# TDI---Aff-Neg---North Korea

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### 1AC---Non-Proliferation

#### Advantage one is Non-Proliferation.

#### Tensions in Northeast Asia are high.

Rising ‘24 – [David Rising, covers regional Asia-Pacific stories for The Associated Press. “As North Korean and Chinese threats rise, US looks to lock in defense partnerships with Asian allies.” Associated Press, https://apnews.com/article/north-korea-china-navy-aircraft-carrier-exercise-8efda0f84ab856912faf2e0d9c9dbf56#, June 28, 2024] TDI

Under Biden, Washington is seeking to solidify its system of alliances, both with increasingly sophisticated exercises and diplomatic agreements, Graham said.

“It’s obviously a U.S. attempt to try and mesh their alliances as positively as possible, not just given the challenge of their adversaries, but also the uncertainty around a second Trump administration,” he said. “They’re trying to institutionalize as many of these habits of cooperation while they can.”

Tensions with North Korea are at their highest point in years, with the pace of Kim Jong Un’s weapons programs intensifying, despite heavy international sanctions.

China, meantime, has been undertaking a massive military buildup of both nuclear and conventional weapons, and now has the world’s largest navy. It claims both the self-governing island of Taiwan and virtually the entirety of the South China Sea as its own territory, and has increasingly turned to its military to press those claims.

China and North Korea have also been among Russia’s closest allies in its war against Ukraine, while Russia and China are also both key allies for North Korea, as well as the military leaders of Myanmar who seized power in 2021 and are facing ever-stiffer resistance in that country’s civil war.

In Pyongyang this month, Russian President Vladimir Putin and Kim concluded a mutual defense pact, agreeing to come to the other’s aid in the event of an attack, rattling others in the region.

Despite a greater number of ships overall, China still only has three aircraft carriers compared to the U.S. fleet’s 11 — probably the most effective tool a country has to bring vast amounts of power to bear at a great distance from home.

China’s advantage, however, is that its primary concern is the nearby waters of the Indo-Pacific, while Washington’s global focus means that its naval assets are spread widely. Following the exercises in the East China Sea with Japan and South Korea, the Roosevelt is due to sail to the Middle East to help protect ships against attacks by Yemen’s Houthi rebels.

#### Economic pressure erodes non-proliferation efforts, prompting an East Asian arms race and miscalculation on the Korean Peninsula.

Eyina & Anyalebechi ’24 – [Nkatomba Nkatomba Eyina, PhD, Department of Political Science, Ignatius Ajuru University of Education, Nigeria; Shammah Mahakwe Anyalebechi, PhD, Department of Political Science, Rivers State University, Nigeria. "DETERRENCE, SECURITY DILEMMA AND THE PROLIFERATION OF NUCLEAR WEAPONS IN THE INTERNATIONAL SYSTEM: A STUDY OF NORTH KOREA AND PAKISTAN." European Journal of Humanities and Educational Advancements, May 5, 2024] TDI

International Responses and Security Dilemmas: The international response to North Korea’s nuclear program has significantly influenced its deterrence strategy. Sanctions and diplomatic isolation imposed by the United Nations and various individual states have aimed to curtail North Korea's nuclear ambitions. However, these measures have also reinforced the regime's narrative of external hostility and victimisation (Park, 2017). This external pressure has arguably intensified North Korea's resolve to maintain and advance its nuclear capabilities as a crucial means of ensuring its security. North Korea’s leadership uses these international sanctions as evidence of a hostile world that seeks to undermine its sovereignty, thereby justifying the continuation and expansion of its nuclear program.

Moreover, the security dilemma is clearly visible in the region, as North Korea's nuclear advancements prompt neighbouring countries, such as Japan and South Korea, to enhance their own military capabilities. This situation risks triggering an arms race in East Asia, where increased military spending and capability development among these nations could further destabilize the region (Friedman, 2017). For example, Japan has increased its defense budget and pursued missile defense systems in response to North Korea’s missile tests, while South Korea has strengthened its military alliance with the United States and developed its own advanced military technologies.

The ongoing cycle of action and reaction among these countries highlights the complex interplay of deterrence and the security dilemma. North Korea perceives the military enhancements of its neighbours as additional threats, which further fuels its justification for nuclear development. This reciprocal dynamic underscores the challenges of achieving long-term stability and peace in the region. The international community's efforts to curb North Korea's nuclear ambitions, while intended to enhance global security, have thus also contributed to a more entrenched and determined nuclear posture by Pyongyang (Park, 2017; Friedman, 2017).

In addition to regional security dynamics, global non-proliferation efforts have been impacted by North Korea’s actions. The effectiveness of international treaties and agreements aimed at preventing the spread of nuclear weapons is called into question when a state like North Korea successfully develops and tests nuclear weapons despite widespread condemnation and sanctions. This situation undermines the credibility of international norms against nuclear proliferation and could encourage other states to pursue similar paths, believing that the benefits of nuclear deterrence outweigh the potential costs imposed by the international community (Park, 2017).

Through these actions and reactions, North Korea aims to solidify its nuclear deterrent posture and ensure that it remains a credible and formidable power on the global stage. The strategic use of nuclear deterrence not only aims to prevent military conflicts but also seeks to secure the regime's long-term survival against both external and internal challenges. By reinforcing its deterrent capabilities and communicating its willingness to use them, if necessary, North Korea continues to shape its security environment in accordance with the principles of deterrence theory (Hecker, 2010; Gallucci, 2019).

Implications for Regional Security: North Korea’s nuclear armament has significant implications for regional security dynamics, exacerbating the risk of miscalculation and escalation during crises. The presence of nuclear weapons on the Korean Peninsula means that any military confrontation has the potential to rapidly escalate to nuclear exchanges, particularly given the United States’ commitment to defending its allies, South Korea and Japan, through extended deterrence. This commitment involves intricate strategic calculations and the inherent dangers of rapid escalation (O’Hanlon, 2017). Additionally, North Korea’s nuclear capabilities pose a direct challenge to the global non-proliferation regime, potentially encouraging other states to consider developing their own nuclear arsenals to secure their strategic interests. Consequently, the regional security environment is marked by heightened tensions and uncertainty, necessitating robust diplomatic efforts to manage and mitigate potential conflicts effectively.

Deterrence has been a significant factor driving North Korea's pursuit of nuclear weapons, influenced by a combination of historical grievances, strategic imperatives, and responses to international pressures. The regime’s emphasis on establishing a credible nuclear deterrent aims to ensure its survival against perceived existential threats from the United States and its allies. This strategic pursuit is deeply rooted in North Korea's perception of a hostile international environment and the need to protect its sovereignty and regime stability. Historical context, such as the Korean War and subsequent military tensions, has profoundly shaped North Korea's security policies and its determination to maintain a robust deterrent (Cha & Kang, 2018).

While North Korea’s nuclear armament has provided it with a sense of security in the short term, it has also escalated regional tensions and presented significant challenges to global non-proliferation efforts. The international community’s response, including sanctions and diplomatic isolation, has not deterred North Korea but rather reinforced its commitment to its nuclear program. This dynamic illustrates the complexity of addressing nuclear proliferation in a way that balances the need for security with efforts to prevent the spread of nuclear weapons. Understanding the motivations and implications of North Korea’s nuclear strategy is crucial for developing effective policies to address the intricate security dynamics of the Korean Peninsula and beyond.

#### That guarantees humanitarian failure, culminating in fast nuclear escalation.

Ahn ’23 – [Christine Ahn, Founder and Executive Director of Women Cross DMZ, “HOW CAN WE ACTUALLY IMPROVE HUMAN RIGHTS IN NORTH KOREA?” Foreign Policy In Focus, https://fpif.org/how-can-we-actually-improve-human-rights-in-north-korea/, December 14, 2023] TDI

While many in Washington advocate for more pressure in the form of sanctions and an information offensive, history has shown that these actions do not improve human rights. Instead, they increase tensions, and North Korea responds by doubling down on its nuclear weapons program. As Elizabeth Beavers and Su-mi Jeon noted for The Hill, “the status quo has been an unmitigated failure in terms of improving both rights and security.”

North Korea is already one of the most sanctioned countries in the world, and evidence suggests that sanctions are worsening the humanitarian situation. Dr. Kee Park of the Harvard University Department of Global Health and Social Medicine and a neurosurgeon who has performed surgeries in North Korea calls the sanctions a “complete economic blockade“ and “warfare without bullets.”

“Sanctions kill,” Park argues. “We know it and we should not accept that… We have allowed our leaders and our examples of our morals to deteriorate. We have become barbarians because we accept the death of children and women in the name of national and regional security.”

Sanctions and the U.S. travel ban on North Korea have also significantly hindered the delivery of humanitarian aid, according to Joy Yoon, the co-founder of IGNIS Community, a nonprofit organization working in North Korea. And high military tensions are not conducive to humanitarian aid work.

What is fundamentally missing in the human rights discourse is recognition of the ongoing state of war on the Korean Peninsula, which provides the North Korean government justification to invest its limited resources on defense and maintaining a national security state. (The Korean War only ended in an armistice, so the U.S. and North Korea have technically remained in a state of war ever since.) The U.N. Special Rapporteur on DPRK Human Rights, Elizabeth Salmon, has noted that North Korea’s militarization severely impacts human rights because the government under-invests in socio-economic development, which disproportionately affects children and women.

Instead of continuing the status quo of more pressure and sanctions, ending the state of war with a peace agreement would be more conducive to improving human rights and security — specifically by building trust, sapping the militarism that undergirds the human rights abuses, and creating the conditions to engage more effectively on human rights.

As Tomás Ojea Quintana, former UN Special Rapporteur on the Situation of Human Rights in North Korea, said in his 2020 report: “A declaration on peace and development in the Korean Peninsula, and a swift resolution of the armistice status, would create the atmosphere and space needed for further discussions on denuclearization, less isolation, more access, and respect for human rights.”

In fact, in 2019, following the historic peace summits between the two Koreas and the United States, North Korea engaged in the first ever Universal Periodic Review at the Human Rights Council in Geneva, and then participated in a two-week-long human rights workshop. Peace summits also led North Korea to self-impose a moratorium on nuclear and missile tests, to cooperate with South Korea on removing landmines in the DMZ, and to repatriate the remains of U.S. servicemen.

Not only have decades of war, sanctions, and isolation forced North Korea to adapt and become more resilient to pressure. But China and Russia, two members of the UN Security Council, are no longer willing to go along with the U.S.-led calls for more sanctions.

To truly create genuine human security and the conditions for improved human rights, we need to end the unresolved Korean War — which is only justifying the endless arms race, keeping families separated, and continuing the risk of nuclear conflict. “What will improve the ordinary North Korean people’s situation is more engagement with people from the outside world, not less,” said Cassie Kim, a North Korean defector now living in the United States.

#### East Asian prolif ensures cascades, preventative strikes, and global nuclear war.

Dr. Chung‑in Moon & Young‑Deok Shin 23, PhD, Distinguished University Professor, Political Science & International Relations, Yonsei University. Krause Distinguished Fellow, School of Policy & Global Strategy, University of California, San Diego. Co-Convener, Asia-Pacific Leadership Network for Nuclear Non-Proliferation & Disarmament. Editor-In-Chief, Global Asia. Former Special Advisor, Foreign Affairs & National Security, President Moon Jae-in; Fellow, Global Asia, East Asia Foundation, "‘South Korea Going Nuclear?’: Debates, Driving Forces, and Prospects," China International Strategy Review, Vol. 5, pg. 14-15, 11/28/2023, Springer.

The most worrisome potential outcome stems from nuclear fragility and related human costs. Mutually assured destruction (MAD) and the logic of nuclear deterrence makes planned nuclear attacks inconceivable, but the chance for accidental nuclear escalation is very high, given the uncertainty of the nuclear arms races. Bruce Blair (1985) demonstrated in his book, *Strategic Command and Control: Redefning Nuclear Threats*, that nuclear forces are amazingly fragile because if the nuclear command system is attacked, control is lost, and no matter who “wins” the war, the winner will also lose the war due to the inevitable loss of its own and adversarial control, given that even an incapacitated enemy is likely to retaliate in kind, and even a few nuclear weapons coming back will be a very bad day for a state. Yet, states and nuclear weapons intellectuals took solace in the “survivability” myth that ignored Blair’s warning on nuclear fragility. Even Press (2019), who is supportive of South Korea’s independent nuclear path, aptly raises this issue. As the inter-Korean nuclear arms race intensif-es, the structure of nuclear fragility will be amplified. It is certain that when and if South Korea goes nuclear, the North will double-down on proliferation and deception.3 Nuclear escalation and accidental nuclear clashes could become a horrifying new reality.

The human costs of nuclear clashes will be unbearably high in the Korean context. Lisowski and von Hippel (2023) identify six impacts of nuclear weapons use that would result in unimaginable death and destruction. Human casualties can come from various sources: thermal fuence (heat) from nuclear blasts; firestorms; physical damage caused by blast overpressure; prompt radiation from nuclear detonation itself; fallout radiation; and radiation-induced cancer deaths. The level of casualties would vary by the number of nuclear bombs used. Jefrey Lewis (2017) estimated two million deaths, mostly Koreans and some Americans, and Japanese. But the exact numbers would be impossible to track. Zagurek Jr. (2017) also shows similar figures. According to calculations using the Nuclear Bomb Effects Computer, if nuclear detonations happened over Seoul and Tokyo with North Korea’s current estimated weapons, it could result in as many as 2.1 million fatalities and 7.7 million injuries. The human cost would be staggering even without nukes: back in 1994, when Clinton was contemplating preemptive strikes on North Korea, the commander of US forces in South Korea estimated over a million deaths in and around the Korean Peninsula in the first 60 days of the war (Fefer 2017).

Contrary to expectations of the pro-nuke forces, independent nuclear weapons development will result in severe adverse security consequences. If both South and North Korea nuclearize, their relationship would be characterized by escalation imperatives that would make the peninsula highly unstable, with potentially catastrophic consequences. Far from reinforcing South Korea’s already overwhelming ofensive military capabilities, nukes would undermine deterrence based on conventional forces, and even reduce the South’s ability to use its conventional forces in response to a North Korean attack. Both Koreas would be faced with a nuclear-armed adversary with a mutual incentive to strike first. Each would therefore remain in a state of constant nuclear alert in case the other side intended to attack immediately. This state of constant fear would drive both states to invest in surveillance technologies and increase mutual distrust (Hayes and Moon 2015, 397, 402). The new nuclear path will only justify North Korea’s nuclear status and diminish the opposition from China and Russia to the North’s nuclear armament.

Equally troublesome is a nuclear domino effect in Northeast Asia. South Korea’s nuclear armament will instantly force China and Russia to strengthen their nuclear capabilities to counter it. Also, some ultra-rightists in Japan will relish the prospect that Seoul might make such a move so that they can justify Japanese nuclear weapons. They have been advocating Japan’s nuclear latency after China undertook its first nuclear testing in October 1964. Japan has nuclear materials (47.8 tons of plutonium and 1.5 tons of enriched uranium as of 2016), technological competence, and financial capabilities. Once the political decision is made, with the support of national consensus, Japan could go nuclear relatively easily. Japan has always been worried about the advent of a nuclear Korea armed with nationalism (Moon 2021). New nuclear threats coming from China, Russia, and even Japan, in addition to those from North Korea, will drive Seoul’s defense planners to face an unprecedentedly harsh security reality.

#### Miscalculated war in Northeast Asia goes nuclear.

Hwang ’24 – [Jihwan Hwang, Professor in the Department of International Relations at the University of Seoul. “Is the Second Korean War Imminent?” Global North Korea, https://www.globalnk.org/commentary/view?cd=COM000141, May 29, 2024] TDI

IV. What Type of War Should We Prepare for?

Even if North Korea’s military strategy is still focused on deterrence, it is evident that peace and stability on the Korean Peninsula are being undermined. Kim Jong Un’s aggressive rhetoric and shifts in nuclear policy suggest a significant risk of crisis escalation in the region. Similar to the 1914 Sarajevo incident that ignited World War I, an accidental clash could inadvertently lead to an uncontrollable military crisis. In situations where military tensions escalate on the Korean Peninsula, North Korea is likely to increase its vigilance against the U.S.-ROK alliance, and the updated nuclear doctrine could raise the chances of a war.

The Washington Declaration represents an important step in bolstering extended deterrence against deliberate provocations by North Korea. Nonetheless, it may not be sufficient to prevent accidental conflicts that could erupt on the Peninsula. Ambassador Gallucci’s reference to the possibility of a nuclear war in Northeast Asia highlights a scenario where a crisis could escalate from accidental conflicts. He emphasized the need to resume nuclear negotiations with North Korea, given the potential for nuclear war to start for reasons not directly related to the failure of deterrence against North Korea. This highlights the complexity of the security dynamics in the region and the urgent need for effective mechanisms to prevent unintended escalations.

Indeed, an accidental incident would not necessarily lead to a full-scale war. Even if North Korea engages in military provocations during a crisis escalation, these could be part of a strategic plan aimed at negotiating with the United States, intending to limit the spread of the crisis. Given North Korea’s vulnerability and lack of military power to sustain a total war, it may engage in limited provocations to pursue strategic gains. However, if an accidental situation like the Sarajevo incident triggers a crisis that spirals out of control, it could lead to a catastrophic situation that no party on the Korean Peninsula would wish for. Ultimately, addressing the potential crises posed by North Korea’s nuclear capabilities fundamentally requires efforts to either pursue denuclearization or at least control its nuclear arsenal.

Since assuming office in 2021, the Biden administration has largely overlooked the North Korean nuclear issue, having proposed a “calibrated practical approach” towards North Korea. The administration has been preoccupied with the U.S.-China strategic competition, Russia’s invasion of Ukraine, and domestic political and economic challenges, leaving limited time and resources to focus on North Korea. Amid these dynamics, North Korea is trying to leverage the new Cold War confrontation between the U.S. against China-Russia on the Korean Peninsula. Without denuclearizing North Korea or controlling its nuclear capabilities, the potential for crisis on the Peninsula remains unmitigated. Furthermore, as the global new Cold War deepens, North Korea is likely to adopt even more aggressive policies. Sophisticated diplomatic efforts are necessary to prevent accidental situations like the 1914 Sarajevo incident from occurring on the Korean Peninsula.

#### Economic concessions prevent proliferation and normalize relations, whereas sanctions induce mistrust.

Ali et al. ’24 – [Nadia Zaheer Ali, Assistant Professor, Dept of International Relations, Labore College for Women University; Aqsa Rehman, B.S. International Relations, Lahore College for Women University; Barrister Muhammad Ali Binyameen, Advocate High Court L.L.M UK. “ASSESSING THE UTILITY OF SANCTIONS: HALTING NUCLEAR PROLIFERATION IN NORTH KOREA AND IRAN” International Journal of Contemporary Issues in Social Sciences, Volume 3, Issue 2, April 27, 2024] TDI

Fostering Global Security: The Path to Resolving Nuclear Proliferation

In the face of nuclear proliferation, it is evident that stable negotiations between nations are the key to finding lasting solutions. Whether we consider Iran or Democratic People's Republic of Korea, it is essential to engage in constructive and trustworthy dialogues. However, history has shown that negotiations can be complex and unpredictable, often facing abrupt interruptions due to issues arising from any involved state. To overcome these hurdles, confidence-building measures are vital, and a trilateral summit involving the United States, North Korea, and Iran, with two neutral observer or mediator states, could provide the necessary platform for progress.

The Power of Economic Concessions: When seeking common ground, economic concessions prove to be a far more effective tool than imposing sanctions. A significant point of contention between the United States and Iran revolves around Iran's oil exports through the Strait of Hormuz. By allowing Iran to export oil freely, the United States can demonstrate its friendship and foster trust with Iran. Moreover, addressing other issues such as FTO3 and Hezbollah will pave the way for more constructive discussions.

Avoid taking mistrust inducing Decisions: Hasty decisions that single out states and induces mistrust among them must be avoided. As was done in 2017 by President Donald Trump, when the Iranian Revolutionary Guard Corps was listed as a foreign terrorist organizations. Such steps tend to hinder the process of negotiations. Instead, multilateral dialogue and cooperation are essential for achieving fruitful outcomes. All parties must approach discussions with openness and understanding, focusing on mutual interests and common ground.

Ensuring a Nuclear-Free Korean Peninsula: With DPRK escalating its nuclear arsenal and the U.S deploying more missiles in South Korea, the situation demands urgent attention. The vision of a nuclear-free Korean Peninsula must be embraced, and steps should be taken to prevent any further arms race in the region. This includes addressing concerns that have led South Korea to consider developing its nuclear weapons. (Jean Mackenzie, 2023)

The Role of Sanctions: While sanctions have historically been an effective tool in curbing nuclear proliferation, their impact on Iran and DPRK has been limited. This can be attributed to their non-democratic governments, which do not necessarily prioritize public opinion. To make sanctions more effective, a nuanced approach must be adopted, focusing on targeted measures that encourage dialogue rather than isolation.

Conclusion: In the pursuit of global security and a world free from the threat of nuclear proliferation, stable and meaningful negotiations are paramount. Building trust between nations is crucial, and this can be achieved through dialogue, confidence-building measures, and economic concessions. Instead of relying solely on sanctions, we should strive for cooperative solutions that address the underlying concerns of all parties involved. By fostering understanding and a commitment to peace, we can create a brighter and safer future for the world.

