, North and South Korea, Japan, and Russia. After rollercoaster ups and downs, North Korea agreed in September 2005 to abandon "all nuclear weapons and existing nuclear programs" and return to the NPT. This led to a suspension of operations at the Yongbyon nuclear complex and the return of IAEA inspectors. The other parties recognized North Korea's right to peaceful uses of nuclear energy and agreed to discuss provision of a LWR "at an appropriate time." The United States and South Korea both affirmed that they would not deploy nuclear weapons on the peninsula, and stated, along with Russia, China, and Japan, their willingness to supply North Korea with energy aid. The United States and Japan, further, committed themselves to working to normalize relations with North Korea.

The negotiating climate deteriorated sharply, however, when the United States announced sanctions on North Korean trading companies and Banco Delta Asia of Macau for illicit activities and froze North Korean accounts there. Pyongyang responded by boycotting the talks and conducting multiple missile tests. It followed up with its first nuclear test on October 9, 2006.

Talks picked up again in mid-2008 when Pyongyang made more concessions, providing the United States with details of its nuclear program and moving ahead with dismantlement of the Yongbyon facility. The Bush administration responded by easing sanctions and removing the regime from the State Sponsors of Terrorism.

But Pyongyang failed to agree to a verification protocol for its

nuclear program by the end of Bush's term, straining US-North Korea relations. By the end of 2008, the regime had restarted its program and barred nuclear inspectors.

Starting with the best of intentions by offering negotiations in his inaugural speech, President Obama wound up following a path similar to his predecessor. Multiple missile tests followed along with a second nuclear test in May 2009, forcing Obama to alter course. North Korea continued to act up throughout 2010, sinking a South Korean navy ship and shelling a South Korean island near the DMZ.

Following revelations by Stanford University scientist Siegfried Hecker of a large-scale uranium enrichment facility and construction of a light water reactor, the Obama administration decided to re-engage diplomatically. It held three rounds of talks with North Korea beginning in July 2011 and culminating in the ill-fated "Leap Day Agreement."

Unveiled on February 29, 2012 — only two months after Kim Jong Il's death, the agreement provided for a moratorium on missile launches, nuclear tests, and nuclear activities at Yongbyon. The United States, for its part, promised to release 240,000 metric tons of food aid it had placed on hold. The agreement fell apart within weeks when Pyongyang conducted a failed satellite launch.

Refusing again to distinguish between satellite launches and missile tests, Washington portrayed the launch as violating the Leap Day Agreement and pulled the plug. The administration neither understood nor cared how impossible it would have been for Kim, at this early stage of his rule, to be seen by elites as abandoning Pyongyang's space program and giving in to Washington.

Following the Leap Day Agreement's collapse, Washington fell back on a policy of passivity euphemistically referred to as "strategic patience." This meant that the United States avoided engaging diplomatically as North Korea accelerated its nuclear and missile programs.

VI. Dual Power Transitions: Crises or Opportunities?

As noted above, worrisome as the collapse of Park Geun-hye's government and the advent of the Trump administration may seem, this new situation could provide new opportunities. Once Seoul emerges from its political crisis, it can begin to think seriously about stabilizing the security situation and restoring inter-Korean contacts. A new administration will have a chance to have a greater say in formulating policy towards North Korea. Given the collapse of inter-Korean contacts under Park, it is likely to focus on rebuilding economic, cultural, and social ties (Im, 2016).

In Washington too, there are signs that engagement may get a fresh look. In contrast to Clinton's advisors, John Bolton, a Bush-era hardliner often mentioned as a possible Trump cabinet appointee, recently told visiting Korean legislators that the chance of Washington launching a preemptive strike on North Korea's nuclear and missile facilities was "zero percent." Bolton reasoned that ensuing North Korean retaliation would result in total destruction of Seoul (Kim, 2016).

Even if he wants to make a fresh start with North Korea, Trump will respond poorly if the situation develops in such a way that he perceives that he is being directly challenged. There is some danger that Trump will too readily accept the conventional wisdom on North Korea — attributing everything to the regime's inherent "badness."