#### Sanctions evasion drives a Russia-North-Korea-China trilateral, which destabilizes Asia.

Park & Mochizuki ’24 – [James Park, Research Associate at the Quincy Institute’s East Asia Program; Mike Mochizuki, Non-Resident Fellow at the Quincy Institute and holds the Japan-U.S. Relations Chair in Memory of Gaston Sigur at the Elliott School of International Affairs in George Washington University. “The U.S.–Japan–South Korea Trilateral Partnership: Pursuing Regional Stability and Avoiding Military Escalation” Quincy Institute For Responsible Statecraft, [https://quincyinst.org/research/the-u-s-japan-south-korea-trilateral-partnership-pursuing-regional-stability-and-avoiding-military-escalation/#](https://quincyinst.org/research/the-u-s-japan-south-korea-trilateral-partnership-pursuing-regional-stability-and-avoiding-military-escalation/), April 22, 2024] TDI

Risk of precipitating a Russia–North Korea–China trilateral

As North Korea and China view the tightening Japan–U.S.–South Korea military partnership as posing greater challenges to their core interests (regime security and unification with Taiwan, respectively), North Korea and China could enhance their security ties and even pursue a trilateral strategic partnership with Russia.

There is a historical precedent for the three countries working together: in the first decade of the Cold War, China, North Korea, and Russia were committed to cooperating against the West in the name of anti-–imperialism and collaborated in the Korean War. In recent years, the China–Russia and North Korea–Russia bilateral relationships have deepened as the U.S.–China rivalry and the Ukraine War increased their need for cooperation.

A shared antagonism against the United States has driven China and Russia to bolster military cooperation such as intelligence sharing, joint weapons development, and more frequent and expansive joint military exercises in regional maritime and air spaces. [40](https://quincyinst.org/research/the-u-s-japan-south-korea-trilateral-partnership-pursuing-regional-stability-and-avoiding-military-escalation/#fn40-17376) Russia’s isolation from the West following its full–scale invasion of Ukraine in February 2022 provided an opportunity for North Korea to elevate cooperation with Russia. Leveraging Russian needs for munitions and political support for its war at the United Nations, Pyongyang has obtained greater Russian military technological assistance and economic support for circumventing sanctions.[41](https://quincyinst.org/research/the-u-s-japan-south-korea-trilateral-partnership-pursuing-regional-stability-and-avoiding-military-escalation/#fn41-17376)

China has so far maintained a distance from the emerging North Korea–Russia partnership for a couple of possible reasons. First, the deep historical mistrust between Chinese and North Korean leaders has kept their relationship fragile.[42](https://quincyinst.org/research/the-u-s-japan-south-korea-trilateral-partnership-pursuing-regional-stability-and-avoiding-military-escalation/#fn42-17376)Another factor might be Beijing’s cost–benefit calculation that drawing closer to North Korea and Russia could severely damage its global reputation and provoke a deeper anti–China coalition among the United States, Japan, South Korea, and other regional actors.[43](https://quincyinst.org/research/the-u-s-japan-south-korea-trilateral-partnership-pursuing-regional-stability-and-avoiding-military-escalation/#fn43-17376)

Nonetheless, China’s stance on North Korea has become more tolerant in recent years. In the past, China had endorsed extensive U.N. sanctions against major North Korean provocations, such as intercontinental ballistic missile (ICBM) tests, most recently in 2017. But China has since become far less willing to support punitive measures against North Korea and reluctant to condemn North Korean provocations.[44](https://quincyinst.org/research/the-u-s-japan-south-korea-trilateral-partnership-pursuing-regional-stability-and-avoiding-military-escalation/#fn44-17376)

Beijing’s increased reluctance to pressure North Korea may go beyond the longstanding Chinese fear of a regime crisis in Pyongyang caused by external pressure. Increasingly alarmed about U.S. regional containment, Beijing may now be more willing to tolerate Pyongyang’s nuclear ambition and might even eventually partner with a nuclear North Korea in a confrontation against the United States and its regional allies.[45](https://quincyinst.org/research/the-u-s-japan-south-korea-trilateral-partnership-pursuing-regional-stability-and-avoiding-military-escalation/#fn45-17376) Such a major shift in China’s value perception of North Korea might become more likely in the context of growing Chinese suspicions that the emerging Japan–U.S.–South Korea trilateral military partnership is supporting a U.S. containment strategy to keep Taiwan permanently separated from China.

The emergence of a Russia–North Korea–China trilateral alignment will no doubt further destabilize northeast Asia’s security environment and intensify regional tensions. For example, Russia, North Korea, and China may begin trilateral joint military training and exercises in order to counter Japan–U.S.–South Korea joint drills.[46](https://quincyinst.org/research/the-u-s-japan-south-korea-trilateral-partnership-pursuing-regional-stability-and-avoiding-military-escalation/#fn46-17376)Specifically, Beijing could become more inclined to undertake such actions if Japan–U.S.–South Korea naval and aerial drills — so far mostly taking place near South Korean territory — start appearing more directed at China by moving closer to the Taiwan Strait or other disputed maritime locations.[47](https://quincyinst.org/research/the-u-s-japan-south-korea-trilateral-partnership-pursuing-regional-stability-and-avoiding-military-escalation/#fn47-17376)

Additionally, North Korea might become more emboldened to engage in provocative nuclear weapons tests. Previously, China’s opposition to (and willingness to punish) North Korean nuclear tests had raised the cost of nuclear tests high enough to at least restrain Pyongyang from testing nuclear weapons more frequently.[48](https://quincyinst.org/research/the-u-s-japan-south-korea-trilateral-partnership-pursuing-regional-stability-and-avoiding-military-escalation/#fn48-17376) Without such pressure from China, Washington, Tokyo, and Seoul would face Pyongyang with a completely free hand to test new tactical nuclear weapons it develops.

As depicted above, the likelihood of deeper regional friction and confrontation calls into question the wisdom of framing the regional order in Asia as a contest between democracy and autocracy or making “values–based diplomacy” the guiding principle of cooperation.[49](https://quincyinst.org/research/the-u-s-japan-south-korea-trilateral-partnership-pursuing-regional-stability-and-avoiding-military-escalation/#fn49-17376) This ideology–oriented framework will undercut Chinese incentives to pressure North Korea and provide a rationale for trilateral military cooperation between China, North Korea, and Russia.

The Japan–U.S.–South Korea trilateral’s transition into an overtly anti–authoritarian, anti–North Korea, and anti–China coalition could also backfire by creating echoes of the imperialist past, which could incite nationalist passions in both China and North Korea and exacerbate geopolitical polarization. Japan’s seizure of Taiwan after the first Sino–Japanese War of 1894–95 is indelibly etched in China’s collective memory. Therefore, the Chinese will be defiant against Japanese cooperation with the United States and South Korea to impede Taiwan’s eventual unification with China.[50](https://quincyinst.org/research/the-u-s-japan-south-korea-trilateral-partnership-pursuing-regional-stability-and-avoiding-military-escalation/#fn50-17376) North Korea could see the U.S.–Japan security partnership with South Korea as echoing the history of outside imperialists enlisting Korean collaborators, as in Japanese colonialism in the first half of the 20th century or the Cold War alliance between the United States and South Korean dictators.

#### Trilateral military action shreds the LIO.

Kendall-Taylor & Fontaine ’24 – [Andrea Kendall-Taylor, Senior Fellow and Director of the Transatlantic Security Program at the Center for a New American Security. From 2015 to 2018, she was Deputy National Intelligence Officer for Russia and Eurasia at the National Intelligence Council; Richard Fontaine, CEO of the Center for a New American Security. He has worked at the U.S. Department of State, on the National Security Council, and as a foreign policy adviser to U.S. Senator John McCain. “The Axis of Upheaval” Foreign Affairs, <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/china/axis-upheaval-russia-iran-north-korea-taylor-fontaine>, April 23, 2024] TDI

AMERICA UNDERMINED

Collaboration among the axis members also reduces the potency of tools that Washington and its partners often use to confront them. In the most glaring example, since the start of the war in Ukraine, China has supplied Russia with semiconductors and other essential technologies that Russia previously imported from the West, undercutting the efficacy of Western export controls. All four countries are also working to reduce their dependence on the U.S. dollar. The share of Russia’s imports invoiced in Chinese renminbi jumped from three percent in 2021 to 20 percent in 2022. And in December 2023, Iran and Russia finalized an agreement to conduct bilateral trade in their local currencies. By moving their economic transactions out of reach of U.S. enforcement measures, axis members undermine the efficacy of Western sanctions, as well as anticorruption and anti-money-laundering efforts.

Taking advantage of their shared borders and littoral zones, China, Iran, North Korea, and Russia can build trade and transportation networks safe from U.S. interdiction. Iran, for example, ships drones and other weapons to Russia across the Caspian Sea, where the United States has little power to stop transfers. If the United States were engaged in conflict with China in the Indo-Pacific, Beijing could seek support from Moscow. Russia might increase its overland exports of oil and gas to its southern neighbor, reducing China’s dependence on maritime energy imports that U.S. forces could block during a conflict. Russia’s defense industrial base, now in overdrive to supply weapons for Russian troops in Ukraine, could later pivot to sustain a Chinese war effort. Such cooperation would increase the odds of China’s prevailing over the American military and help advance Russia’s goal of diminishing the United States’ geopolitical influence.

The axis is also hindering Washington’s ability to rally international coalitions that can stand against its members’ destabilizing actions. China’s refusal to condemn Russia’s invasion of Ukraine, for example, made it far easier for countries across Africa, Latin America, and the Middle East to do the same. And Beijing and Moscow have impeded Western efforts to isolate Iran. Last year, they elevated Iran from observer to member of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization, a predominantly Asian regional body, and then orchestrated an invitation for Iran to join the BRICS—a group that China and Russia view as a counterweight to the West. Iran’s regional meddling and nuclear pursuits have made other countries wary of dealing with its government, but its participation in international forums enhances the regime’s legitimacy and presents it with opportunities to expand trade with fellow member states.

Parallel efforts by axis members in the information domain further weaken international support for U.S. positions. China, Iran, and North Korea either defended or avoided explicitly condemning Russia’s invasion of Ukraine, and they all parroted the Kremlin in accusing [NATO](https://www.foreignaffairs.com/topics/nato) of inciting the war. Their response to Hamas’s attacks on Israel last October followed a similar pattern. Iran used the state media and social media accounts to express support for Hamas, vilify Israel, and denounce the United States for enabling Israel’s military response, while the Russian and, to a lesser extent, Chinese media sharply criticized the United States’ enduring support for Israel. They used the war in Gaza to portray Washington as a destabilizing, domineering force in the world—a narrative that is particularly resonant in parts of Africa, Asia, Latin America, and the Middle East. Even if axis members do not overtly coordinate their messages, they push the same themes, and the repetition makes them appear more credible and persuasive.

AN ALTERNATIVE ORDER?

Global orders magnify the strength of the powerful states that lead them. The United States, for instance, has invested in the liberal international order it helped create because this order reflects American preferences and extends U.S. influence. As long as an order remains sufficiently beneficial to most members, a core group of states will defend it. Dissenting countries, meanwhile, are bound by a collective action problem. If they were to defect en masse, they could succeed in creating an alternative order more to their liking. But without a core cluster of powerful states around which they can coalesce, the advantage remains with the existing order.

For decades, threats to the U.S.-led order were limited to a handful of rogue states with little power to upend it. But Russia’s invasion of Ukraine and the restructuring of interstate relations it prompted have lifted the constraint on collective action. The axis of upheaval represents a new center of gravity, a group that other countries dissatisfied with the existing order can turn to. The axis is ushering in an international system characterized by two orders that are becoming increasingly organized and competitive.

Historically, competing orders have invited conflict, especially at the geographical seams between them. Wars arise from specific conditions, such as a territorial dispute, the need to protect national interests or the interests of an ally, or a threat to the survival of a regime. But the likelihood that any of those conditions will lead to war increases in the presence of dueling orders. Some political science researchers have found that periods in which a single order prevailed—the balance-of-power system maintained by the Concert of Europe for much of the nineteenth century, for example, or the U.S.-dominated post–Cold War era—were less prone to conflicts than those characterized by more than one order, such as the multipolar period between the two world wars and the bipolar system of the Cold War.

The world has gotten a preview of the instability this new era of competing orders will bring, with potential aggressors empowered by the axis’s normalization of alternative rules and less afraid of being isolated if they act out. Already, Hamas’s attack on Israel threatens to engulf the wider Middle East in war. Last October, Azerbaijan forcibly took control of Nagorno-Karabakh, a breakaway region inhabited by ethnic Armenians. Tensions flared between Serbia and Kosovo in 2023, too, and Venezuela threatened to seize territory in neighboring Guyana in December. Although internal conditions precipitated the coups in Myanmar and across Africa’s Sahel region since 2020, the rising incidence of such revolts is connected to the new international arrangement. For many years, it seemed that coups were becoming less common, in large part because plotters faced significant costs for violating norms. Now, however, the calculations have changed. Overthrowing a government may still shatter relations with the West, but the new regimes can find support in Beijing and Moscow.

Further development of the axis would bring even greater tumult. So far, most collaboration among China, Iran, North Korea, and Russia has been bilateral. Trilateral and quadrilateral action could expand their capacity for disruption. Countries such as Belarus, Cuba, Eritrea, Nicaragua, and Venezuela—all of which chafe against the U.S.-led, Western-dominated system—could also begin working more closely with the axis. If the group grows in size and tightens its coordination, the United States and its allies will have a more difficult time defending the recognized order.

#### The Liberal Order caps every existential threat.

Yuval Noah **Harari ‘20**, Professor in the Department of History at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem, “How to Survive the 21st Century: Three Existential Threats to Humanity,” Journal of Data Protection & Privacy, vol. 3, no. 4, 03/11/20, p. 463–468

As we enter the third decade of the 21st century, humanity faces so many issues and questions, that it is really hard to know what to focus on. So I would like to use the next 20 minutes to help us focus on all the different issues we face. Three problems pose existential challenges to our species. These three existential challenges are nuclear war, ecological collapse and technological disruption. We should focus on them. Now nuclear war and ecological collapse are already familiar threats, so let me spend some time explaining the less-familiar threat posed by technological disruption. In Davos, we hear so much about the enormous promises of technology — and these promises are certainly real. But technology might also disrupt human society and the very meaning of human life in numerous ways, ranging from the creation of a global useless class to the rise of data colonialism and of digital dictatorships. Socio-Economic Upheaval Automation will soon eliminate millions upon millions of jobs, and while new jobs will certainly be created, it is unclear whether people will be able to learn the necessary new skills fast enough. Suppose you are a 50-year-old truck driver, and you just lost your job to a self-driving vehicle. Now there are new jobs in designing software or in teaching yoga to engineers — but how does a 50-year-old truck driver reinvent himself or herself as a software engineer or as a yoga teacher? And people will have to do it not just once but again and again throughout their lives, because the automation revolution will not be a single watershed event following which the job market will settle down into a new equilibrium. Rather, it will be a cascade of ever bigger disruptions, because artificial intelligence (AI) is nowhere near its full potential. Old jobs will disappear, new jobs will emerge, but then the new jobs will rapidly change and vanish. Whereas in the past humans had to struggle against exploitation, in the 21st century, the really big struggle will be against irrelevance. And it is much worse to be irrelevant than exploited. Those who fail in the struggle against irrelevance would constitute a new ‘useless class’ — people who are useless not from the viewpoint of their friends and family, but useless from the viewpoint of the economic and political system. And this useless class will be separated by an ever-growing gap from the ever more powerful elite. The AI Revolution Creating Unprecedented Inequality Between Classes and Countries In the 19th century, a few countries like Britain and Japan industrialised first, and they went on to conquer and exploit most of the world. If we are not careful, the same thing will happen in the 21st century with AI. We are already in the midst of an AI arms race, with China and the US leading the race, and most countries being left far, far behind. Unless we take action to distribute the benefit and power of AI between all humans, AI will likely create immense wealth in a few high-tech hubs, while other countries will either go bankrupt or become exploited data colonies. Now we are not talking here about a science fiction scenario of robots rebelling against humans. We are talking about far more primitive AI, which is nevertheless enough to disrupt the global balance. Just think what will happen to developing economies once it is cheaper to produce textiles or cars in California than in Mexico? And what will happen to politics in your country in 20 years, when somebody in San Francisco or Beijing knows the entire medical and personal history of every politician, every judge and every journalist in your country, including all their sexual escapades, all their mental weaknesses and all their corrupt dealings? Will it still be an independent country or will it become a data colony? When you have enough data, you do not need to send soldiers in order to control a country. The Rise of Digital Dictatorships and Global Monitoring This danger can be stated in the form of a simple equation, which I think might be the defining equation of life in the 21st century: B ×C×D =AHH! Which means? Biological knowledge multiplied by computing power multiplied by data equals the ability to hack humans, ahh! If you know enough biology and have enough computing power and data, you can hack my body and my brain and my life, and you can understand me better than I understand myself. You can know my personality type, my political views, my sexual preferences, my mental weaknesses, my deepest fears and hopes. You know more about me than I know about myself. And you can do that not just to me, but to everyone. A system that understands us better than we understand ourselves can predict our feelings and decisions, can manipulate our feelings and decisions and can ultimately make decisions for us. Now in the past, many governments and tyrants wanted to do it, but nobody understood biology well enough, and nobody had enough computing power and data to hack millions of people. Neither the Gestapo nor the KGB could do it. But soon at least some corporations and governments will be able to systematically hack all the people. We humans should get used to the idea that we are no longer mysterious souls — we are now hackable animals. That is what we are. The power to hack humans can be used for good purposes — like providing much better healthcare. But if this power falls into the hands of a 21st-century Stalin, the result will be the worst totalitarian regime in human history. And we already have a number of applicants for the job of 21stcentury Stalin. Just imagine North Korea in 20 years, when everybody has to wear a biometric bracelet that constantly monitors your blood pressure, your heart rate, your brain activity 24 hours a day. You listen to a speech on the radio by the great leader, and they know what you actually feel. You can clap your hands and smile, but if you are angry, they know, you will be in the gulag tomorrow. And if we allow the emergence of such total surveillance regimes, do not think that the rich and powerful in places like Davos will be safe, just ask Jeff Bezos. In Stalin’s USSR, the state monitored members of the communist elite more than anyone else. The same will be true of future total surveillance regimes. The higher you are in the hierarchy — the more closely you will be watched. Do you want your chief executive officer or your president to know what you really think about them? So it is in the interest of all humans, including the elites, to prevent the rise of such digital dictatorships. And in the meantime, if you get a suspicious WhatsApp message, from some Prince, do not open it. Now if we indeed prevent the establishment of digital dictatorships, the ability to hack humans might still undermine the very meaning of human freedom. Because as humans will rely on AI to make more and more decisions for us, authority will shift from humans to algorithms and this is already happening. Already today billions of people trust the Facebook algorithm to tell us what is new, the Google algorithm tells us what is true, Netflix tells us what to watch, and the Amazon and Alibaba algorithms tell us what to buy. In the not-so-distant future, similar algorithms might tell us where to work and who to marry, and also decide whether to hire us for a job, whether to give us a loan, and whether the central bank should raise the interest rate. And if you ask why you were not given a loan, and why you the bank did not raise the interest rate, the answer will always be the same — because the computer says no. And as the limited human brain lacks sufficient biological knowledge, computing power and data — humans will simply not be able to understand the computer’s decisions. So even in supposedly free countries, humans are likely to lose control over our own lives and also lose the ability to understand public policy. Already now, how many humans understand the financial system? Maybe 1 per cent, to be very generous. In a couple of decades, the number of humans capable of understanding the financial system will be exactly zero. Now we humans are used to thinking about life as a drama of decision-making. What will be the meaning of human life when most decisions are taken by algorithms? We do not even have philosophical models to understand such an existence. The usual bargain between philosophers and politicians is that philosophers have a lot of fanciful ideas, and politicians basically explain that they lack the means to implement these ideas. Now we are in an opposite situation. We are facing philosophical bankruptcy. The twin revolutions of infotech and biotech are now giving politicians the means to create heaven or hell, but the philosophers are having trouble conceptualising what the new heaven and the new hell will look like. And that is a very dangerous situation. If we fail to conceptualise the new heaven quickly enough, we might be easily misled by naïve utopias. And if we fail to conceptualise the new hell quickly enough, we might find ourselves entrapped there with no way out. Technological disruption of not just our economy, politics and philosophy but also our biology In the coming decades, AI and biotechnology will give us godlike abilities to reengineer life, and even to create completely new life forms. After four billion years of organic life shaped by natural selection, we are about to enter a new era of inorganic life shaped by intelligent design. Our intelligent design is going to be the new driving force of the evolution of life and in using our new divine powers of creation, we might make mistakes on a cosmic scale. In particular, governments, corporations and armies are likely to use technology to enhance human skills that they need — like intelligence and discipline — while neglecting other humans skills – like compassion, artistic sensitivity and spirituality. The result might be a race of humans who are very intelligent and very disciplined but lack compassion, artistic sensitivity and spiritual depth. Of course, this is not a prophecy. These are just possibilities. Technology is never deterministic. In the 20th century, people used the same industrial technology to build very different kinds of societies: fascist dictatorships, communist regimes, liberal democracies. The same thing will happen in the 21st century. AI and biotech will certainly transform the world, but we can use them to create very different kinds of societies. And if you are afraid of some of the possibilities I have mentioned, you can still do something about it. But to do something effective, we need global cooperation. Global Problems that Demand Global Solutions Whenever a leader says something like ‘My country first!’ we should remind that leader that no nation can prevent nuclear war or stop ecological collapse by itself, and no nation can regulate AI and bioengineering by itself. Almost every country will say, ‘Hey, we don’t want to develop killer robots or to genetically engineer human babies. We are the good guys. But we can’t trust our rivals not to do it. So we must do it first’. If we allow such an arms race to develop in fields like AI and bioengineering, it does not really matter who wins the arms race — the loser will be humanity. Unfortunately, just when global cooperation is more needed than ever before, some of the most powerful leaders and countries in the world are now deliberately undermining global cooperation. Leaders like the US president tell us that there is an inherent contradiction between nationalism and globalism, and that we should choose nationalism and reject globalism. But this is a dangerous mistake. There is no contradiction between nationalism and globalism. Because nationalism is not about hating foreigners. Nationalism is about loving your compatriots. And in the 21st century, in order to protect the safety and the future of your compatriots, you must cooperate with foreigners. So in the 21st century, good nationalists must be also globalists. Now globalism does not mean establishing a global government, abandoning all national traditions or opening the border to unlimited immigration. Rather, globalism means a commitment to some global rules. Rules that do not deny the uniqueness of each nation, but only regulate the relations between nations. The World Cup: An Effective Model for Global Cooperation The World Cup is a competition between nations, and people often show fierce loyalty to their national team. But at the same time, the World Cup is also an amazing display of global harmony. France cannot play football against Croatia unless the French and the Croatians agree on the same rules for the game. And that is globalism in action. If you like the World Cup — you are already a globalist. Now hopefully, nations could agree on global rules not just for football, but also for how to prevent ecological collapse, how to regulate dangerous technologies and how to reduce global inequality. How to make sure, for example, that AI benefits Mexican textile workers and not only American software engineers. Now of course, this is going to be much more difficult than football — but not impossible. Because the impossible, well we have already accomplished the impossible. We have already escaped the violent jungle in which we humans have lived throughout history. For thousands of years, humans lived under the law of the jungle in a condition of omnipresent war. The law of the jungle said that for every two nearby countries, there is a plausible scenario that they will go to war against each other next year. Under this law, peace meant only ‘the temporary absence of war’. When there was ‘peace’ between — say — Athens and Sparta, or France and Germany, it meant that now they are not at war, but next year they might be. And for thousands of years, people had assumed that it was impossible to escape this law. But in the last few decades, humanity has managed to do the impossible, to break the law and to escape the jungle. We have built the rule-based liberal global order that, despite many imperfections, has nevertheless created the most prosperous and most peaceful era in human history. Peace has changed ‘Peace’ no longer means just the temporary absence of war. Peace now means the implausibility of war. There are many countries that you simply cannot imagine going to war against each other next year — like France and Germany. There are still wars in some parts of the world. I come from the Middle East, so believe me, I know this perfectly well. But it should not blind us to the overall global picture. We are now living in a world in which war kills fewer people than suicide, and gunpowder is far less dangerous to your life than sugar. Most countries — with some notable exceptions like Russia — do not even fantasise about conquering and annexing their neighbours. Which is why most countries can afford to spend maybe just about 2 per cent of their gross domestic product on defence, while spending far, far more on education and healthcare. This is not a jungle. Unfortunately, we have gotten so used to this wonderful situation that we take it for granted, and we are therefore becoming extremely careless. Instead of doing everything we can to strengthen the fragile global order, countries neglect it and even deliberately undermine it. The global order is now like a house that everybody inhabits and nobody repairs. It can hold on for a few more years, but if we continue like this, it will collapse — and we will find ourselves back in the jungle of omnipresent war. We have forgotten what it is like, but believe me as a historian — you do not want to be back there. It is far, far worse than you imagine. Yes, our species has evolved in that jungle and lived and even prospered there for thousands of years, but if we return there now, with the powerful new technologies of the 21st century, our species will probably annihilate itself. Of course, even if we disappear, it will not be the end of the world. Something will survive us. Perhaps the rats will eventually take over and rebuild civilisation. Perhaps, then, the rats will learn from our mistakes.

### 1AC---Engagement

#### Advantage two is Engagement.

#### America’s stretched thin. Normalized relations with North Korea prevents revisionist spheres of influence.

Motin ’22 – [Dylan Motin, Ph.D. in political science from Kangwon National University and non-resident fellow at the European Centre for North Korean Studies. He was named one of the Next Generation Korea Peninsula Specialists at the National Committee on American Foreign Policy and a Young Leader of the Pacific Forum. “On Containing China: A Realist Case for American Engagement with North Korea” The Journal of East Asian Affairs (2022)] TDI

A Chinese or a Russian planner may conclude that it can win a war with the United States or its allies. It is far less likely that a North Korean planner would come to the same conclusion. An overambitious or irrational one still could, but this is true of almost any other state on the planet. Thus, the United States appears driven to confront North Korea more due to historical legacy and ideological differences than to an imminent military threat. This does not mean that North Korea is no threat at all. Any nuclear-armed state can do terrible harm to the United States and its interests. However, this is true for others like Britain, France, India, Israel, and Pakistan, which obviously are not treated as imminent threats by U.S. policymakers.

On the contrary, Russia and especially China are formidable powers in their own right and already require an extensive U.S. political-military effort to defend Europe and Asia. But the quasi-alliance of Beijing and Moscow forces the United States into a gigantic effort of dual containment. China and Russia coordinate their policies to reduce U.S. influence and maximize their chances of reaching regional hegemony in at least the Western Pacific and Eastern Europe. 11 To prevail in that two-front competition, America needs to leverage the geography and capabilities of its old allies while also making new friends.

Although the United States has been “great-power competing” with China and Russia for a few years already, it has so far failed to articulate a North Korean policy coherent with this larger goal. There is a discrepancy between the traditional approach which treats North Korea as a major threat for the United States and the growing focus on out-competing China. This discrepancy is all the more surprising due to the importance of North Korea for Beijing: “Korea is more salient to China than are most countries because the two share an 880-mile land border adjacent to one of the most populous and prosperous regions of China, and because North Korea is only a few hundred miles from Beijing.”12 How does North Korea fit within the U.S. overarching goal of containing Chinese power?

The Conventional Military Balance with China

The current stalemate on the Korean Peninsula skews the balance of military capabilities in favor of China and against pro-U.S. forces in Asia. Bad relations between the United States and its allies on one side and North Korea on the other force North and South Koreans alike to devote almost all of their attention to defend against each other. Their two massive militaries and their latent power are unavailable for balancing against China, which is thus free to focus its energy on other theaters. 13 South Korea maintains a modern military of nearly 600,000 and is an economic powerhouse. The North Korean military, although of dubious quality, counts more or less one million troops. 14 In addition, the United States and Japan earmark forces to deter the DPRK that could be put at better use elsewhere.

A U.S.-aligned DPRK would be a game changer in Northeast Asia. South Korea would have more strategic leeway to balance against China and even to participate in a Taiwanese contingency. 15 The North Korean military, although outdated, remains a formidable mattress that could cushion South Korean and U.S. forces from Chinese power. North Korea could become a blotter for sucking Beijing’s attention away from regional hegemony and force the Chinese to commit considerable forces to garrison their northeastern border. That would allay Chinese pressure on like-minded states such as Taiwan, Vietnam, or India, thus stabilizing Asian politics. To show that point, consider China’s force posture along its borders (Table 1). Although available Chinese ground forces represent around one million troops, China’s armies are already stretched thin and a hostile N. Korea would force Beijing into painful trade-offs.

[Table 1 omitted]

The Southern Theater Command is arguably the weakest one. Its most likely and threatening rival is Vietnam with its over 400,000-strong army. Also, although relations with Thailand are cordial, Bangkok remains a treaty ally of the United States. Among non-conventional threats are instability in Myanmar and a Hong-Kong contingency. We may assume that Beijing will want to keep at least ten brigades there.

The Western Theater Command is one of the two most capable. The main adversary is India, which possesses a large and seasoned military and is the strongest rival of China on mainland Asia. The Chinese also need to guard against non-conventional threats such as potential Uighur and Tibetan uprisings, while preventing Islamist infiltration from Central Asia. Beijing is currently reinforcing the area and may thus want to maintain its current posture there - around 35 brigades.

The Eastern Command faces no land threat: although Beijing may prefer to keep some units to monitor Taiwan and prevent eventual popular uprisings, we assume that it keeps only five brigades there. The Central Theater Command faces no land threat either but oversees the political heart of China. It also serves as a strategic reserve for contingencies in border areas. To safeguard the rule of the Party, the capital area, and keep some reserves, we can imagine that Chinese leaders would prefer to maintain at least ten brigades there. As a consequence, if we assume that China needs to keep at least 60 brigades in other theaters, it would have 87 brigades available to reinforce the Northern Theater (see Table 2).

[Table 2 omitted]

North Korean brigades are likely weaker and less competent than Chinese units; for the sake of conservatism, we could assume that N. Korean forces are three times weaker than their Chinese peers. Even in that scenario, North, South Korean, and U.S. forces still represent the equivalent of 190 brigades against 87 Chinese brigades. The Indians have to deter Pakistan; a large part of their army cannot be arrayed against China. Even if they have only 65 brigades earmarked for a Chinese contingency, U.S.-friendly forces on mainland Asia would still represent 255 brigades against overall 147 Chinese ones and this does not even account for Vietnam and other partners.

On the sea, a friendly North Korea would help bottle up China’s North Sea Fleet. Although the Chinese would rapidly get rid of the DPRK’s navy, they may incur some losses to the North Korean large fleet of submarines. 16 Thus, the main benefit of rapprochement with North Korea is to create a strong buffer between China and U.S. forces and allies in Northeast Asia and seriously complicate any willingness the Zhongnanhai may have to reshape the region by force.

Pressuring Russia

To a lesser extent, North Korea can also promote U.S. interests concerning Russia. With the end of the Cold War and the Sino-Russian warming, Moscow largely demilitarized its southeastern borders and has been free to focus on Europe. The Eastern Military District overseeing the long border with China and Korea has combat forces corresponding to around only eight divisions supported by surface-to-surface missile units. 17 Better relations with the DPRK could have a ripple effect on Europe and oblige Russia to earmark more forces to defend Vladivostok, which is only around 150 kilometers away from North Korea, and allay pressure on European partners. Furthermore, by the same token, it complicates the life of the Russian Pacific Fleet based there.

In addition, an alliance with North Korea would maximize U.S. options during a bilateral war with Russia. During the 1980s, the U.S. Navy contemplated that in case of a Soviet attack in Germany, it could open a new front in the Russian Far East to pin down Soviet reserves in an area of secondary importance for NATO, away from Central Europe. It notably envisaged air and missile attacks and landings against naval facilities, air bases, and other military objects in Primorye, Sakhalin, and Khabarovsk regions as well as cutting the Trans-Siberian railway to isolate eastern Russia from its western core. Although this so-called “Lehman Doctrine” was unrealistic during the Cold War due to the inherent difficulty of an amphibious assault on the territory of another great power, 18 an alliance with North Korea combined with the current skeletal force posture of the Russian army on its eastern flank would create a major headache for Moscow.

The Nuclear Balance

Another benefit of friendly relations with the DPRK is to alleviate nuclear threats hovering over the United States. North Korean nuclear ambitions took root during the mid-1950s and gained momentum during the 1980s, ultimately leading to the detonation of a nuclear weapon in 2006. 20 North Korea is generally considered in the public debate through the sole prism of the nuclear danger it poses to the United States and Washington has no reliable way to prevent a North Korean nuclear strike. 21 Normal diplomatic relations would decrease the risk of an unwanted nuclear exchange by multiplying the channels of communications between Pyongyang and Washington. 22

Going further, North Korean nuclear weapons can become an asset. Now that North Korea is capable of launching nuclear-tipped missiles on any of its neighbors and even on the continental United States and that N. Korean nuclear weapons are an inescapable fact of life, do American policymakers prefer North Korean missiles to point towards Seoul, Tokyo, and Washington or toward Beijing?

Indeed, a benefit of engagement is to complicate Chinese nuclear planning. When contemplating a nuclear attack against the United States, China will fear that a U.S.-aligned DPRK will choose to side with Washington and the whole range of North Korea’s nuclear arsenal is capable of striking China. Hence, Beijing will be forced to earmark nuclear weapons for North Korea or even bomb it preemptively, thus diminishing the number of weapons available for waging war on the United States.

To sum up, at a time where U.S. forces are spread thin, adding one million soldiers and their nuclear weapons is an easy fix to correct the balance of power in America’s favor. Therefore, Pyongyang’s military power could turn from a threat to a formidable asset. Engagement with North Korea could fundamentally alter the balance of power for little cost.

#### Engagement contains China and solves North-South relations. Sanctions make that impossible.

Motin ’22 – [Dylan Motin, Ph.D. in political science from Kangwon National University and non-resident fellow at the European Centre for North Korean Studies. He was named one of the Next Generation Korea Peninsula Specialists at the National Committee on American Foreign Policy and a Young Leader of the Pacific Forum. “On Containing China: A Realist Case for American Engagement with North Korea” The Journal of East Asian Affairs (2022)] TDI

Parallel to balancing against China (and Russia), engagement offers economic opportunities to the United States and promotes peace on the Korean Peninsula.

U.S. companies would gain from relations with N. Korea. Eventually, Pyongyang will open its economy more largely to the outside world. “Iran’s and North Korea’s infrastructures are in disrepair, their natural resource sectors are underdeveloped, and their populations are largely cut off from Western economies,” noticed Lawrence, “but absent sanctions, Western firms could pursue untapped opportunities in such sectors as oil and mineral extraction, transportation, and port infrastructure, many of which would involve industrial equipment that U.S. workers could build at home.”23 However, if the current stalemate persists, China and Russia will have a first-mover advantage and monopolize a big part of North Korea’s market. Even if North Korea is and will remain a small market, the United States and like-minded states should preempt this by positioning themselves as economic partners for Pyongyang.

U.S. engagement with the DPRK to counterbalance China is also likely to fundamentally improve relations between Pyongyang and Seoul. European integration after World War II started because of the overwhelming threat from the Soviet Union. 24 More recently, Russia’s resurgence kick-started integration efforts in Central Europe, like the Three Seas Initiative. The rise of China forced Indo-Pacific states to work together through the Quad, the Trans-Pacific Partnership, and other initiatives. 25 The threat of seeing the Peninsula dominated by Beijing could do more to promote peace and integration between the two Koreas than everything tried up to now. South Korean openings towards the North throughout recent decades rested on the liberal and constructivist logic of “more interactions, more peace” and led nowhere. 26 But a North-South-U.S. understanding based on a shared sound strategic interest - containing a common threat - would bring stability in inter-Korean relations.

Some may fear that U.S. engagement with North Korea could harm U.S. alliances with Japan and South Korea but such fears are unwarranted. Japan is worried by North Korea’s nuclear program and still resents Pyongyang’s kidnapping of Japanese citizens during the 1970s and 1980s. 27 Nevertheless, Japanese leaders made clear that the main threat to Tokyo’s security is China and its growing navy. 28 As long as this remains true, there is no reason to believe that engaging North Korea would break the Japan-U.S. alliance. Seoul has generally been more eager than Washington to engage with North Korea since the era of the W. Bush administration. South Korea would thus welcome a U.S. effort to settle relations with Pyongyang. In addition, a large majority of South Koreans see China as a major threat. 29 Therefore, U.S. engagement with the DPRK is unlikely to risk the alliance with South Korea either. 30 Instead, South Korea would have greater leeway to focus on the Chinese threat. After all, both the Japan-U.S. and South Korea-U.S. alliances survived the Mao-Nixon rapprochement of the early 1970s, which was an order of magnitude more unsettling than a possible North Korea-U.S. one.

The Current Approach Is Counterproductive

The Futility of Sanctions

Policymakers and pundits usually claim that the current stalemate will eventually denuclearize North Korea and force the regime to liberalize and respect human rights. They make the case that economic sanctions incentivize North Korea to give up its nuclear weapons while the United States coordinates with regional powers, said to all have a deep-seated interest in stopping the North Korean nuclear program. If sanctions are thoroughly enforced while U.S. policymakers reach out to the Chinese, the Russians, and others, then the North Korean arsenal will eventually fade away. 32 In parallel, sanctions will make the Pyongyang regime realize it must respect the rights of its people and adopt a more liberal model.

The failure of the sanctions to denuclearize the DPRK is obvious and requires little development. 33 However, the assumption that the United States should partner with China and Russia against North Korea is more intriguing and is discussed at more length. Status quoists also believe that sanctions help to promote democracy and Western values. 34 In a second section, I show why such a thesis is untenable.

Washington’s stated goal towards North Korea is its complete, verifiable, irreversible denuclearization (CVID). However, refusing to work with the DPRK because it does not comply with CVID sacrifices U.S. interests while it is unlikely to eventually denuclearize North Korea. 35 The DPRK endured decades of budget spending, sanctions, and suffering with the sole aim of building a working nuclear arsenal. It now possesses a fully functional nuclear arsenal offering a potent deterrent against foreign threats. North Korea estimates that it developed an effective strategic deterrent and is now investing in tactical nuclear capabilities. 36 Only an irrational North Korean leader would suddenly drop the ultimate survival guarantee and accept CVID. Even under overwhelming diplomatic and economic pressure, no one would expect China or Russia to give away their nuclear arsenal. Why would anyone expect North Korea to suddenly throw in the towel and give away its hard-won weaponry?

I do not make the case that sanctions are universally useless. They can impact the balance of power by harming the target’s economy and military capabilities. 37 If one thinks counter-factually, sanctions probably limited the development of N. Korea’s conventional capabilities by shattering its economic growth and reducing the DPRK’s access to foreign weapons, technologies, and skills. However, sanctions are unlikely to ever roll back North Korea’s nuclear weaponry, which is already a hard fact.

#### China’s ascension to regional hegemony causes nuclear transition wars.

Minemura and Mearsheimer '20 [Kenji and John; August 17; Researcher at Hokkaido University Public Policy School; Distinguished Service Professor of Political Science at the University of Chicago, Ph.D. in Political Science from Cornell University; The Asahi Shimbun, "Interview/ John Mearsheimer: U.S.-China rift runs real risk of escalating into a nuclear war," <http://www.asahi.com/ajw/articles/13629071>]

Answer: The real Cold War started before the coronavirus, and the coronavirus doesn't matter much. And ideology doesn't matter much. What matters is the balance of power. And the fact is, China has become so powerful over the past 20 years.

There is a serious chance that (China) could become a regional hegemon in Asia. And the United States does not tolerate peer competitors. The idea that China is going to become a regional hegemon is unacceptable to the United States.

So, it's this clash of interests that are generated by this fundamental change that's taking place in the balance of power. It is driving the competition. And I would note that you'll hear a lot of talk about the fact that the United States is a liberal democracy, and that China is a communist state. And, therefore, this is an ideological clash.

Q: In “The Tragedy of Great Power Politics,” the book you published in 2001, you said there would never be a peaceful emerging of China and predicted the U.S.-China conflict. When do you think the critical turning point was for their bilateral relationship?

A: That's a difficult question to answer, because it really started in the early 1990s when China began to grow. That's when it started.

It was China's rise in the unipolar moment that is driving the train in this process. And there were a number of events along the way that mattered greatly. Most importantly, it was China's admission to the WTO in 2001, which really allowed the Chinese economy to accelerate, to the extent that you can pinpoint a date where the United States recognized that the rise of China was a problem and that China would have to be contained.

Q: Some analysts in the United States and Japan have argued that since U.S.-China bilateral economic ties and political relations have grown over 14 years under the so-called engagement policy, it is not feasible for either country to instigate an open war. Do you agree?

A: Well, there were many experts who said the same thing before World War I. They said there was a tremendous amount of economic interdependence in Europe. And nobody would dare start a war because you would end up killing the goose that lays the golden egg. But nevertheless, we had World War I. And what this tells you is that you can have economic cooperation, and at the same time, you have security competition.

And what sometimes happens is that the security competition becomes so intense that it overwhelms the economic cooperation and you have a conflict. But I would take this a step further and say that if you look at what's happening in the world today, that economic cooperation between the United States and China is slowly beginning to disappear, and you're getting an economic competition as well as security competition.

As you well know, the United States has its gun sights on Huawei. The United States would like to destroy Huawei.

The United States would like to control 5G. The United States would like to remain on the cutting edge of all the modern sophisticated technologies of the day and they view the Chinese as a threat in that regard. And that tells you that not only are you getting military competition, but you are also getting economic competition.

Q: Unlike in the Cold War era, no one knows exactly how many nuclear weapons China possesses. You have said that since Eastern Asia has no central front like Europe, the possibility that a war between the United States and China could occur over East Asia is high. Many countries surrounding China, particularly Japan, as well as other countries that do not possess a nuclear weapon, would be vulnerable to an attack from China. Do you think that we may see a war breaking out in East Asia in the future?

A: Let me start by talking a little bit about the Cold War and then comparing the situation in East Asia and with the situation in Europe during the Cold War. During the Cold War, the competition between the United States and the Soviet Union was centered on central Europe. We used to talk about the central front, where you had the Warsaw Pact on one side, and NATO on the other side.

And when we talked about U.S.-Soviet war, it involved the central front. Now, the central front was populated by two giant sets of armies, that were armed to the teeth with nuclear weapons. That meant if we had World War III in central Europe, you would have two huge sets of armies crashing into each other, with thousands of nuclear weapons.