VII. Deploy, Postpone or Abandon THAAD

One thorny issue that will come up at the beginning of the Trump administration is the Terminal High Altitude Area Defense System (THAAD). Though many Republican heavyweights are true believers, Trump is reportedly no fan of land-based missile defense. His skepticism stems from the cost of the system, incredibly short response times, the ease with which the system can be overwhelmed by mass attacks, and difficulty in dealing with easily applied counter-

measures. In campaign speeches, he talked instead about modernizing naval cruisers with missile defense capabilities. China and Russia are both adamantly opposed to the system as upsetting the regional strategic balance. If he wants better relations with them, Trump could be inclined to scrap plans for deployment. The direction of Trump's policy on North Korea will ultimately influence where he goes on THAAD. If he manages to improve relations with North Korea, the urgency to deploy THAAD will lessen. Given his personality and business background, he will certainly see the potential value of THAAD as bargaining chip with China regardless whether he decides to use it (Chong, 2016). If the political complexion of the South Korean government changes, postponing or abandoning THAAD may also be welcome in the South Korean polity.

VIII. How will North Korea Respond to Trump?

North Korea's behavior during the transition will have a big influence on the Trump administration. Its last major hostile act toward South Korea was in August 2015 when two ROK soldiers on patrol near the DMZ were maimed when they stepped on a box mine. So far Pyongyang has not taken any direct action to exploit the unsettled political situation in South Korea. Although there has been an increase in the tempo of its missile and nuclear tests, this seems more like part of a normal development program. The timing of the September nuclear test suggests that it might have been primarily intended as a parting shot at the outgoing Obama administration. In recent months, Pyongyang seems to have adopted a wait-and-see mode looking toward the change of administration.

However remote, there is always a chance that Kim Jong Un could be emboldened by South Korean political chaos and his missile and nuclear achievements. Overconfidence could lead Kim to try to do something on the unification front by force — although that would result in the mutual destruction of both regimes.

A far more likely scenario is that North Korea will try to engage

Washington. In multiple private dialogues with US interlocutors in recent months, Pyongyang has signalled that it wants improved relations with Washington and is prepared to slow its strategic programs if necessary. As in the past, it will want to discuss its space launch programs at the expert level. It will probably want a downsizing and reduction in the frequency of US-ROK joint military exercises as well as a suspension of B-52 overflights and other demonstrations of American military force that it perceives to be excessive and provocative.

XI. Regional Dynamics in Flux

Trump made it clear during the campaign that he wants allies to share more of the burden for the forward deployment of US forces. This is a complicated issue as stationing US forces closer to the action provides benefits to the United States. Despite grouching about cost sharing during the campaign, Trump has said nothing since the election about withdrawing troops or downsizing the US military presence — and is unlikely to do so given the salience of the North Korean nuclear issue. Moreover, “bringing them home” to the United States would be far more expensive than keeping them in Korea, unless he were to demobilize them — which is contrary to his expressed desire to build up the military.

Trump certainly appreciates Asia’s economic and strategic weight. He knows it is a major center of world economic power, accounting for some 40 percent of world economic output, much larger than the shares of the United States and the European Union. Trump talked about a decades-long, 30 percent expansion in the size of the navy to 350 ships, so disengagement does not seem to be in the cards (Larter, 2016).

During the campaign, he bashed China, blaming it for currency manipulation, American job losses, and snowballing deficits — warning about a trade war. These themes played well in swing states in the rust belt. Trump also talked about using economic pressure to convince China to persuade North Korea to abandon its missile and

nuclear weapons programs. Some people say that his acceptance of a congratulatory phone call from the president of Taiwan was intended to create more potential leverage to pressure Beijing. Balancing against this, Trump sent a much friendlier signal by naming Iowa governor Terry Branstad as ambassador to China. Brandstad has maintained a warm personal friendship with Chinese leader Xi Jinping since the two met thirty years ago when Xi visited Iowa as a provincial official to study American agriculture. China immediately welcomed the announcement, praising Branstad as “old friend of the Chinese people” (Appelbaum, 2016).