Not surprisingly, when we ran war games during the Cold War, it was very difficult, if not impossible, to get a war started in central Europe, because nobody in his or her right mind, would start a war given the possibility of nuclear Armageddon.

Now, contrast that with the situation in East Asia, which is the central flash point between United States and China, the three places where you could possibly have a war involve the South China Sea, Taiwan and the East China Sea.

Those areas are not the equivalent of the central front. And it's possible to imagine a limited conventional war breaking out in one of those three areas. It's much easier to imagine that happening, than a war on the central front during the Cold War.

This is not to say that a war in East Asia is axiomatically going to happen. I'm not arguing that, but it is plausible that the United States and the Chinese and some allies of the United States like Japan may end up in a shooting match with the Chinese in say, the East China Sea.

Now, if China is losing, or if the United States is losing that military engagement, there will be a serious temptation to use nuclear weapons as the United States is committed to use nuclear weapons to defend Japan if Japan is losing a conventional war. And one might say, it's unimaginable that the United States or China would use nuclear weapons.

But I don't think that's true, because you would be using those nuclear weapons at sea. You would not be hitting the Chinese mainland in all likelihood. And, therefore, it's possible to think in terms of a "limited nuclear war," with limited nuclear use.

So, I worry greatly that not only will we have a war between the United States and China, but also that there's a serious possibility nuclear weapons would be used. And I think in a very important way, it was much less likely that would happen during the Cold War.

#### Independently, containment prevents nuclear breakouts and alliance collapse.

Beckley ’23 – [Michael Beckley, Associate Professor of Political Science at Tufts University, a Nonresident Senior Fellow at the American Enterprise Institute, and Director of the Asia Program at the Foreign Policy Research Institute. “Delusions of Détente” Foreign Affairs, https://www.foreignaffairs.com/united-states/china-delusions-detente-rivals, August 22, 2023] TDI

The problem with capitulation, however, is that Chinese demands cannot be satisfied by the United States alone. To make the CCP happy, Taiwan would have to accept absorption by a brutal dictatorship, and neighboring countries would have to beg Beijing for permission to venture beyond their coastlines. None of that is likely, which is why the most probable result of U.S. retrenchment would be not an immaculate transition to peaceful Chinese hegemony but violent chaos. A fully militarized Japan; a nuclear breakout by Seoul, Taipei, and Tokyo; and an emboldened North Korea are only the most obvious risks. Less obvious are potential knock-on effects, such as the collapse of Asian supply chains and U.S. alliances in Europe, which might not survive the shock of seeing the United States create a security vacuum for China to fill.

Containment does not have to lead to violent conflict.

Perhaps Americans could ride out the resulting storm from the safety of the Western Hemisphere, but the history of both world wars suggests they would eventually be sucked into the Eurasian vortex. At a minimum, the United States would need to arm itself to the teeth to hedge against that possibility—as well as against the possibility of a Chinese colossus that sets its sights on U.S. territories in the western Pacific after overrunning East Asia. Either way, the United States would be back where it started—containing China—but without allies, secure supply chains, forward-deployed forces, or much credibility. To compensate, the United States might have to become a garrison state, with its wealth and civil liberties eroded by breakneck militarization.

Capitulation might be worth a try if the only alternatives were a catastrophic hot war or an endless and financially crippling cold war. But there are reasons to hope that U.S. containment of China can be a temporary way station to a brighter future. During the original Cold War, containment was designed to block Soviet advances until the weaknesses of the communist system sapped Moscow’s power and forced the Soviets to radically scale back their ambitions. That should be the same goal with China today, and it may not take four decades to get there. The drivers of China’s rise are already stalling. Slowing growth, soaring debt, autocratic incompetence, capital flight, youth unemployment, and a shrinking population are taking a toll on Chinese comprehensive national power. The CCP has also made enemies near and far. Many of China’s neighbors are beefing up their militaries, and major economies, led by the G-7, which controls more than half the world’s stocks of wealth, are imposing hundreds of new trade and investment barriers on Beijing every year. China garnered goodwill across the global South by doling out more than $1 trillion in loans to over 100 countries. But most of those loans will mature around 2030, and many will not be paid back. It is hard to see how a country saddled with so many liabilities and facing so many rivals can continue to compete with a superpower and its wealthy allies. The United States does not need to contain China forever, just long enough to allow current trends to play out. Should that occur, Xi’s dream of Chinese dominance will start to look unattainable, and his successors may feel compelled to address, through diplomatic moderation and internal reform, the country’s economic stagnation and geopolitical encirclement.

In the meantime, containment does not have to lead to violent conflict. Competition could see the United States and China engage in a technology race that pushes the frontiers of human knowledge to new heights and creates innovative solutions to transnational problems. It could also mean the two rivals cultivate internally peaceful blocs of like-minded states, and in which they use nonviolent means, including the provision of aid, to try to win hearts and minds and expand their influence at the margins. This type of rivalry might not be so bad for the world and certainly would be better than the great-power wars that have characterized most of modern history. The “one world” dream of a single, harmonious international system may be impossible for now, but that does not rule out peaceful, if tense, relations between two rival orders. Containing China in that competition will entail severe risks and costs, but it is the best way to avoid an even more destructive conflict.

#### The mere perception of alliance decline triggers adversarial probing---extinction.

Mitchell ’17 [Wess and Jakub J. Grygiel; 2017; PhD, political science, Otto Suhr Institut für Politikwissenschaft at Freie Universität, President, Center for European Policy Analysis; Professor, Catholic University of America, Fellow, The Institute for Human Ecology; “The Unquiet Frontier: Rising Rivals, Vulnerbale allies, and The Crisis of American Power,” p. 42-71]

America’s deprioritization of allies creates opportunities for revisionist powers. Such transition is recurrent in geopolitics; international relations are always characterized by uncertainty. Policy makers have to navigate a landscape that is often difficult to delineate, full of strategic actors whose purposes are often obscure and whose power is difficult to assess. Intentions are notoriously hard to divine, in part because rival states obfuscate them but in part because often the states themselves do not have a clear and consistent perception of what they want to achieve. Uncertainty arises also out of a more quantifiable source of knowledge, an assessment of hard power, which is imperfect and results in widely different estimates. It is sufficient to recall the challenges of assessing Soviet power throughout the Cold War.

Moments characterized by alleged large shifts in relative power present particularly acute problems of assessing power and intentions, adding an additional layer of ambiguity and uncertainty. Rumors of change put in doubt the relatively well- known, or at least familiar, geopolitical situation. All parties involved are unsure about their position relative to the others, the extent of their political sway, and the match between their commitments and their power. The established great powers may have a crisis of confidence, while emboldened rising states are uncertain how far their influence extends as well as how solid and credible is the power reach of their weakening rival. Revisionist powers now openly but cautiously question what was the grudgingly accepted geopolitical status quo.

Rising powers are thus curious but careful. They are interested in pushing the existing boundaries of their influence but do not know how far they can do so without meeting a firm opposition of the other power. In the current case, U.S. rivals— China, Russia, and Iran— appear keen to assert their influence and establish what they deem their rightful position in their respective regions and in the world but are also eager to avoid a direct confrontation with the United States. Uncertain about their own power relative to the United States, they test the hypothesis of a growing American economic and military fragility and decaying political reach. To figure out the new map of power, and possibly to redraw it at low cost, revisionist powers engage in probing.

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In this chapter we examine this behavior— the probing by revisionist powers. We define probing as a low- intensity and low- risk test aimed at gauging the opposing state’s power and will to maintain security and influence over a region. It is a set of actions that studiously avoids a direct military confrontation with the leading power by targeting the outer limits of its commitments and interests. There, along the outer rim of its influence, the hegemon is at the furthest of its commitments and power projection. The perception, or rather the suspicion, of its decline is most consequential along these frontiers of power because the revisionist state senses opportunities in its own neighborhood and searches for confirmation of the rival’s weakness. Probing is an opportunistic behavior. It occurs when the revisionist states detect a permissive international situation, namely, when they think that the existing great power is retreating. It is still a behavior that is characterized by self- doubt and uncertainty, although if unanswered it results in the confirmation of the belief in the rival’s decline and may lead to ever more assertive challenges to the international order and expansions of influence by the geopolitical challenger. Over the past few years, and with greater frequency and brazenness, regional powers opposed to the United States have been engaging in probing. Russia, Iran, and China in their respective regions have been working under the hypothesis that the United States is retreating, out of choice, fatigue, or weakness, or all three combined. The American retrenchment is more pronounced in the Middle East, with the ending of U.S. combat presence in Iraq and the drawdown in Afghanistan as well as the unwillingness to intervene in Syria, leaving a vacuum for Iranian influence. But there is an equally pervasive perception of American withdrawal or decline in the other two key regions, Europe and Asia. In Europe, the perception is that Washington is redirecting its strategic focus and resources toward Asia and has limited willpower to back its extended deterrent, giving Moscow a window of opportunity to redraw the map in Europe’s eastern “borderlands. ” And in Asia, a rising and confident China looks at a United States hobbled by financial crises, fiscal imbalances, and a decade- long military overstretch in the Middle East. The reasons are different, but the broad perception is similar: the revisionist states sense an opening left by a distracted and weakening United States. And they probe along the periphery of American influence, from Ukraine to the South China Sea through the Persian Gulf. ORIGINS OF PROBING BEHAVIOR Probing stems out of a tentative belief that the existing geopolitical order is amenable to change, and it seeks to confirm this suspicion. A perceived geopolitical change remains only that, perceived, until facts on the ground confirm it. An assessment of a state’s power is merely an estimate of how that state may fare in a clash with others. As such, it informs a set of expectations for the future, and it may or may not reflect reality. Often there is little agreement among powers as well as within those powers as to which assessment of power is correct.1 Today, for instance, questions about the continued resilience of American power abound both abroad and in the United States, and there are analysts on both sides of the argument.2 Regardless of where one stands on the issue of American relative decline or retrenchment, the mere existence of such a debate is a source of concern because it points to an absence of clarity on the geopolitical scene. The various strategic actors no longer know where they stand on the international pecking order and are confused as to how far their own influence can reach and what the responses of their rivals may be.3 These are periods of a tense peace but also of great uncertainty about the nature of the security environment. As a scholar put it, it is the “fog of peace” that makes strategic planning more difficult because it is unclear who the enemy is, how much power a potential rival may have, and where the boundaries of political influence are.4 As history indicates, often such an uncertain strategic environment degenerates into war, which is a “dispute about the measurement of power. ”5 The outcome of a war is the violent clarification of such confusion. It settles the dispute about the assessment of power. A victory or defeat in war, followed by changes in boundaries, military bases, or political affiliations of governments, is one way to prove or disprove a perceived alteration in relative power. As British historian A.J.P. Taylor observed, the “test of a Great Power is . . . the test of strength for war. ”6 After its defeat in the 1853– 1856 Crimean War, Russia was clearly militarily inferior to European states (even though the victorious powers, Britain, France, Turkey, and later Austria, also encountered serious difficulties in projecting power to the Black Sea theater) and consciously chose to retreat, reform, and rebuild its foundations of power, known as a policy of recueillement, in order to maintain its status as a European great power.7 There is no clearer confirmation of a state’s decline than a loss in a direct confrontation with a rising power; there is equally no better proof that the perception of relative decline was incorrect when the aspirant revisionist state is soundly defeated. In the immediate aftermath of a war it is therefore easier to assess one’s own power relative to that of the other players. War lifts the “fog of peace. ” But war is rarely pursued simply to clarify one’s own uncertain standing relative to the other strategic actors. To engage in war, the ultimate test of power, is exceedingly dangerous, and no leader wants to enter into a violent conflict simply as a way of assessing the power of its own state relative to the target. Wars are realms of luck and un knowns as much as of more calculable kinetic clashes, and consequently the outcomes do not always align with the expectations preceding them.8 In fact, the losing party in a conflict has often entered that war having overestimated its own capability relative to the rival. Many in Europe, for instance, expected in summer 1914 to be “home for Christmas, ” only to remain in the bloody trenches for several years. Given this inherent uncertainty, the risk of being proven wrong for both the perceived rising and declining powers is high, and great powers in history seem to stumble into wars rather than consciously pursue them as tests of strength. The risks of war are incalculable and thus extremely high. A less risky way of assessing a changing equilibrium of power is through probing. This is a form of strategic behavior meant to test existing perceptions of power relations, seeking at the same time to draw the presumably new boundaries of influence. The rising or revisionist state, in particular, is strongly motivated to test the will of its seemingly declining rival power. It has the aspiration, mitigated by the fear of the rival great power, to alter the existing geopolitical map. Such states, unhappy with the existing international order, which they perceive perhaps as imposed on them and certainly as increasingly not reflective of their own rising aspirations and power, have the most to gain from probing. If this behavior confirms the perception that the existing great power is on the wane and that the map drawn by it is no longer supported by its strength and will, the revisionist state may be able to reassert lost influence over its neighborhood and revise a previous settlement. At the same time, such a state has also a strong incentive to avoid a direct clash with its main antagonist lest the perception of its relative weakening turns out not to match reality. A strategy of direct confrontation is risky because its success is predicated on the relative weakness of the targeted power, the existing hegemon, and this is exactly what is unknown. If the probing power becomes convinced that its hypothesis of its own superiority (and of the relative decline of the rival) is true, then a direct clash may occur. But until that confirmation, a safer, less risky course of action is to engage in a probing behavior, akin to testing the water before jumping in. Probes target the frontier of the rival power’s influence, where its interests are less pronounced, its power is at its farthest projection, and its political clout at its weakest. At these outer edges the response of the great power is expected to be most restrained, while the gains of the probing state are most likely to occur. The purpose of probing, therefore, is to gauge the resolve of the targeted powers. We will return to this later, but here it is important to note that a probing action is also a way of showing the renewed or freshly acquired capabilities and aspirations that otherwise would remain latent and without tangible effects. One cannot revise an established order by keeping one’s own intentions and capabilities hidden. Showing a new military platform, often in a carefully choreographed event, is one way of signaling growing power. The 1907– 1909 voyage of the American “Great White Fleet, ” meant to showcase the emergent global naval strength of the United States, was one such episode. The round- the- globe cruise was not targeted at a specific power and did not aim to extend American influence over a particular state or region. Rather, it was a broad assertion of American capabilities and global reach, and the other powers, Great Britain in particular, certainly received it as a sign that the United States was a power to be reckoned with. But probing is more than showing off. It is not simply an action of strutting on the world stage with newly acquired military gadgets and political confidence but a precisely targeted action with clear objectives. Through probing, a revisionist state aims at changing the existing geopolitical order where it thinks it can, namely, at the farthest points of the ruling great power’s influence. Probing, therefore, is not just mere signaling of displeasure with the rules of the international order and the map of power; it aims to revise the order gradually and carefully, starting from the outer layers of the rival great power’s influence. FEATURES OF PROBING The purpose of probing is threefold. First, a probing state aims to check whether the rumors of its rival’s weakening are true. A probe is a test, meant to elicit a response from the targeted power. Second, the revisionist state that engages in probing behavior wants to avoid a direct military clash with the existing great power. The risks of being wrong about the rival’s resolve and capability are simply too big. Third, the state’s objective is to achieve, if possible, low- cost revision of the existing regional order. These purposes can be seen in the features that characterize a probe and distinguish it from other types of behavior, ranging from fullout aggression to commercial pressures and diplomatic démarches. First, probes are low intensity, vigilantly avoiding a direct war with the main rival power. They are below the horizon of direct military confrontation. The revisionist state has no interest in starting an allout military conflict with the rival great power, perhaps declining but still more than a match. The level of violence used, therefore, is low, and probes are limited projections of power in areas of less pronounced interest to the rival. A probing power engages in a lot of selfrestraint; it intentionally elects to keep the use of force at a minimum. It can but chooses not to escalate. A probe is a calculated gamble, not a foolish thrashing around. The desire to avoid a war with the existing hegemon often leads the revisionist to project power under cover of civilian or paramilitary forces, part of a larger trend of “civilianization” of conflict.9 By using unmarked units to harass a U.S. protégé, a state is able to de ny authorship of provocative actions and thereby avoid a more violent and direct war while at the same time chipping away at the rival’s influence and wealth. The possibility of denying that an aggression has occurred drives costs of revisionism lower. For instance, the sixteenth- century privateer Sir Francis Drake acted on behalf of Queen Elizabeth I, raiding Spanish shipping but never in an official capacity. The queen went so far as to tell a Spanish ambassador that “Drake was a private adventurer, and that she had nothing to object to his alleged execution. ” She was careful in not provoking Spain too much but eager to “singe the King of Spain’s beard. ”10 A similar approach can be seen around the world today. The initial Russian push into Crimea in 2014 was done anonymously with unmarked special forces, dubbed by Ukrainians as the “little green men, ” a clear example of a long- standing Russian practice of tactical deception and disguise (maksirovka).11 It was an indication that Moscow was unsure whether Ukrainian forces would react, and, in the event of a determined opposition, it maintained the option of either escalating with larger conventional forces or halting operations and denying. Moscow seemed to be more careful in masking the identity of its forces in eastern Ukraine, where the local opposition was more assertive and the Western displeasure with Russian aggression more pronounced. The greater the risk of a strong response from the actors targeted, the more carefully tailored, dissimulated, and low- intensity is the probe. The use of unmarked troops and paramilitary forces allows Russia to claim that no aggression has occurred, and thus no military response from Ukraine or from the West is warranted. China has been testing the limits of the influence of the United States and its allies in the South China Sea using an array of civilianlooking vessels. Its fishing fleet, combined with a fishery- enforcement fleet, is integrated into its military institutions and plays an active role in expanding China’s maritime reach. As Lyle Goldstein observes, this is part of a “strategy of ‘defeating harshness with kindness’ (yi rou ke gang)” whereby China deploys “unarmed fishing vessels or fisheries enforcement vessels to confront foreign vessels operating in its EEZ and claimed waters. ”12 This low- intensity push tests the fron tier of American influence in a way that makes a U.S. response difficult.13 A foray by a Chinese naval vessel into contested waters can be countered with the might of the United States and its ally’s navy; a probe by fishing vessels manned by Chinese fishermen does not warrant the involvement of the U.S. Seventh Fleet. This is risky behavior, but it also indicates a desire by China to avoid a war with the other regional powers as well as with the United States.14 If it is openly a military attack, a probe is conducted with a strong and perhaps warranted belief that the rival power will not intervene because it is distracted elsewhere and because it deems the targeted region to be of little immediate interest. This was the case of the Russian war with Georgia in 2008, when Moscow felt emboldened by NATO ambivalence to extending its membership process to Tbilisi and by the American strategic distraction by the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq (where a small Georgian contingent was deployed). The Russian gamble was based on the expectation of no meaningful Western, and American in particular, response. The objective was to chip away at the unwelcome Western influence in Russia’s neighborhood but without spurring an equally unwelcome Western military reply— to “singe America’s beard, ” as it were. Second, a revisionist state engages in probing because it sees it as a low- risk but high- reward behavior. The low risk stems in part from the first feature, the carefully tailored level of aggressiveness that is expected not to elicit a full- out military response by the rival. It is also related to the third feature, explained below, namely, the fact that the immediate target of probing is geographically and political peripheral to the interests of the rival great power, and consequently contributes to the low likelihood of a forceful military response. But on top of being pursued as a low- risk action, a probe can yield high strategic rewards. Most often the revisionist power seems to direct probing behavior to its immediate vicinity, hoping to expand its influence over neighboring and thus more controllable regions.15 It is there that it has the greatest chances of extending its own political shadow successfully. Probes are rarely long- distance projections of power because incursions deep into the rival’s sphere of influence are more liable to be met with more assertive responses as well as being less likely to establish durable control by the probing state. The farther the revisionist state engages in probing behavior, the more high risk and low reward it is, and vice versa. Hence the more likely locations for probing behavior are in the near neighborhood of the revisionist power. Furthermore, probes focus on strategically important regions, either resource rich or located along lines of communication, or both. Elizabethan England, for example, conducted raiding probes of Spain’s vulnerable transatlantic arteries bringing gold from the New World— not its stronger positions in the Mediterranean. Imperial Germany’s probes of the Anglo- French alliance targeted Morocco, located near the strategically important choke point of Gibraltar but beyond easy reach of the main British fleet. Today China’s probes of U.S. allies in Asia often target oil and gas fields in the South China Sea. In all these cases, since the goal of probing is to test the power and commitment of a rival state, it has to be directed at regions where the rival’s influence is present but not preponderant. It is unlikely that regions of no geostrategic value or with few resources have much of a presence of the rival great power, and as such they are not prime material for probing. A state may still have imperial aspirations in such regions, but not every extension of power is a probe. Probing is not simply grabbing new areas of influence but first and foremost to test the will of the rival. There may be, of course, the bonus that if the probe is successful, it may result in the addition of strategically important regions. The third feature of probing is that it is peripheral or indirect. The target of the probe is the periphery or the frontier of the tested power where the rival’s presence is at its farthest reach, its interests are less pronounced, and thus its response is expected to be muted. Fearful of a militarily assertive response, the state that is probing is careful not to target areas that are clearly considered of primary and existential interests, such as the rival’s homeland or its immediate neighbors. Hence the visits of Russian or Iranian naval vessels to Venezuelan ports are less a probe per se than an act of grandstanding, since all sides know that the United States could quickly bring overwhelming force to bear in the event of a crisis. These are temporary publicity stunts rather than a calculated attempt to test the hegemon’s commitment to maintaining the status quo. Probes test for perceived weaknesses, not strengths, and it is on the outer boundaries of the existing great power that its influence is likely to appear the most fragile. The revisionist power is interested in probing the power and influence of its rival in places where that influence is at its weakest, overstretched, and uncertain. During the Peloponnesian War the Spartan general Brasidas adopted such a peripheral strategy, but only a decade into the conflict. The initial Spartan approach of annual invasion of Attica, Athens’s immediate neighborhood, failed to inflict sufficient damage to end the war. It was only with Brasidas, sent north with a small force of helots (minimizing thus the risk to Spartan manpower), that Sparta changed its strategy to one similar to probing, by persuading or forcing distant Athenian allies in Thrace to switch sides. And many did reconsider their allegiance to Athens, because, as Thucydides observes, there did not seem to be much risk given the distance from Athens and their belief that this empire was on the wane.16 Striking the rival’s periphery, and its allies, not only was cheaper than assaulting it directly but also forced it to devote a lot of resources to reasserting the lost influence. Global powers in particular have a “periphery or frontier problem” that invites probing. A lengthy frontier, distant from the homeland and thus from key logistical bases, is difficult to protect. The sheer amount of power needed to outfit the distant outposts, combined with the uncertainty as to the location and timing of potential attacks, makes it impossible to have an impermeable frontier. When a power assesses threats, the key questions of “where, when, and by whom” are directly related to the length of the imperial frontier. A regional power has well- delimited borders and a clear idea of who the rival is. For instance, from the final decade of the nineteenth century on, Germany was burdened with the possibility of a two- front war, with France on one side and Russia on the other; a serious problem of military planning caused by poor diplomacy but not a source of strategic confusion. For a global power, it is that strategic clarity that is missing, resulting in the need to prepare for multiple contingencies and ultimately to stretch resources in several theaters of potential action.17 While imperial Germany could concentrate on its two- front problem, Great Britain at the turn of the twentieth century had to consider threats from Russia (in Central Asia, pushing toward India), Japan (in the Asian littoral sphere), France (in Africa as well as the Mediterranean), and Germany (in Europe and the North Sea in particular). Through deft diplomacy, it managed to neutralize the first three, allowing it to focus on the German naval threat, thereby limiting its “frontier problem. ” In practice, probing the periphery of a rival’s great power often translates into testing the strength of its alliances. Most great powers, or empires, expand their influence in informal ways, through political arrangements with local elites and formal alliances.18 The security of these great powers, in particular of ones with global reach, therefore resides not only in the safety of their borders but in their ability to hold rivals at a distance and thwart their challenges to faraway interests. They do so only in part through their own forces and rely heavily on the presence of allies that provide additional military strength and local deterrence (see chapter 5). Allies are at the periphery of influence and strength of great powers, and it is there that the powers’ commitment and influence are at their weakest. It is clear that a state will respond to an encroachment on its territorial possessions or to an attack against its forward deployed forces. It is less certain, however, that a state will respond in the same strong fashion to similar actions directed against its allies and their interests. The security guarantee extended to them, the foundation of the alliance, is a promissory note that carries a high degree of uncertainty. Placing bases with troops on the territory of an ally is a time- tested way of diminishing this uncertainty. As Thomas Schelling put it, the role of U.S. troops in South Korea was simply to die, buttressing the American security guarantee to its ally.19 The loss of American soldiers to an initial attack by the enemy would, so the argument goes, create powerful pressures for Washington to respond. French general Ferdinand Foch, when asked before World War I how many British troops would be needed for the security of France, replied, “One single private soldier . . . and we would take good care that he was killed. ”20 Probes by the revisionist power are not attacks against these bases and forces that underwrite the credibility of the extended deterrent. Rather, they target areas that may be of great importance to the ally but not necessarily to the security patron. That is the periphery of the periphery, so to speak, the tip of the great power’s commitment. The United States has a particularly pronounced “periphery” problem. There are few direct threats to the continental United States, short of a large- scale assault with weapons of mass destruction or the tragic yet relatively small and isolated terrorist attack. While the absence of a contiguous threat is a geopolitical blessing, it also means that most of the menaces to U.S. interests and security are outside of the North American continent. Hence, in the competitive international environment, “the strategic position of the United States rests ultimately on its ability to project power over great distances. ”21 In practice this entails managing alliances that maintain stability and keep U.S. rivals on the defensive in key regions of the world, in particular along an arc from Europe to East Asia through the Middle East. And historically this has been, and continues to be, achieved by extending U.S. deterrence beyond the North American continent to the countries, some allied by treaty and some neutral. Such an extended deterrence is a “ ‘three- nation problem’ involving an aggressor nation, the United States, and some smaller nation which is the object of the aggressor’s designs and which Washington seeks to protect. ”22 Probing by an “aggressor nation” aims to test U.S. commitment to these “smaller nations, ” which constitute the periphery of American interests and power. In the most successful case, probing could achieve a dual purpose: first, it tests the level and credibility of the commitment of the distant security patron, and second, it can weaken the rival alliance. It does so by targeting the foundation of the alliance, the belief that the alliance is beneficial to both parties and that it is effective. As Michael Mandelbaum has observed, alliances need to manage two concurrent fears: one of entrapment, namely, of being dragged into undesirable wars of limited significance and local interest, and one of abandonment, the apprehension of often the weaker ally of be ing abandoned by its security provider when the need comes. 23 Probing aims to increase the rival’s fear of entrapment while at the same time stoking worries of abandonment among its weaker and more dependent partners. By harassing the local interests of the rival’s peripheral allies, the revisionist power wants to drive up the risk of a local war, perceived by the rival as a distraction and a potential drain of resources. At the same time, it wants to indicate to the smaller allies that they may not rely on their security provider to defend their local, narrow interest, and that they may be abandoned. The goal is to drive a wedge in the opposing alliance by leveraging the fundamental dilemma of alliances— the fears of entrapment and abandonment. This is where probing becomes more than a simple test of the rival’s strength. By targeting the outer edges of the existing hegemon, and thus harassing its alliance system, the revisionist is engaging in a much more significant endeavor. The contest for regional, or global, control is in the end a contest for allies. A.J.P. Taylor observed that when Germany “was bidding for the domination of Europe” in the decade before the outbreak of World War I, “her chosen method was to isolate the independent Powers one from another. ”24 As we point out in chapter 5, allies are, among other things, an extension of the distant patron’s power. Were they to peel away from the side of their security guarantor— or vice versa, were the security guarantor to decide that the risk of continued support of a distant ally pressured by a regional revisionist power is too big— it would in either case signify a retrenchment of power for that offshore patron. The loss of allies is both a confirmation of the waning sway of that rival great power as well as a further reduction in its reach. To be alone in inter national relations is to be vulnerable, inviting further aggressive behavior from the rival. Walter Lippmann observed in 1943, “No one knew, not Hitler, not Stalin, not Chamberlain or Daladier, the relative strength of the Axis and of the opposing combination. Only when Hitler succeeded at Munich in separating the Franco- British allies from Russia, had he so altered the balance of power in his favor that a war for the conquest of Europe was from his point of view a good risk. ”25 War is an extension of successful probing. The benefits of targeting allies of a rival, rather than the rival itself, are well recognized in history. The astute observer of history and politics Niccolò Machiavelli noted in his Discourses that attacking a rival’s ally is always a preferred option: “For I know especially that if I assault his friend, either he will resent it and I will have my intention of making war with him, or by not resenting it he will uncover his weakness or faithlessness in not defending a client of his. Both the one and the other of these two things are able to take away his reputation and to make my plans easier . ”26 In the strategic behavior we describe, the probing power is not interested in “making war” with the rival, and therefore a probe is not a full- out attack on a rival’s ally or supported state. The risks of activating the security guarantees or assurances that ought to be at the foundation of that alliance are too big. But it is an offensive act of sorts, which threatens the interests of the rival’s ally. The security patron will either respond, thereby disproving the perception of its weakness, or will not, “taking away his reputation” and undermining its alliance. China has been particularly astute in picking geographic objectives that are important to U.S. allies but only indirectly important to the United States, such as the shoals and reefs around the Spratly and Paracel Islands. By ratcheting up the pressure in these areas, China causes the targeted states to intensify their demands for American assurance while diminishing U.S. willingness to back allies over seemingly petty issues that could lead to a larger conflict. Americans do not want to risk their lives for insignificant and distant rocks. Russia achieves a similar effect by reigniting NATO’s eastern frontier through its attack on Ukraine and a series of threats against exposed NATO members around the Baltic Sea. Those are areas that until recently have not been prominent on the U.S. strategic radar screen but are naturally vital to those smaller states inhabiting the region, which in turn are driven to make increasingly vocal requests for security reassurances from Washington. As in the case of the South China Sea, however, the local and limited nature of the rival’s probes generates in Washington as much a perception of threat as fear of a larger conflict, raising doubts about the benefits of extending security guarantees to these allies and partners. In the end, these peripheral probes pursued by U.S. rivals can create a wedge between Washington and its regional friends and allies. These three features— low intensity, low risk but high reward, peripheral— point also to the timing of the probing behavior. Probing is a strategic behavior that arises out of an uncertain assessment of power relations. It is the product of doubt, not confidence, in the resilience of the existing international order. As such it arises early on in the transition of power, when perceptions of rise and decline are not firm. The vagueness of the security environment creates among revisionist powers the perception of opportunities that a probing behavior aims to test. Hence probing should occur with less frequency in the immediate aftermath of a war, when, as we point out, an assessment of relative power carries the weight of the ultimate test, war. A defeated power may have all the incentives to upset the existing order, but unless it has no ability to evaluate its clearly weakened position, it has no capacity to do so. After a defeat probing may be tempting but is unfeasible. Such states are more likely to pursue a policy of recueillement (introspection, a moment of pause and strengthening), characterized by internal reforms, modernization, and very limited foreign engagements mostly aimed at dividing the opposing alliance.27 When, however, the perceived weakening of the founding power puts in doubt the existing international settlement, the desire to revise it is matched by the possibility of doing so. The perception of American weakening, or at least retrenchment, therefore opens up a window of opportunity for those powers that aspire to expand their own influence and resent the Western order and its institutions. THE AUDIENCES OF PROBING Another useful way of looking at the strategic behavior of probing is by considering the audiences involved. As we argued, a revisionist power pursues probing behavior to check whether new boundaries of influence are feasible given the perceived weakening of the rival. The main purpose is therefore to elicit a response from the targeted audiences. That response, or lack thereof, supplies information necessary to draw the new outline of the geopolitical map. Probing is first and foremost a violent and risky didactic exercise. The most direct audience is the immediate target of the probing behavior, usually an ally, or an aspirant to be an ally, of the rival great power. Probing here seeks to gauge the willingness and capacity of the targeted state to withstand pressure, and ultimately it aims to push that state to sever itself from its security patron. As we examine in chapter 4, vulnerable frontier allies of a great power actively consider alternative strategic options, especially when they perceive themselves to be under threat from a neighboring revisionist pow er and to have a fraying security guarantee from a distant patron. A probe is meant to ratchet up the threat perception while also attempting to establish a sense of strategic isolation and separation from the security provider. Hence as important as, if not more important than, the first audience is the second one: the distant but more powerful ally and security provider. Probing tests indirectly the regional staying power of the rival hegemon. While carefully avoiding direct confrontation, the revisionist power wants to assess the commitment of the opposing great power to its ally in the near neighborhood. What the revisionist is testing, therefore, is not the rival’s resolve to oppose other great powers, but the rival’s reliability to its own allies.28 Resolve is the willingness to risk war to achieve one’s own objectives: the more diffuse and distant the threatened interests, the less the resolve. Given that the target of probes is peripheral and not the rival’s homeland or troops and bases, the resolve is assumed to be small. Direct war between the revisionist probing state and the rival great power is unlike ly to erupt as a result. Moreover, the probing state is not interested in finding out whether the rival has the will to fight a direct war: the stakes would be simply too high and the outcome too uncertain. A direct challenge would test the resolve of the rival. Poking around the periphery, therefore, is a poor test of the rival’s willingness to fight a war. History seems to confirm this. For instance, as scholars have pointed out, Soviet leaders did not think that U.S. responses to peripheral threats (e.g., in the Third World) could serve as indicators of future American behavior when its core interests (NATO allies, Japan, or the U.S. homeland) were threatened.29 Whether the United States responded militarily or not to a Soviet foray in Angola or Ethiopia could not be easily translated into expectations of future American behavior in Europe. But it does affect the perception of whether the United States wants to fight in other peripheral areas. “If Soviet leaders were to gain the impression that the United States is firmly set upon a course of neo- isolationism and the absolute avoidance of intervention in local wars, they might become dangerously adventurous in the Middle East and elsewhere. ”30

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Probing, however, tests the reliability of the rival great power— that is, its willingness to protect and stand by its ally or aspiring allies. The immediate target is not a test of the rival’s general credibility but only of its commitment to the security ties to the state. Probing wants to elicit a response (or lack thereof) from the rival great power regarding the seriousness of its commitment to the directly targeted state. To be perceived as a reliable ally means to instill the belief that promised security guarantees will hold even in cases of heightened tensions and, in final analysis, of conflict. Consequently a perception of low reliability results in the belief that the alliance is fragile and that it may be in the small state’s interest to seek accommodation with the nearby revisionist power. As delineated above, probes are care fully tailored to split the distant security patron from its regional allies, showing it to be unreliable.

Even if it achieves nothing else, probing can introduce doubts about the security guarantees, forcing the security patron to renew its promises. The less reliable the security patron is perceived by its allies, the more insistent are their demands for continued security guarantees. Probing thus imposes an immediate cost on the rival great power by reactivating a frontier region that until then was dormant and by pressing the rival to expend more resources and political capital to reassert its security guarantees.

Finally, the third audience is composed of the geopolitical onlookers, states that are watching the behavior and derive their own conclusions about the resilience of the existing great power. The strategic interaction spurred by a probe does not directly affect them, but they perceive it as a regionally circumscribed development with potentially more global repercussions. That is, a probe is limited to a specific region but has radiating effects as others also see it for what it really is: a test of the resilience and reliability of the great power that may be analogous in other regions.

Recent academic literature puts in doubt the idea that reputation for commitment is interdependent. Thomas Schelling, among others, articulated that idea in his classic work from 1966 where he argued that U.S. reputation was global, and a loss in one region would have negative impact in other areas. Reputation was not compartmentalized in different regions, in large measure because the rival, the Soviet Union, was one and the same across the world map. Hence “we tell the Soviets that we have to react here because, if we did not, they would not believe us when we say that we will react there. ”31 Academics have relentlessly questioned this argument, resulting in copious writings asserting that reputation is not interdependent and, according to some, does not even matter.32 Reputation is merely a cult and does not exist in international relations.33 Policy makers, however, disagree and continue to speak of reputation for resolve and reliability as something that not only matters and requires constant work but also is interdependent. They prefer to rely on time- tested authors, from Thucydides to Machiavelli, who consider reputation as indispensable to political power.34 In brief, there is a deep gap between academics and policy makers on the issue of reputation.

By observing recent events in the three frontier regions— Central Europe, the Middle East, and East Asia— we think that the truth is closer to Schelling’s view. It is clear that the effects of probing behavior do not remain confined to the immediate actors involved (the probing power, the direct target— usually a rival’s ally— and the rival great power). Other actors in the region are keenly aware of the revisionist state’s probing and of the responses of the United States. For instance, other states, from the Baltics to Poland and Ukraine, observed Russia’s war against Georgia in 2008 and its invasion of Crimea in 2014 with great trepidation.35 These wars were symptoms of a more assertive Russia; a source of worry in themselves. But they were also meant to elicit an answer from the United States. Any sign of American hesitation to respond quickly and firmly to Russian small wars in the two states was perceived as affecting directly these other states, not directly involved in the probing event. America’s reputation for reliability, in other words, was at stake, even though Georgia and Ukraine were not NATO members but only aspiring to closer security and political relations with the United States and the EU. Similarly, Pacific nations from Japan to Australia follow with great attention China’s probing behavior in the South China Sea that puts pressure on Vietnam, the Philippines, and Taiwan. They too seek to figure out whether the United States has the will to remain as a security provider in this region and to the “global commons” in general. How the United States responds to a probe in a particular region therefore affects its regional image.

The question is whether there is also a wider, global audience to regional probes. Do Middle Eastern leaders watch American responses to Russia’s probing in Eastern Europe? Do Kremlin elites draw lessons from U.S. actions along the “first chain of islands” in East Asia? Or, do Chinese neo- Mahanian leaders think the United States is on the wane if it accommodates Putin’s imperial fantasies? According to the latest academic literature, the answer should be negative: how the United States is perceived to be doing in one region does not translate into a similar perception elsewhere. The practical implication of such a view is that the United States should not have fought in Vietnam to prove that it would stand its ground in Europe; similarly, it ought not to oppose Putin around the Black Sea basin simply to demonstrate that it will oppose China in the South China Sea. But we are not so confident that there are no connections between regional demonstrations of will and power. It is at least plausible, and perhaps safer, to argue that there are wider, global effects of probing. First, the world is indeed global, and regions are not hermetically separated from each other. As Nicholas Spykman observed, “Global war, as well as global peace, means that all fronts and all areas are interrelated. No matter how remote they are from each other, success or failure in one will have an immediate and determining effect on the others. It is necessary, therefore, to see the world as a whole and to weigh the measures taken to achieve victory in the light of conditions in all theaters. ”36 Leaders watch and learn from other regions, more than previously in history when conflicts were limited by technology and geographic knowledge to a contiguous region. Because of their domestic opacity, it is difficult to prove that America’s rivals learn from U.S. behavior in other regions, but the question whether they do so needs to be asked. Chinese military officials, for example, have commented publicly on lessons for China from the U.S. handling of the war in Ukraine.37 As one analyst noted, “It might be impossible to determine definitively whether the Ukraine Crisis has impacted China’s risk calculus in hotspots such as the South and East China Sea, but the evidence . . . certainly suggests that such eastern reverberations are quite plausible. ”38 At a minimum we have to recognize that some cross-regional analyses do occur, and it is safer to assume that the U.S. reputation does not stay limited to a region.

Second, the much stronger effect of probing appears to be on U.S. allies and friends, the key geopolitical spectators. They watch how the United States treats other allies and form an opinion regarding American reliability. The former director of Saudi intelligence summed up the view of many officials from U.S. allied states in the Persian Gulf when he said in reaction to the Russian seizure of Crimea, “While the wolf is eating the sheep, there is no shepherd to come to the rescue. ”39 Israel was interested in the war in Georgia; Japanese analysts followed the Obama administration’s decision to cancel the Ballistic Missile Defense (BMD) program in Central Europe; and Polish experts watch U.S. moves in East Asia.40 The probing by revisionist states is first and foremost an attempt to test the strength of their rival’s commitment to its allies and friends. In sum, probing behavior by revisionist states targets these specific audiences in order to elicit responses from them. The goal is to figure out whether and how to draw the new map of power. And it puts the burden on the targeted audiences: their responses determine whether the probe is successful.

EVALUATION OF PROBING: SUCCESS OR FAILURE

From the perspective of the revisionist power that engages in probing, whether a probe has achieved its objectives determines its success or failure. The minimum objective of the probing state is to measure the rival’s staying power in its neighboring region, an objective that is achieved whether the targeted powers respond or not, but it is difficult to interpret. The targeted rival may be tempted to ignore the probe not out of a sense of its own weakness but in the belief that ignoring the test will send a signal of strategic insouciance from its pedestal of power. Also, because of the local and limited nature of a probe, directly involving only the regional actors, it is tempting for the distant security provider to leave the response to its allies and friends. A direct and strong intervention by the offshore patron would escalate the interaction, raising the chances of a larger war, an outcome that neither party desires. But the shrewdness of a probing strategy is that it puts the targeted rival power in the position of having either to escalate the tensions in order to respond or to choose a less confrontational approach but one that risks weakening its alliances. The response to the probe, not the probe itself, is perceived as a potential cause of war. This creates strong disincentives for the tested great power to react by opposing the revisionist state’s probe in a direct and forceful way, or to respond at all. For instance, in the case of China’s probing actions in the South China Sea, the Obama administration’s approach seems to have been to accommodate Beijing, acknowledging a decline in U.S. naval capabilities and welcoming a greater Chinese role in providing security to the global commons.41 Similarly, after Russia’s takeover of Crimea, Washington’s first response was to turn the episode into a strictly regional affair. As President Obama put it in February 2014, “Any violation of Ukraine’s sovereignty and territorial integrity would be deeply destabilizing, which is not in the interest of Ukraine, Russia, or Europe, ” tellingly not including the United States in the list of the affected parties.42

The problem is that the temptation of the existing great power to either ignore or regionalize the tension stemming from the revisionist state’s probes— an attempt to de- escalate the strategic interaction— also constitutes a response. It may, however, be one that serves for the revisionist power as a confirmation of its initial suspicion that the rival’s commitment to the region was on the wane. An unanswered— ignored or regionalized— probe is an indication that the existing map of power is open to revisions. Another way to put this is that a probe is a question of sorts: does the existing hegemon have the will and capacity to oppose the revisionist power? An attempt to dismiss the question or to let allies respond to it is a tacit admission by the tested great power that its interest in maintaining a strong foothold and influence in the region is in decline. Silence in response to a probe is telling. Probing, therefore, always elicits some sort of answer, and in this narrow sense it is a success.