Trump should know by now that any strategy to solve the North Korean problem must involve China. He will soon discover, however, that China’s relationship with North Korea is fraught with tension and based not on any affinity but a hard-headed calculation of national interest.

Beijing’s worst fear is a collapse of North Korea, creating a flood of refugees pouring into China leading to unified Korea under the protection of the United States. Beijing is committed to keeping North Korea afloat as a buffer state. Given these considerations, Trump could eventually move toward a more nuanced position on China, and seek a strategic accommodation. More specifically, as one Trump insider suggests, the United States could accept China’s political and social structure in exchange for China’s commitment not to challenge the status quo in Asia (Woolsey, 2016).

Japan was also a target of Trump’s campaign rhetoric, mostly complaints that it was free-riding on defense. Prime Minister Abe moved swiftly to patch up any awkwardness by reaching out to Trump while traveling to Peru for the APEC summit. It is not known what the two leaders discussed in their meeting but it is almost certain that it was more than just pleasantries. Security issues in the region, Trump’s stance on Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP), and cost sharing probably were discussed. Given Trump’s interest in Russia, Abe may have brought up his efforts to improve relations with Moscow, including setting up a joint \$900 billion investment fund (Kim, 2016). If Trump improves relations with Moscow, it would

make it easier for Abe to do so as well, without worrying too much about Washington's possible reaction.

Abe may also have brought up the perennial issue of Chinese maritime expansion. He later characterized the meeting as "very candid," saying he was confident that Washington and Tokyo would be able to maintain a "relationship of trust."

Russia welcomed the election of Trump and expressed guarded optimism about an improvement in relations (Kofman, 2016). Since the collapse of Six-Party Talks, Russia has been sidelined in Asia and probably wants to get back in the game. During the campaign Trump made a number of positive comments about Russian president Vladimir Putin. Both sides have said that boosting ties between the superpowers would be a good thing. This could become important if there is progress on the nuclear issue and revived interest in infrastructure development in the China-Russia-North Korea triangle.

X. Concluding Remarks

For the incoming Trump administration, the challenges are enormous. As Kim Jong Un continues to consolidate his leadership and stabilize the economy, a North Korea collapse scenario is unlikely. Like it or not, Pyongyang probably will endure and will become a nuclear armed state with the capability to hit all its neighbors with missiles carrying nuclear warheads. As North Korea's nuclear arsenal grows, so will the potential for accidents and miscalculations. Putting excessive pressure on North Korea runs the risk of creating internal turmoil that could loosen control of its nuclear facilities. It could also conceivably tempt the leadership to offer to sell nuclear materials or technology. The unfolding political crisis in South Korea, which sooner or later seems certain to result in President Park Geun-hye's resignation or impeachment, adds a whole new level of complexity and challenges for the new administration.

The United States needs to set realistic expectations for what might be achievable with North Korea rather than insisting on denu-

clearization in absolute terms. A set of realistic expectations might include freezing, North Korea's strategic programs, reducing tensions on the peninsula, and expanding US-DPRK and inter-Korean contacts.

If anything can be said for sure about Trump, it is that he is intensely transactional and sees life as a series of negotiations. After their first meeting, Obama noted that Trump is a pragmatist, not an ideologue. He also said that Trump is entering office "with fewer set, hard-and-fast policy prescriptions than a lot of other presidents." He observed that Trump's pragmatism can serve him well, so long as he surrounds himself with "good people," and a "clear sense of direction."

Along with the near-collapse of President Park Geun-hye's government in Seoul, Trump's upset victory provides some breathing space and a chance to rethink American policy toward Korea. Based on his personality and operating style as a businessman, the early consensus is that his administration will pursue a more realistic and transactional approach towards North Korea based on national interest. Many of the traditional shibboleths of American foreign policy could recede in importance or fall by the wayside, including democratization, human rights, and nation-building.

Time, of course, will tell.

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