The purpose of a probe is also to attain a secondary, albeit crucial, goal of beginning to redraw the map of influence without generating counterbalancing pressures from the tested great power and its allies. The most successful probe would be one that pushes the targeted small states and other regional spectators closer to the revisionist power (or at least convinces them to distance themselves from their existing security patron, the rival great power) while at the same time convincing the rival great power that it is too costly to maintain its political influence and provide security in the region. Hence the probe needs to be evaluated on what it achieves in the three audiences: the directly targeted neighboring small state, the distant security patron, and the geopolitical onlookers (in particular other states in the region). The success or failure of a revisionist state’s probe depends on the actions by these three groups, and, arguably, it can attain partial success by achieving a revision of the status quo in one audience but not the other.

For instance, a probe can succeed in extending the revisionist power’s influence over the immediate target, the ally or would- be ally of the rival, but at the same time it may generate more vigorous efforts by regional onlookers to counterbalance it through a variety of strategies, ranging from military modernization to tighter defense cooperation with the distant security patron. This seems to be the case for Russia’s takeover of Crimea. Moscow quickly conquered Crimea and destabilized Ukraine’s easternmost oblast, successfully demonstrating its ability and willingness to use force to achieve limited territorial adjustments. While Kiev maintains its political independence, it has also been shown to be weak and unable to oppose Russian pressures. The quasi– civil war in the eastern regions and Russia’s conquest of Crimea make Ukraine an unlikely candidate for a closer relationship with the EU and NATO, even if Ukrainian political elites and public opinion may continue to be in favor of it. Russia’s probe, in the form of its intervention in Crimea and eastern Ukraine, has thus been successful in neutering the westward drift of Kiev. The EU, and in particular states such as France and Germany, have now an even smaller desire to bring Ukraine closer, as it is deemed too dangerous and risky; Ukraine is not worth losing business deals with Russia, not to mention starting a war with Russia.

The Ukraine War has also damaged American credibility in the region. Washington after all had given assurances (not “guarantees, ” which are reserved for NATO members) to the Ukrainian government in the Budapest Memorandum of 1994. This is undoubtedly a Russian success. But there are also other consequences of Russia’s probing, unintended and unwelcome by Moscow. Some states in the Central European region, in particular Poland and the Baltic states, have awakened from the geopolitical vacation of the past two decades. The 1990s and the 2000s were characterized by a widespread sense that threats to the territorial security of the region were minimal, and most of the strategic focus was on economic cooperation with the EU and on keeping in the good graces of the United States through participation in wars in Iraq and Afghanistan. This is over, at least in part. While strengthening the EU continues to be a priority in Central European capitals, there is simply no more interest in “out- of- area” operations, which drain resources and time from territorial defense. From this perspective, Russian probes have altered the geostrategic outlook of some Central European states. The eastern frontier is what really matters to them now, as their threat assessment has changed. Russia, in other words, has reached an upper threshold in its probes, creating a backlash among some of the states in the region, which are pursuing diplomatic counterbalancing and defense modernization. They are also calling for more visible and permanent NATO (and in particular, U.S.) security presence on their territories to shore up the extended deterrent against Russia.

It appears therefore that Russia is less successful than the other revisionist power, China. Moscow is less subtle in its probes, choosing dramatic military interventions (Georgia and Crimea) that generate growing fear and opposition among some European states as well as the United States. In part Moscow’s more aggressive behavior is a result of a Russian assessment of the weakness and divisions of the West. But in part the seeming Russian rush to restore influence over its “near neighborhood” is due to internal demographic, economic, and political problems. The growing weakness of Russia, a great power more by courtesy and by nuclear weapons than by economic and political strength, gives little time to Putin to shore up his country’s position facing China’s rapid economic growth and Europe’s political appeal. It is a short- term approach of large probes, and it may be successful only by extending influence over its most immediate nearby target.43

China, on the other hand, may have a different time frame, allowing it to probe in a much more indirect and less violent way, though this could change in the months ahead. It is therefore more careful and guarded, pursuing a long- term strategy of small probes over, quite literally, small rocks in the South China Sea. The U.S. “pivot” or “rebalancing” to Asia makes American presence and resolve more pronounced, increasing the doubt of a U.S. retrenchment and thus, from China’s perspective, the need to be cautious in testing the limits of American influence and commitment. Moreover, the counterbalancing efforts of regional onlookers, from Japan to the Philippines and Vietnam, are increasing in intensity, in both the rhetoric used and the arms buildup. Similarly, unlike Russia in Crimea, Beijing has not succeeded in extending its direct control over a large piece of real estate. But in the end it may be more successful, because it is establishing a gradual change in the map of power, visible only after a decade- long period. Through its probes, China is pursuing a classic example of “salami tactics. ” As Thomas Schelling describes them, “If there is no sharp qualitative division between a minor transgression and a major affront, but a continuous gradation of activity, one can begin his intrusion on a scale too small to provoke a reaction, and increase it by imperceptible degrees, never quite presenting a sud den, dramatic challenge that would invoke the committed response. ”44 Many small probes into areas of contested influence do not individually invite a strong response, but they erode steadily the perception and in the end the reality of the opponent’s influence.

Moreover, a continuing sequence of gradual probes signals the seriousness of the revisionist’s intent to alter the status quo. In the mind of the hegemon, the steady drumbeat of low- intensity and peripheral incidents creates the impression that the revisionist both has special claims for and may someday be willing to fight over a particular piece of real estate. These claims are often backed up by legal, historical, or ethnic justifications and a creeping physical presence— in Ukraine, Russian forces and equipment; in the South China Sea, artificially created reefs. Over time, this places the onus of a response on the shoulders of the hegemon and its allies in the region for why the status quo should be maintained. For a weary hegemon like the United States today, probes communicate that the act of supporting the regional status quo is no longer cost free but will require a level of exertion that was not needed in the past, inevitably leading to questions of whether such effort and resulting escalation are worthwhile.

Nonetheless, it is certainly possible to see failed instances of probing, which achieve the opposite of the revisionist power’s intentions. The historic scorecard of probing states is mixed. A clear failure of probing would be if the targeted regional states and offshore security patron responded strongly, tightening their alliance and even initiating a direct war. This is an unintended consequence of a probe and can take several forms, from a tightening of alliances countering the revisionist power to increased military contingency planning and rearming. In the worst- case scenario, it results in a combination of actions that counterbalance the revisionist state more effectively and forcefully than before the probing behavior started. The revisionist state did not want nor expect this response before engaging in probing. It amounts to a disconfirmation of the initial hypothesis that the rival great power is in decline and retreat, and in the end it worsens the strategic position of the probing state.

The biggest loser may thus be the probing power, which puts in motion a series of strategic interactions that undermine its own strength. This was the case of Germany in the early twentieth century. Kaiser Wilhelm’s visit to Tangier in 1905 initiated the first Moroccan crisis, manufactured by Berlin to, among other objectives, probe the strength of the brand new and untested Franco- British Entente Cordiale. 45 By challenging French interests in Morocco in a nonviolent way, Berlin wanted to pressure Paris, “the weakest link in the surrounding chain” of states opposing Germany.46 But it desired to do that in an area and in a way that were expected not to draw Great Britain into a direct confrontation, so that Germany could demonstrate to Paris that the entente was in effect useless. Morocco was important to France but not to Great Britain, and the German Foreign Office expected that London would not back Paris. Great Britain after all was also seen as retrenching after a bloody war with the Boers and unable and unwilling to project power on land to guarantee the security of its French quasi- ally. As Friedrich von Holstein put it, the French would seek a rapprochement with Germany, in effect bandwagoning, “when they have seen that English friendship . . . is not enough to gain Germany’s agreement to the French seizure of Morocco, but rather that Germany wishes to be loved on its own account. ”47 Germany, however, greatly miscalculated the British need for a continental ally and resulting commitment to France. The Moroccan crisis was resolved in a multilateral conference in Algeciras where Berlin ended in a position that was considerably worse than before the crisis: its only support was from the weak Austro- Hungarian Empire, while London was firmly and actively on the side of Paris. Instead of weakening the nascent strategic friendship between Britain and France, “German bullying” strengthened it.48 From then on, the “European Balance of Power, which had been ignored for forty years, again dominated British foreign policy; and henceforth every German move was interpreted as a bid for continental hegemony. ”49 London reoriented its attention away from the empire and toward the European continent, gradually planning to ready an expeditionary force to come to France’s defense.50 Berlin’s probe in Morocco turned into a clear failure.51

Probing is low risk, insofar as it is tailored to minimize a strong reaction of the rival, but it is not danger free for the revisionist state. Despite the fact that it arises out of a desire to clarify an allegedly new map of power, the effects of probing are difficult to interpret. All parties involved— the revisionist power and the targeted states— can miscalculate their reactions. In a case of moral hazard, the smaller states, directly targeted by the revisionist power, may respond violently to the low- intensity probe, feeling secure thanks to the alliance with a more powerful patron. Or, sensing that their distant patron is no longer capable of maintaining its influence, they may decide the exact opposite and accept the hegemony of the rival. This was the case of Athenian allies in Thrace, switching sides under General Brasidas’s pressure and persuasion. They were mistaken because their “judg ment was based more upon blind wishing than upon any sound prediction. ”52 Athens rallied and sent large forces north to restore its sway.

The probing power can also be the one to miscalculate, either not seeing the success or ignoring the failure. The nature of probing is such that the effects are often not visible immediately and require time to alter the perceptions and realities of power. The episode of Spartan commander Brasidas is again telling. Sparta did not follow up on his successes, in part because Spartan kings were jealous of his military exploits, but in part because they thought the damage inflicted on Athens was sufficient to strike a deal and end the war.53 They were of course wrong, as the war continued for decades. Alternatively, despite being checked, the probing power may simply up the ante, seeking some gain. This may have been the case of Germany, which did not stop challenging France and Britain after 1905, despite its diplomatic isolation, the military conundrum of a two- front war, and a robust Franco- British entente. In brief, there is no easy single interpretation of a probe and its effects.

A related risk is that a probe may lead to an unintended and untimely escalation of the strategic rivalry. As we described, the purpose of probing is to see how permissive the geopolitical order is, and to that goal a probe is limited in geographic reach and means used. It targets an issue presumed peripheral to the rival great power, seeking, for instance, a small territorial adjustment that is costly to the weaker neighboring state but not deemed worthy of a direct conflict by the distant and more powerful security patron. But the limited nature of the probe is somewhat at odds with its ultimate purpose to check the limits of an allegedly declining rival great power. A probe is a low- intensity, local pinprick with wider repercussions; limited geographically yet potentially global in outcome. The probing state has a strong interest in keeping the crisis limited and circum scribed to the narrowly defined area, but it is also poking the rival great pow er to see what the reaction may be. It is banking on the fact that the probe is on the periphery of the rival’s influence and interests, and thus that the rival will not escalate the interaction. The probing challenger, in other words, is betting that its great power rival will fear entrapment, being involved in an undesirable conflict, more than loss of prestige, reputation, or influence. The revisionist power seeks to use the fact of alliances (which it lacks itself) as a source of competitive disadvantage for the hegemon. This is based on two reinforcing perceptions— first, that the commitment involved in their maintenance is an encumbrance depriving the hegemon of strategic flexibility; and second, that the hegemon’s temptation to devalue its own alliances suggests that it feels the weight of this encumbrance.

Probes therefore arise from a view that entrapment is the congenital flaw of alliances. They are the ultimate act of attempting to expose the dangers of entrapment to hegemon and ally alike. This is ultimately a gamble— an expectation, not a certainty. And the gamble can backfire, as there is always the possibility that a probe will result in a dramatic escalation since it is targeted at multiple audiences. There is thus a clear recognition that a probe has a much wider purpose than its immediate action may convey, and consequently the desire to keep it limited runs against the desire to have a much larger demonstrative effect. As a result, the interaction a probe initiates has an inherent risk of escalating into a much larger confrontation.54

### 1AC---Plan

#### The United States ought to remove nearly all of its economic sanctions on the Democratic People’s Republic of Korea.

### 1AC---Solvency

#### Finally, Solvency.

#### Maximum pressure emboldens Kim. Lifting comprehensive sanctions defuses tensions and enables successful negotiations.

Bandow ’22 – [Doug Bandow, JD from Stanford University, senior fellow at the Cato Institute, specializing in foreign policy and civil liberties. “It’s Time for the United States to Reduce Sanctions against North Korea.” CATO Institute, <https://www.cato.org/commentary/its-time-united-states-reduce-sanctions-against-north-korea>, January 18, 2022] TDI

Sanctions don’t work. At least, they don’t cause governments to yield political power or abandon territory, weapons, and other interests viewed as vital. So it is with North Korea, which is heading for another “arduous march,” according to Supreme Leader Kim Jong‐​un, referring to the terrible famine of the late 1990s.

The Kim regime continues to produce missiles, nuclear weapons, and a host of other war materiel. In January 2021 Kim said creating nuclear weapons was “the exploit of greatest significance in the history of the Korean nation​,” quite a claim for a people whose kingdoms go back centuries. Kim also presented a long list of weapons under development. In October, Kim said his country needed to possess an “invincible military capability.” Pyongyang later justified its activities by pointing to the hypocrisy of Americans producing weapons for themselves while criticizing the North’s activities.

Washington’s protests have not impressed Kim. He stated that “The US.. has frequently signaled it’s not hostile to our state, but there is no action‐​based evidence to make us believe that they are not hostile.” Rather, he added, “The US is continuing to create tensions in the region with its wrong judgments and actions.”

The United States’ maximum pressure strategy against North Korea has only emboldened Kim Jong‐​un. It’s time for the Biden administration to consider other options.

That certainly was Kim’s view of the sanctions proposed by the Biden administration in January 2022 after two recent Democratic People’s Republic of Korea’s (DPRK) missile tests. Washington penalized several North Korean officials and proposed new UN measures on the DPRK, but those sanctions are unlikely to win Chinese and Russian support.

Pyongyang responded sharply, launching two more short‐​range missiles from rail cars. North Korea dismissed administration threats: “The U.S. is intentionally escalating the situation even with the activation of independent sanctions, not content with referring the DPRK’s just activity to the U.N. Security Council,” stated the Foreign Ministry. North Korea also warned: “If the U.S. adopts such a confrontational stance, the DPRK will be forced to take stronger and certain reaction to it.”

That could be a longer‐​range missile or even nuclear test.

Sanctions obviously have not deterred North Korea from devoting a disproportionate share of its resources to the military or developing UN‐​prohibited missiles and nuclear weapons. Economic penalties have failed to convince the DPRK to roll back any of its military programs. If anything, Kim has used sanctions to justify new advances, proving that Pyongyang will defend itself and not be intimidated.

Yet some observers still hope to find the perfect sanctions recipe that will disarm North Korea. It is the classic mistake of hope trumping experience. Military action, with a significant risk of war, surely is too dangerous, given North Korea’s ability to retaliate with nuclear weapons. Diplomacy has failed thus far, and Kim shows no interest in talking to the United States now. Thus, contended Nah Liang Tuang of Singapore’s S. Rajaratnam School of International Studies, “the only door open is a sustained maximum pressure strategy against the regime.”

Advocates for sanctions inevitably call for tougher measures when even the strictest sanctions fail. It was no different with President Donald Trump. He imposed “maximum pressure” on North Korea, Iran, Syria, and Venezuela, as well as lesser penalties on Cuba, Russia, China, and even Germany, an American ally. He failed to achieve his objective in every case. Not one government gave in. His record was a perfect zero.

Despite this, he continually reinforced failure. When Trump’s targets failed to fly to Washington and sign surrender documents, he added more sanctions. And then even more. Unsurprisingly, these sanctions also failed. Nevertheless, advocates blamed their lack of success on failing to be tough enough. For instance, the Center for Security Policy’s Grant Newsham claimed: “Sanctions do work. I would submit that they’ve never been tried with any degree of seriousness towards North Korea,” a curious claim to make when Beijing was enforcing the measures with sufficient alacrity to spark angry protests from the DPRK.

Nah also recommended even tighter controls: “The U.S. and other stakeholders should pursue watertight enforcement of all UNSC sanctions against North Korea. Since such sanctions amount to an embargo on most of the DPRK’s official economy, this will make the opportunity cost, or the cost in terms of alternative spending forgone, exorbitantly high for any expansion or even maintenance of Kim’s nuclear weapons.”

Where, one wonders, can such a watertight system be found? The problems with this argument are many. The tougher the sanctions, the greater the profit from smuggling. Neighboring countries, such as the People’s Republic of China, also often have political and security reasons for moderating enforcement. The more countries the United States attempts to punish to enforce its original sanctions, the greater the resistance and price paid by America.

This is a particular problem regarding North Korea, since compliance by both Beijing and Moscow is necessary to effectively enforce economic restrictions. Both countries already are subject to U.S. penalties for other reasons, and neither is inclined to be helpful for American policy in Northeast Asia. Forcing them to comply is a steep task. Complicating it further, few of America’s friends and allies would support stringent controls over commerce with China.

Although North Korea’s weapons programs are not cheap, Pyongyang has managed to maintain funding even during its most economically desperate times. The regime has been able to find the resources necessary to become a nuclear power with an increasing long reach despite “maximum pressure.”

Nah ignored the reality that the DPRK, not America, decides whether the price exacted by sanctions is “exorbitant.” North Korean leadership has been willing to accept a very high cost paid by those outside of the political elite and military. During the mid‐ to late‐​1990s as many as three million North Koreans died during the famine, but the regime did not change course. Although Kim’s rhetoric was measured at the party plenum which closed out 2021, it was evident that food production is lagging badly. Nevertheless, the regime launched four missiles in the following weeks.

Ironically, the COVID-19 epidemic provided an opportunity to test the thesis that watertight sanctions would force the Kim regime to crawl back to Washington and disgorge its nukes. Pyongyang closed the country’s borders in January 2020. It isolated itself from the world, ordering its border forces to shoot and kill anyone seeking to enter. Aid workers and diplomats went home. Even most trade with China appeared to end.

It is unlikely that the US could ever attain a similar level of control. Yet the North continued to develop and deploy an array of sophisticated new weapons.

Now trade appears likely to resume, with the first freight trains seen crossing the PRC-DPRK border in seventeen months. Such commerce will be quarantined and disinfected, but will ease pressure on North Korea. And the United States has no practical way to interdict such shipments.

If increased sanctions on North Korea won’t work, it is time to reconsider American policy. While retaining personal and sectoral penalties—focused on military and dual‐​use technologies—Washington should consider lifting broader economic penalties which “work” only by impoverishing the entire population. These sanctions keep the DPRK notably poorer economically but only somewhat weaker militarily than it otherwise would be. They don’t prevent it from being deadly, able to kill hundreds of thousands, or even millions in a full‐​scale war. This means innocent North Koreans are suffering for no good reason.

In practice, there is only one option dealing with North Korea and that is negotiation. Diplomacy might be doomed to fail. However, reducing sanctions, the most antagonistic aspect of America’s “hostile policy,” might create new areas for agreement. Even if not, the situation is unlikely to be much worse than today, with a heavily armed North Korea isolated from the world and paranoid about possible threats from America.

#### The plan facilitates North Korea’s engagement with the global economy and normalizes relations.

Feffer ’21 – [John Feffer, director of Foreign Policy In Focus. He is a senior associate at the Asia Institute in Seoul and has been both a Writing Fellow at Provisions Library in Washington, DC and a PanTech fellow in Korean Studies at Stanford University. “The Problem Of Sanctions Against North Korea” Foreign Policy In Focus, <https://fpif.org/the-problem-of-sanctions-against-north-korea/>, November 22, 2021] TDI

The Problems with Sanctions

Regardless of whether North Korea is in fact the most heavily sanctioned country in the world or whether there is room to levy even more sanctions against Pyongyang, the obvious conclusion is that sanctions have not worked to change the country’s behavior. If anything, sanctions have achieved the opposite effect. In the face of a hostile international community, North Korea became ever more convinced of the necessity of building a nuclear weapons program. Once it acquired those weapons, it has decided that they represent the single most important deterrent against foreign intervention. On the economic front, North Korea has forgone the benefits of formal participation in the global economy and has developed various strategies to raise capital through black-market and grey-market activities.

North Korea also routinely evades sanctions. On the energy front alone, according to Arms Control Today’s coverage of a UN assessment, “In the first nine months of 2020, North Korea ‘exceeded by several times’ the annual 500,000-barrel cap on sanctioned imports by receiving at least 121 shipments of refined petroleum products. The panel also found that North Korea exported 2.5 million tons of coal during the same months via at least 400 shipments through Chinese territorial waters.”

The dream of a “perfect sanctions regime” that chokes off all economic interactions with North Korea is illusory as long as there are actors willing to engage the country. China, because it does not want a collapsing nuclear power on its borders, is willing to keep its fraternal ally on life support. Despite this design flaw, sanctions advocates are always coming up with a better mousetrap. They offer “smart sanctions” and “targeted sanctions” to direct punitive measures at those in power. They propose new enforcement mechanisms, like the Proliferation Security Initiative, to ensure more effective implementation of sanctions. These are often very sophisticated initiatives. But still the mouse avoids the mousetrap.

The expectation that North Korea will eventually surrender its nuclear program or experience some form of regime change also flies in the face of the evidence of 70 years of experience. If North Korea has defied these expectations for seven decades, why should we expect that capitulation is right around the corner?

Not only have sanctions failed to achieve their intended effect—a non-nuclear North Korea, a more law-abiding regime—they have produced the opposite. In addition to acquiring nuclear weapons, North Korea has been forced to rely on obviously illegal means to generate funds—smuggling, counterfeiting, traffic in illegal products. It has further concentrated power in the military. It has been further cut off from international contacts that could potentially expose the country to other ideas and practices. The result has been a much more isolated, parochial, defensive, militaristic country.

Sanctions, in other words, have produced a vicious circle. The tighter the sanctions, the more North Korea becomes a country that requires sanctioning.

The current U.S. approach is transactional. If North Korea promises in negotiations to behave a certain way and then follows through on its promises, the United States will reduce sanctions. On several occasions, this approach has produced certain results. The United States lifted certain sanctions as part of the Agreed Framework in the 1990s, then as part of the Six Party Talks negotiations in the 2000s. But any progress along these lines was eventually reversed.

It’s not that the logic of this transactional approach is flawed. Rather, there is a deep divide between the United States and North Korea that renders such an approach problematic. First, there is a profound asymmetry. U.S. sanctions policy is directed by a number of different actors—the president, Congress, the Treasury Department. And some of these sanctions follow from or otherwise contribute to international sanctions, requiring different authority for their suspension.

But North Korea is extremely hierarchical. The leader has unilateral authority to direct policy, even overruling the military if necessary (as was the case, for instance, in the promotion of the Kaesong Industrial Complex over military objections that the territory was strategic in nature and should not be given over to an inter-Korean economic project). The United States must abide by the legal requirements embedded in sanctions policy and legislation; the North Korean leader can, with a simple edict, create the law.

Second, there is a gap of trust between the two countries. Both sides have made promises that the other side argues have not been upheld. This makes any future promises that much more difficult to be believed. North Koreans generally don’t appreciate the disputes that arise between the executive and legislative branches in the United States – as they did over the implementation of the Agreed Framework provisions in the 1990s – and view the breach to be a result of bad faith rather than politics.

Third, there are certain assumptions in the transactional approach that are not shared. Essentially, the United States views North Korea as a mule that can be pushed one way or another through a policy of “carrots and sticks.” Sanctions are a big stick; removal of sanctions is a big carrot.

But North Korea views itself as an autonomous, independent actor. Self-determination is one of the most important elements of the country’s ruling philosophy. It does not look kindly upon foreign entities that treat it as an unreasonable animal that must be pushed and pulled. The transactional nature of the negotiations around the country’s nuclear program fails to take into account this fiercely independent approach.

Beyond Sanctions

It is not easy to do away with U.S. sanctions against North Korea. As Jessica Lee points out, “none of the economic sanctions against North Korea have a sunset clause, so they are difficult to amend or remove.” Presidential waivers are possible, but presidents are generally reluctant to invoke such waivers because of congressional pushback and the generally negative perception of North Korea in U.S. public discourse.

The most immediate task is to consider a range of exemptions to the current sanctions to ensure that the international community can help avert a humanitarian disaster in North Korea. Even the UN Special Rapporteur on North Korean Human Rights Tomas Ojea Quintana has argued for such a relaxation of the sanctions regime in order to safeguard the livelihoods of ordinary citizens.

Beyond the humanitarian crisis, however, the United States should consider more radical approaches to North Korea that go beyond sanctions.

Donald Trump was willing to consider this more radical approach in part because he was more taken with grand gestures and foreign policy spectacles than with day-to-day political calculations. He attempted the top-down approach of engaging directly with Kim Jong Un. But he frankly didn’t understand the terms of engagement and, when frustrated by North Korea’s apparent lack of reciprocity, fell back on the default policy of applying even more sanctions. The virtue of Trump’s approach was that it established, at least on the surface, a measure of symmetry between the two sides: two “deciders” sweeping aside the procedural requirements to hammer out a deal. But in the end, Trump wasn’t willing to abandon the underlying carrot-stick mentality.

No U.S. administrations have seriously considered the “Chinese option” of undertaking a break-through agreement with North Korea comparable to the Nixon-Kissinger approach of the 1970s. Such an approach would reduce and eventually eliminate economic sanctions in order to facilitate North Korea’s engagement with the global economy in the expectation that it will become a more responsible global actor, which China has in fact become (certainly in comparison to its Cultural Revolution days). Constrained by the rules of the global economy, nudged away from illegitimate and toward legitimate economic activities, and cognizant of the importance of preserving new trade ties, North Korea would still possess weapons of mass destruction—as well as a considerable conventional military—but would be less likely to consider using them.

The United States took such a radical move with China in the 1970s in order to gain a geopolitical edge with the Soviet Union. It could do the same with North Korea today in order to gain some leverage over China.

The major objection, of course, is that the United States would unilaterally give up a powerful tool of influence by removing sanctions on North Korea. But, as has been detailed above, sanctions haven’t been effective. Instead of more coercive sticks, perhaps the United States should consider better carrots.

**Removing sanctions is a prerequisite to Korean concessions.**

Kim **Tong-Hyung 21**. Reporter, Associated Press. “EXPLAINER: Why North Korea wants sanctions lifted first.” <https://apnews.com/article/united-nations-general-assembly-business-seoul-united-nations-south-korea-5998f38c49a5d899f2290530df8b4728>.

SEOUL, South Korea (AP) — Days after outgoing South Korean President Moon Jae-in made possibly his last ambitious push to diplomatically resolve the standoff over North Korea’s nuclear program, **the North** on Friday **rejected his call for a declaration ending the Korean** War, making it clear it has **no interest in political statements unless they bring badly needed relief from crippling economic sanctions**. **Nuclear diplomacy** between the U.S. and North Korea **has stalled over disagreements over a relaxation of the U.S.-led sanctions** in exchange for steps toward denuclearization by the North. Analysts say North Korea is trying to use Moon’s desire for inter-Korean engagement to pressure South Korea into extracting concessions from Washington on its behalf. WHY IS MOON OFFERING A PEACE DECLARATION? The 1950-53 Korean War, in which North Korea and ally China faced off against South Korea and U.S.-led U.N. forces, ended with an armistice, but there was never a peace treaty. In a speech at the U.N. General Assembly this week, Moon called for an end-of-war declaration while expressing hopes for a quick resumption of talks between the U.S. and North Korea. He said such a declaration among the leaders of the Koreas, the United States and China would help achieve denuclearization and lasting peace on the Korean Peninsula. Moon’s proposal was an attempt to break the stalemate as he nears the end of his term in May 2022. North Korea had initially supported South Korea’s call for an end-of-war declaration when Seoul helped set up a summit between its leader, Kim Jong Un, and former U.S. President Donald Trump in 2018 in which Kim aimed to leverage his nuclear weapons in exchange for economic benefits. Such an end-of-war declaration would make it easier for North Korea to demand that the United States withdraw its 28,500 troops in South Korea and ease sanctions. But North Korea lost interest in the idea after talks between Kim and Trump collapsed during their second summit in February 2019. The **Americans rejected North Korea’s demand for major sanctions relief in exchange for the dismantling of an aging nuclear facility**, a partial surrender of its nuclear capabilities. WHY IS NORTH KOREA REJECTING MOON’S OFFER? On Friday, Kim’s powerful sister, Kim Yo Jong, and North Korean Vice Foreign Minister Ri Thae Song issued separate statements rebuffing Moon’s proposal. Kim Yo Jong’s comments were directed toward Moon while Ri’s were aimed at the Biden administration, but they communicated essentially the same message — that **North Korea isn’t interested in an end-of-war declaration unless** **Washington first discards its “hostile” policies**, **a reference to the U.S.-led economic sanctions** and its military activities with ally South Korea. Ri said such a **declaration would be “premature”** considering U.S. efforts to strengthen its military presence in the Asia-Pacific region, which North Korea has increasingly used to justify the expansion of its own nuclear and missile programs. Kim Yo Jong, who handles inter-Korean affairs, used softer language toward South Korea, saying the North is willing to resume “constructive” discussions over improving bilateral ties if the South abandons its hostility and “double-dealing standards.” She was clearly demanding that Seoul try harder **to persuade Washington to offer “concrete actions to resume negotiations**, whether they be the **relaxing of sanctions** or suspension of U.S.-South Korea joint military exercises,” which North Korea views as an invasion rehearsal, said Yang Moo-jin, a professor at the University of North Korean Studies in Seoul. North Korea’s statements on Friday show it has no expectation that Biden will accept Moon’s call, said Park Won Gon, a professor at Seoul’s Ewha Womans University. “The North still has nothing to lose with the South proposing an end-of-war declaration again and it basically gave Seoul ‘homework’ to press Washington to meet its demands,” Park said. “**The North could be trying to drive a wedge between Washington and Seoul**, or **create a rift in public opinion** within South Korea by pressuring Seoul over the state of inter-Korean relations.” WHAT ARE THE PROSPECTS FOR NUCLEAR TALKS? The North Korean nuclear issue receded from the center of attention at this year’s U.N. General Assembly with newer global challenges such as the coronavirus, rising U.S.-China tensions and Afghanistan’s uncertain future. But **North Korea hates to be ignored**, and its recent missile tests after months of relative quiet have raised speculation that Kim is once again flaunting its military might to wrest concessions from Washington if the long-stalled talks over his nuclear program resume. Some experts say Kim is facing harsh domestic challenges, with pandemic-linked border closures further hurting an economy already battered by decades of mismanagement and international sanctions. They say the sense of alarm could push North Korea to escalate its weapons tests in the coming months to pressure the world before offering negotiations to extract aid, at least until China begins pushing for calm ahead of the Beijing Winter Olympics early next year. This month, North Korea tested a new cruise missile it intends to arm with nuclear warheads and demonstrated the launching of ballistic missiles from rail cars as it expands its arsenal of shorter-range weapons threatening U.S. allies South Korea and Japan. “Even while under a pandemic lockdown, **North Korea continues to modernize its military**, **including nuclear weapons** and various means of delivering them,” said Leif-Eric Easley, a professor at Ewha, who sees little room for Moon to advance his peace agenda. “The **Biden administration has repeatedly offered dialogue and humanitarian engagement**, but **the Kim regime appears to want sanctions relief** and de facto nuclear recognition **in exchange for averting a crisis**.”

#### Only a unilateral and conciliatory sanctions policy facilitates cooperation.

Aum & Jasper ’21 – [Frank Aum, senior expert on North Korea at the US Institute of Peace. From 2010 to 2017, Aum served in the Obama administration at the US Department of Defense, primarily as the senior advisor on the Korean Peninsula in the Office of the Secretary of Defense; Daniel Jasper, Asia Public Education and Advocacy Coordinator for the American Friends Service Committee. “The Case for Maximizing Engagement With North Korea” 38 North, <https://www.38north.org/2021/04/the-case-for-maximizing-engagement-with-north-korea/>, April 16, 2021] TDI

As the Biden administration’s North Korea policy review nears completion, there is growing worry that it could dig in its heels on previous US efforts to change North Korea’s behavior through isolation and pressure. Early signals indicate the Biden team is prioritizing pressure among many options. Several experts, however, believe this approach will continue to fail because it incorrectly assumes North Korea will yield to coercive tactics and that China will cooperate in this effort.

Instead, the United States needs a more effective strategy for dealing with the reality of an insecure and nuclear-armed North Korea. Maintaining deterrence and preserving denuclearization as a long-term goal are, of course, essential. However, a practical approach to US and regional security should also maximize the opportunities and channels for interacting with the North Korean government and its people. Greater and more meaningful interaction on both governmental and nongovernmental levels can help clarify our respective interests and concerns, reduce miscommunication and miscalculation, build mutual trust, and perhaps even contribute to North Korea becoming a more responsible, stable and integrated member of the international community.

A History of Disengagement and Cautious Engagement

Since the signing of the armistice in 1953, US administrations have largely disengaged from North Korea. As part of its broader efforts to contain the Soviet Union and build an alliance security architecture in Asia, Washington ignored Pyongyang diplomatically while maintaining a strong military posture in South Korea to deter North Korean aggression. This posture expanded to include nuclear-armed systems in 1958—a direct violation of the armistice agreement signed just five years prior—which helped midwife Pyongyang’s obsession with obtaining its own nuclear deterrent.

Only when the upstart country began posing a nuclear threat in the early 1990s did the United States engage in senior-level talks, which led to a new era of dialogue over the next two decades. Still, many US officials seemed reluctant to invest in long-term relations, believing that the regime faced collapse in the near term.

Even during the era of dialogue, Washington focused narrowly on its own goals without sufficiently addressing North Korea’s security interests. President Bill Clinton and South Korean leader Kim Young-sam proposed peace talks with North Korea in 1996, but discussions soured when Washington refused Pyongyang’s request to put US troop withdrawal on the agenda. Several years later, hawkish US officials in the Bush administration used evidence of North Korean uranium enrichment activity to “shatter” an existing bilateral deal, despite Pyongyang’s willingness to forgo this activity for security guarantees and a peace treaty. Diplomacy resumed under the “commitment for commitment, action for action” approach of the Six Party Talks, but Washington still insisted that significant denuclearization steps had to occur before peace talks could begin.

Pyongyang’s slow progress on denuclearization—punctuated by nuclear tests (2006, 2009 and 2013) and satellite launches using missile technology (2009 and 2012)—led to the return of a more hardline US approach. In its second term, the Obama administration set preconditions for resuming negotiations and rejected North Korean offers, such as a dual freeze on nuclear tests and US-ROK military exercises and peace discussions that excluded denuclearization. It also implemented a comprehensive pressure campaign against the Kim regime and refused humanitarian engagements such as the North’s offer to repatriate remains of US servicemembers still left in the country from the Korean War.

Later, the Trump administration adopted and “maximized” Obama’s pressure campaign. The overall pressure approach contributed to the longest period without sustained official negotiations—February 2012 to June 2018—over the last thirty years. President Trump’s abrupt shift to summit diplomacy and cordial exchanges with Kim Jong Un sparked a short period of haphazard diplomacy, but North Korea disengaged after the two sides failed to reach an agreement in Hanoi in 2019.

US efforts to isolate and pressure North Korea over the last decade caused unofficial and nongovernmental engagement to wither as well. Travel restrictions have prevented most US citizens from going to North Korea and, prior to President Biden’s reversal of Trump-era policies, travel bans prohibited North Koreans from coming here. In addition, US sanctions regulations severely inhibit Americans from interacting with North Koreans in third countries. Longstanding nongovernmental humanitarian programs have also faced severe restrictions and, in some cases, have come to a halt after decades of building trust. This overall policy of disengagement, together with economic sanctions and military pressure, has reinforced North Korea’s perception of US hostility and justification for further development of a nuclear deterrent.

Today, official US engagement with North Korea remains almost nonexistent. Diplomatic negotiations have flatlined since the failure of the Hanoi Summit in February 2019, and no congressional delegation has visited the North since 2008. North Korea has also closed the doors on most official contacts with Americans, partly out of frustration with the US negotiating stance and the Trump administration’s political uncertainty, but also, since January 2020, due to broader fears related to COVID-19 and other domestic matters.

The decades of neglecting North Korea and discounting its security interests have backfired to America’s grave detriment. Instead of abandoning its pursuit of nuclear weapons, the country now possesses 30 to 60 nuclear weapons without any constraints on making more, the capability of launching them at the United States and its allies, and a reluctance to give them up. Just as worrisome, the United States lacks the diplomatic relations, the nuanced understanding of regime thinking, the diversified communication channels, and the regular people-to-people interactions that can help mitigate a future crisis with an insecure, isolated, and nuclear North Korea. Adding fuel to the fire, the US media’s oversimplified and sensationalized portrayal of the North has intensified public perception of the country as a monolithic, immutable threat and diminished the space for dialogue.

As the diplomatic stalemate persists, the roster of US officials with significant experience dealing with North Koreans is being further depleted. One could argue that the Americans with the most insight on Chairman Kim, at least based on direct interactions, are Donald Trump, Mike Pompeo and Dennis Rodman. By focusing primarily on deterrence and pressure and neglecting engagement, the United States has, in many cases, pursued security with one hand tied behind its back.

The Benefits of Engagement

In contrast, US diplomacy with North Korea during the 1990s and 2000s showed that engagement could produce tangible security benefits. Former President Jimmy Carter’s meeting with Kim Il Sung in 1994, amid tensions about North Korea’s nuclear program and a potential military conflict, recentered the focus on diplomatic efforts, which eventually culminated in the bilateral Agreed Framework deal. This agreement froze North Korea’s plutonium reprocessing for eight years, without which the North may have produced enough fissile material for 100 nuclear weapons.

As talks continued in various forms through the Clinton and Bush administrations, Pyongyang—although exhibiting occasional outbursts of displeasure and hostility—remained relatively quiet, with few weapons tests between 1994 and 2008. Conversely, the absence of diplomacy and US shift to pressure between 2012-2018 coincided with the greatest advancements in North Korea’s nuclear weapons program, including 4 nuclear tests of progressively greater yields and over 80 ballistic missile launches, including missiles demonstrating intercontinental range.

Tensions also decreased during the brief period of Trump-Kim diplomacy in 2018. Anti-US propaganda posters disappeared in Kim Il Sung Square, and North Korean media adopted neutral coverage of US actions. In addition, Pyongyang dismantled its Punggye-ri nuclear test site and instituted a unilateral moratorium on nuclear weapons and long-range missile tests—only resuming short-range tests when talks broke down in Hanoi. North Korea also released 3 Americans and repatriated 55 boxes of US servicemember remains. The takeaway is clear: When the United States engages North Korea, hostilities decrease, relations improve and the world is safer for it.

The period of engagement also allowed both sides to address longstanding humanitarian needs and concerns. Faith-based aid organizations such as Christian Friends of Korea, Mennonite Central Committee, American Friends Service Committee (AFSC) and Eugene Bell Foundation established or expanded in-country programs in 1995 and began delivering humanitarian assistance to aid those suffering from the widespread famine. These programs continued and became some of the most consistent forms of engagement between the US and North Korean people. Between 1996-2005, the US military carried out 33 joint operations in North Korea alongside the Korean People’s Army to recover the remains of 156 US soldiers and repatriate them to their families. Likewise, US congress members and staff made almost annual fact-finding trips to Pyongyang, providing on-the-ground insights into North Korean society and the regime’s thinking as well as opportunities to discuss human rights concerns like prison conditions and Japanese abductees.

Furthermore, a proliferation of academic and scientific exchanges strengthened two-way sharing of knowledge with North Korea. Consortiums of US nongovernmental organizations (NGOs), civil society organizations and academic institutions hosted dozens of North Korean delegations in the United States, exchanging information on a range of topics like agriculture, energy, medicine and information technology. US and other Western scientists made trips to North Korea, too, including a 2013 expedition with North Korean counterparts that generated fresh insights into the active volcano at Mt. Baekdu (Paektu) and a joint publication on their findings. Nuclear scientist Siegfried Hecker’s seven visits to North Korea, including four to the Yongbyon nuclear complex, revealed important information about North Korea’s nuclear capabilities, such as uranium enrichment and civilian programs. Additionally, prior to the travel ban, dozens of American professors and staff taught English, finance, management, engineering and other classes to hundreds of North Korean students at the Pyongyang University of Science and Technology, enhancing their access to information and their ability to envision a potentially globalized North Korea.

Cultural and sports exchanges also helped to break down mutual mistrust by emphasizing our common humanity. North Korean taekwondo teams conducted demonstration tours across multiple US cities in 2007 and 2011, engendering goodwill on both sides. In 2008, the New York Philharmonic performed a nationally televised concert at the East Pyongyang Grand Theatre, including the US anthem, Gershwin and the Korean folksong “Arirang.” One North Korean even noted: “This is [the] first time I have seen the American flag in North Korea.” These types of exchanges allow both sides to deal directly with real people and places rather than caricatures from media, and slowly dispel misperceptions and mistrust.

Enhancing Engagement

What would enhanced engagement look like? The first step would be to adopt and signal a comprehensive strategic effort at building new, peaceful US-DPRK relations, which would provide the basis for all-out engagement. Bold, proactive outreach rather than a passive, cautious approach is necessary to pique North Korea’s interest—as its rejection of a recent US offer for talks indicates. Washington could quickly reaffirm the 2018 Singapore Joint Statement, an agreement that Kim Jong Un himself signed and has yet to renounce, and express an interest in declaring an end to the Korean War, which would mute the initial signaling of a pressure-focused approach. Also, offering unilateral conciliatory gestures that do not undermine allied deterrence, such as partial sanctions relief and a moratorium on US strategic asset deployments to the Korean Peninsula, could incentivize North Korea to return to talks and reach an interim deal that freezes its nuclear program—all without coercion. Establishing liaison offices would help sustain diplomatic progress and communications.

An interim deal would not only set the foundation for more comprehensive discussions on peace and denuclearization but could also open the door for expanded security engagement. Beyond the traditional diplomatic and intelligence channels, Washington could offer talks between the US Department of Defense and the Korean People’s Army (KPA). Unlike past military talks at the demilitarized zone, which focused on managing the armistice and are now defunct, defense engagement at senior policy levels could address more strategic goals such as strengthening military ties, understanding KPA thinking, building its buy-in for diplomacy, exploring mutual force reductions and decreasing chances for miscalculation and conflict.

On the nongovernmental side, humanitarian and people-to-people engagements offer low-hanging fruit and should be reinvigorated immediately. The restrictions on travel to North Korea can be lifted by the secretary of state, which—once North Korea reopens from its COVID lockdown—would open up greater humanitarian access for private organizations to deliver aid during a critical moment of mounting needs in the country. Lifting these restrictions could also facilitate potential reunions of Korean Americans with separated family members in North Korea.

Likewise, many family members of the approximately 5,300 missing US soldiers in North Korea eagerly seek the resumption of remains recovery operations. Recently introduced legislation would address all of these issues as well as help expedite aid to North Korea by minimizing roadblocks created by sanctions regulations. Additionally, despite the limited number of North Koreans who visit the United States, easing restrictions on North Korean travel and visas would open up the potential for engagement through established governmental mechanisms such as the Department of State’s International Visitor Leadership Program as well as through nongovernmental channels that center on academic, economic, scientific, sport and cultural affairs.

One potential area for greater US engagement is economic cooperation. North Korea is reluctant to pursue radical economic reform but has embraced limited marketization and economic experimentation, including joint ventures and special economic zones like the Kaesong Industrial Complex and the Mt. Kumgang tourism project. Non-US entities, such as the Singapore-based Choson Exchange, have worked to encourage positive change in North Korea by holding workshops on business, law and economic policy for aspiring North Korean entrepreneurs, specifically including women, who tend to be the breadwinners. Greater economic cooperation—ranging from development assistance to technical assistance in international accounting standards to best business practices—can encourage domestic growth and stability, which would help improve the North Korean people’s welfare and facilitate the country’s integration into the global economy.

Energy and environment offer another space for engagement. North Korea faces chronic energy scarcity due to economic underdevelopment and sanctions on oil imports. As a result, the country relies on “dirtier” sources like coal and synthetic natural gas for fuel and electrical power, while seeking greater advances in wind, hydroelectric and nuclear power. The government is also intensifying afforestation, land management and disaster risk reduction efforts to mitigate the impact of severe climate-related events like flooding, droughts and typhoons. In addition, North Korea’s mostly mountainous terrain contains vast mineral resources, including potentially the world’s largest reserves of rare earth elements, which have useful applications in high-technology goods such as smartphones, electronic displays, and electric vehicles. US-DPRK cooperation on many of these areas could be mutually beneficial but would first need to overcome relevant sanctions.

The United Nations (UN) is also a largely untapped resource for building bridges. US engagement on North Korea at the UN tends to be almost exclusively conducted at the Security Council in reaction to nuclear or missile tests or at the Human Rights Council for censuring the country on human rights grounds. However, as a peacebuilding organization, the UN has the technical and institutional capacity to conduct exchanges and trainings and provide backchannel support during negotiations. The UN Secretariat is comprised of skilled and knowledgeable diplomats who typically have longer tenure than their State Department and other national counterparts and, thus, represent a level of trustworthy institutional knowledge that could help bridge gaps between personnel and administrations.

It is important to emphasize that different forms of engagement can have different goals and be pursued with different timeframes. Security engagement that leads to, for example, a prompt freeze on North Korea’s nuclear and missile activities and US strategic asset deployments to the peninsula would provide immediate and broad benefits for both sides and potentially unlock further negotiations. On the other hand, the impact of people-to-people engagement is felt more at the individual level, but with large-scale implications and the potential to grow over time. Humanitarian assistance, in particular, can bridge these levels of engagement by addressing individual needs and building a solid foundation for geopolitical discussions. Ultimately, recognizing that peace is a process, all engagement should work collectively and cumulatively to soften mutual threat perceptions, build habits of trust and collaboration and reinforce risk-taking toward peaceful coexistence.

Conclusion

To be sure, North Korea also has a say in whether engagement is possible. Its government faces significant constraints and sometimes can take months to respond to proposals. Also, Pyongyang—even more than Washington—can act cautiously out of fear. It often retreats into its shell during periods of crisis, like the current COVID pandemic, restricts the movement of foreigners and citizens to maintain strict control, and can sometimes create an inhospitable environment through its harsh treatment of foreigners suspected of threatening behavior. But just as often, North Korea is eager to engage, invite foreign delegations, seek meetings to discuss the potential for peacebuilding, and explore academic and scientific exchanges. The United States needs to be ready when North Korea reemerges from its COVID lockdown. Better yet, it should encourage the North’s reemergence by signaling a robust commitment to peace and engagement and reinvigorating offers for COVID assistance. As North Korea has noted, in a message of both warning and invitation, it will respond to the US based on “power for power and goodwill for goodwill.”

The future of US-DPRK relations is still to be determined. If the United States continues a policy of isolation and pressure, North Korea will likely remain a hostile and inscrutable security threat, a chronic hotspot draining attention and resources from other priorities, and, in the worst case, one miscalculation away from precipitating a nuclear catastrophe. By shifting to a comprehensive engagement policy, however, Washington could work together with Pyongyang to develop more nuanced understandings of each other, enhance mutual trust and reduce threat perceptions, manage and decrease nuclear and conventional risks, and cultivate the North’s ability to participate as a more responsible member of the international community.

#### Sanctions disproportionately impact the civilian population. Removal restores peace because of political pressure to follow through with negotiations.

Eke ’19 – [Surulola Eke, Peacock Postdoctoral Fellow in the Department of Political Studies at Queen’s University. The importance of Dr. Eke’s research agenda was further affirmed via the recipient of Canada’s most prestigious postdoctoral award, the Banting Postdoctoral Fellowship, which recognizes scholarly excellence and leadership in academic settings. “GRASSROOTS POWER, COERCIVE DIPLOMACY, AND THE FAILURE OF WESTERN ENGAGEMENT WITH NORTH KOREA.” Peace Research, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/10.2307/26905812>, Vol. 51, No.2 (2019)] TDI

The sanctions imposed on DPRK are ineffective because they adversely impact the civilian population who are critical to the effort to halt Pyongyang’s nuclear programme. The Korean people are key to restoring peace in the Korean peninsula. They are the ones to pressure the political leaders to a point where genuine negotiations with the international community will be in their best interest. However, this process of change cannot be initiated through sanctions because it alienates the very people who should be championing it. However, many questions remain. For example, how can the peoples of the two Koreas organise without the Kim regime cracking down on its own people? I doubt that that the regime will respond politely to grassroots mobilisation for change. Even so, this does not spell doom for the future of the peace force discussed in the previous section. The people’s resilience, developed under a brutal dictatorship and US sanctions, can become the foundational element of the peace force. The most important actions that should take place now are those that will bring about its development—change the current policy towards DPRK and publicize the good deeds of the international community through inter-Korean interaction at the grassroots.

To conclude, this is only “one slice of the pie.” After the civilian population is brought on board, other key stakeholders in the conflict must also take steps to disincentivize nuclear weapons development. As the saying goes, “what is good for the goose is good for the gander.” If the US, Russia and others are committed to the non-proliferation of nuclear weapons, they too should destroy their stockpiles through a safe and internationally supervised process. If the US is committed to a nuclear-free Korean peninsula, it should provide some security guarantees to Pyongyang, such as, for example, signing a peace agreement to replace the 1953 Armistice Agreement. The DPRK conflict is a complex one, but the first step to solving it lies in getting the civilian population on board. They are the “prize” to be won. The Kim regime understands this, but the international community, especially the US, is yet to comprehend their significance.

#### Isolation is not Kim’s preference and phased reduction solves.

Feffer ’21 – [John Feffer, director of Foreign Policy In Focus. He is a senior associate at the Asia Institute in Seoul and has been both a Writing Fellow at Provisions Library in Washington, DC and a PanTech fellow in Korean Studies at Stanford University. “The Problem Of Sanctions Against North Korea” Foreign Policy In Focus, <https://fpif.org/the-problem-of-sanctions-against-north-korea/>, November 22, 2021] TDI

North Korea is one of the most heavily sanctioned countries in the world. It has been subject to U.S. and international sanctions for more than 70 years. Those sanctions have come in three overlapping waves, first as a result of the Korean War, then in response to its development of nuclear weapons, and finally to roll back that nuclear program as well as activities such as counterfeiting and cyberterrorism.

These sanctions have contributed to isolating North Korea from the rest of the world. The country has not entirely welcomed this isolation. Despite longstanding suspicions of outside influences, Pyongyang has shown considerable interest in engaging with the West and with the global economy more generally. Economic sanctions have severely limited this interaction.

There is currently little political support in the United States for lifting sanctions against North Korea. Despite claims to the contrary, the Biden administration has settled into the same de facto policy of “strategic patience” adopted by the Obama administration. The new administration has not even reversed the Trump administration’s re-designation of North Korea as a state sponsor of terrorism.

In general, the United States views economic sanctions as a tool of leverage to bring North Korea back to the negotiations table around its nuclear weapons program. The experience with Iran, for instance, suggests that if the pain of economic sanctions proves sufficiently high, a country will be more willing to restrict its nuclear program. Sanctions can then be reduced in a phased manner as part of a nuclear deal like the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action.

But economic sanctions haven’t played that role with North Korea. They didn’t deter Pyongyang from pursuing a nuclear weapons program, nor have they been subsequently responsible for pushing it toward denuclearization. Unlike Iran, North Korea has been under sanctions for nearly its entire existence and it doesn’t have a strong international economic presence that can be penalized. It has been willing to suffer the effects of isolation in order to build what it considers to be a credible deterrence against foreign attack.

## Non-Proliferation

### 1AR---Regional Stability Turn

#### Economic pressure and coercive diplomacy cause blowback and circumvention.

Eke ’19 – [Surulola Eke, Peacock Postdoctoral Fellow in the Department of Political Studies at Queen’s University. The importance of Dr. Eke’s research agenda was further affirmed via the recipient of Canada’s most prestigious postdoctoral award, the Banting Postdoctoral Fellowship, which recognizes scholarly excellence and leadership in academic settings. “GRASSROOTS POWER, COERCIVE DIPLOMACY, AND THE FAILURE OF WESTERN ENGAGEMENT WITH NORTH KOREA.” Peace Research, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/10.2307/26905812>, Vol. 51, No.2 (2019)] TDI

Driven by the objective to protect the US homeland and allies in the Korean peninsula, the US government has imposed several sanctions on DPRK to pressure Pyongyang to abandon its nuclear weapons programme. Some scholars have argued that the aim of sanctions against DPRK is not merely an attempt to force policy changes; it is also aimed at regime change. For example, Nitya Singh and Wootae Lee note that the collapse of the Kim regime through the creation of economic instability is the main purpose for the economic sanctions imposed on DPRK.10 In his critique of sanctions, Johan Galtung notes that it is poor judgment for policy makers to assume that a particular amount of deprivation can produce the political disintegration.11 This objective of political disintegration, according to Singh and Lee, is premised on the belief that it is only with a different DPRK government that the US can have a constructive engagement to address the security concerns of the US.12 If correct, the objective reveals the win-lose orientation that drives the use of coercive “diplomacy” to address the Korean question—the US concern for its own security without caring about the security implication of its demands for the current DPRK government. The use of coercive diplomacy also helps to explain why DPRK pulled out of peace talks—the fact that their participation in the first place did not emanate from an objective assessment about the potential profitability of talks with the US, but due to the pressure of economic sanctions. In other words, even though an adversary is pressured into negotiations, there is no guarantee that they will enter a bad deal even when under pressure from a powerful adversary.

Beyond the DPRK case, the effectiveness of sanctions to change the policy of an adversarial state has been questioned by scholars of International Relations (IR). For example, Peter van Bergeijk doubts the effectiveness of sanctions against a state that is not an active participant in a free-market.13 Similarly, Navin Bapat and Bo Ram Kwon argue that sanctioning states lack the political will to enforce the penalties associated with sanctions when they are violated by their own nationals.14 Additionally, they note that on rare occasions in which enforcement is successful, the impact is still minimal because the political leaders have the resources to circumvent its effect, thereby leaving the burden for the local population to bear alone. Also, longitudinal studies have shown that the imposition of sanctions has a dismal track record as an approach in influencing the policy of an adversary. For example, in their study of 204 cases of sanctions between 1914 and 2007, Garry Clyde Hufbauer, Jeffery Schott and Kimberley Ann Elliot found that only 34 percent were successful in their objective to change the behaviour of the target.15 Other studies have discovered lesser success rates of between 2 to 5 percent.

Despite such findings, other IR scholars have advanced the idea that sanctions are an effective tool for making statesmen implement policies that they otherwise would not adopt. One such category of scholars is instrumental theorists who insist that the policy of hostile states can be altered through denial of access to critical resources and isolation in the international community.17 It has also been argued that sanctions can be effective if the target state has significant relations with the sanctioning state. South Korea and Taiwan are said to be good examples of countries, significantly integrated into the global economy, whose nuclear weapons objectives were abandoned in the 1970s after the US exerted mild financial pressures on them.18 Based on the underlying premise of the instrumental theorists it would be expected that a target which is geographically contiguous to a sanctioning state will easily succumb to sanctions from that state.

This outcome has not resulted from the sanctions imposed on Qatar by Saudi Arabia and other Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) countries, such as the closing of Saudi Arabia’s border with Qatar and the prohibition of the latter from the former’s airspace. In overcoming the resultant burden, Qatar has turned to Turkey and Iran for food supplies and now routes its flights through the latter’s airspace. The import of the Qatari case for this discussion is that the denial of access to critical resources can only produce the desired objective if there are no alternative sources for the same. A further implication of Qatar’s survival strategy is that the sanctioning state may sometimes hastily try to compel the compliance of an adversary through power politics without carefully examining the overall condition of the target. The failure to fully understand an adversary’s total situation because of the irresistible urge for realist power politics also resulted in America’s imposition of sanctions on DPRK even though those sanctions aid, rather than hurt the Kim regime. I now discuss some of those sanctions.

The imposition of sanctions on DPRK by the US dates back to the early 1950s, meaning that a whole generation of North Koreans only know the US as an adversarial country. The first of these sanctions was the prohibition of all exports to DPRK, which came into effect on 28 June 1950.19 On 1 September 1951, the United States excluded DPRK from the list of Most Favoured Nation (MFN), which meant that higher tariffs applied to imports from DPRK and discouraged US businesses from patronising the country’s companies.20 The US State Department also issued the International Traffic in Arms Regulations (ITAR) in August 1955 which prohibited imports and exports of defence equipment to DPRK and other countries.21 The European Union (EU) also prohibits EU banks from having offices in DPRK and vice versa,22 thus, significantly undermining the country’s ability to operate in the global economy.

Although China remains DPRK’s largest trading partner, it has been under pressure from the US to punish North Korea for continuing its nuclear programme. In response to US pressure, the four largest Chinese banks (Industrial and Commercial Bank of China, Bank of China, China Construction Bank, and the Agricultural Bank of China) suspended their business relationship with North Korea’s Foreign Trade Bank in May 2013.23 In February 2016, South Korea, another adversary of DPRK and a US ally, responded to DPRK’s rocket launch by shutting down the Kaesong Industrial Complex, a major source of revenue for North Koreans.24 In a bid to exert maximum pressure on DPRK, the Trump Administration, in November 2017, returned the country to America’s list of state sponsors of terrorism and blacklisted one Chinese businessman and 13 companies for doing business with sanctioned DPRK companies. Sanctions have also been designed to have a direct impact on the Kim regime itself. Such targeted sanctions are commonly referred to as “smart” sanctions because they avoid impacting the civilian population.25 The ban on luxury goods and on the export of the country’s natural resources under United Nations Security Council (UNSC) resolution 2270 of March 2016 is one such smart sanction.

As instrumental theorists argue, the above sanctions have strangled DPRK but have not resulted in the desired policy change; the sanctions did not prevent the country from acquiring nuclear weapons and have not succeeded in pressuring Pyongyang to scale back the enhancement of its nuclear weapons arsenal. Instead, the impact of the sanctions has been appropriated by the Kim administration to perpetuate its rule.

#### Coercive diplomacy fails.

Aum ’24 – [Frank Aum is senior expert on North Korea at the US Institute of Peace. From 2010 to 2017, he served in the Obama administration at the US Department of Defense, primarily as the senior advisor on the Korean Peninsula in the Office of the Secretary of Defense. “Exploring Peaceful Coexistence with North Korea” United States Institute of Peace, <https://www.usip.org/publications/2024/01/exploring-peaceful-coexistence-north-korea>, January 8, 2024] TDI

The United States and North Korea coexist today in an antagonistic, high-risk stalemate. The Kim Jong Un government, feeling besieged by a “hostile” U.S. policy and fearing the potential for regime change, has centered its national defense strategy on strengthening deterrence through nuclear weapons. Facing this intractable nuclear threat, the Biden administration has reinforced a coercive, pressure-based approach that relies on diplomatic isolation, military deterrence and economic sanctions to contain, if not change, North Korea’s defiant behavior.

As a result, the two sides have not talked in over four years, have only engaged in official security discussions in one out of the last 11 years and do not appear to be prioritizing future diplomacy seriously. Similarly, their citizens are largely prohibited from visiting and interacting with each other.

More worrisome, the two sides are intensifying their military postures to perilous levels. North Korea has developed and tested an array of new nuclear weapon delivery systems, including hypersonic glide vehicles and solid-fuel long-range missiles, emphasized the deployment of tactical nuclear weapons and enacted the automatic use of nuclear weapons in its nuclear doctrine. Likewise, the U.S.-South Korea alliance has accelerated the deployment of nuclear-armed submarines, B-52 bombers and other U.S. strategic assets to the Korean Peninsula, increased the scope and scale of bilateral military exercises (and trilaterally with Japan), and sharpened provocative rhetoric about the end of the North Korean regime.

The United States has also led international efforts to isolate North Korea diplomatically while applying economic sanctions and financial measures to squeeze it out of the dollar-based global financial system. North Korea has coped, however, by bolstering ties with Russia and China, which all but removes further U.N. Security Council sanctions from the table, and engaging in cyber theft and other U.N.-proscribed activities to subsist economically and advance militarily.

The upshot is a dangerous, simmering situation on the Korean Peninsula that is one misstep away from boiling over into a catastrophic conflict. This status quo is untenable. Washington should explore a new modus vivendi with North Korea that reduces the risk of conflict, improves security and builds mutual trust and understanding in a tangible, proactive and realistic way.

The Golden Era of U.S.-North Korea Relations?

A hostile relationship between Washington and Pyongyang was not always the case. Even though they have never normalized diplomatic relations and continue to remain in a technical state of war, there was a period not too long ago when the United States and North Korea basically coexisted in relative peace. Between 1994 and 2008, the two countries engaged in meaningful, productive and sustained interactions across the diplomatic, military, economic and people-to-people dimensions, with mostly manageable levels of security tensions.

During this period, the two countries participated regularly in diplomatic dialogue to strengthen their respective security and reduce potential misperceptions. Their diplomats met often to implement the 1994 U.S.-DPRK Agreed Framework, address North Korea’s incipient ballistic missile program and explore a permanent peace treaty. In 1998, when Washington suspected a North Korean underground site of being nuclear-related, it negotiated visits to the facility to confirm that the site could not house nuclear operations.

Diplomacy continued even with setbacks. When North Korea conducted its first intermediate-range missile test in August 1998, the United States arranged senior-level meetings with North Korea, including former Defense Secretary William Perry’s visit to Pyongyang in May 1999 and an exchange of visits by Secretary of State Madeleine Albright and Jo Myong Rok, vice chairman of North Korea’s National Defense Commission, in 2000, to hear Pyongyang’s perspective and seek an end to its missile program.

Productive engagement also occurred beyond the diplomatic sphere. Between 1996 and 2005, U.S. Department of Defense officials worked side-by-side with Korean People’s Army officers in North Korea to recover and repatriate the remains of 153 U.S. servicemembers from the Korean War. U.S. congressional delegations, including members and staffers, periodically visited the country to share perspectives with North Korean government officials. Starting in 1995, numerous U.S. nongovernmental organizations established operations in North Korea to provide aid and assistance on health, agricultural and other humanitarian issues. Approximately 800 to 1,000 U.S. citizens traveled to North Korea every year to go on tours, reunite with family members or conduct academic and scientific exchanges, with minimal negative incidents. Also, North Korean scientific, academic and cultural delegations made dozens of trips throughout the United States to study agriculture, energy, health, business and law, as well as conduct taekwondo demonstrations.

Most importantly, during much of this time, security tensions remained relatively low. Between 1994 and 2002, North Korea conducted zero nuclear tests, only one ballistic missile test and did not reprocess any plutonium for fissile material. The environment began to worsen in 2002 when the Bush administration characterized North Korea as part of an “axis of evil” and scrapped the Agreed Framework due to North Korea’s development of a uranium enrichment facility. This led Pyongyang to withdraw from the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty the following year. After the United States froze North Korean assets in a Macau bank out of money laundering concerns in September 2005, North Korea boycotted the Six-Party Talks for a year and conducted its first nuclear test, signaling a shift in its strategic calculus and a tougher road ahead for disarmament efforts. Yet despite all this, the two sides still engaged through the Six-Party Talks process (2003 to 2008) to achieve important outcomes, including North Korea’s delivery of 18,000 pages of nuclear declarations and destruction of a nuclear plant cooling tower in 2008, and even a New York Philharmonic performance in Pyongyang.

In essence, for 15 years, the United States and North Korea coexisted in relative peace — to the benefit of the people in both countries and the rest of the international community.

Pursuing Peaceful Coexistence Today

The situation today is different. After five additional nuclear tests and hundreds of ballistic missile and other military tests over the past 15 years, North Korea is de facto, and certainly for alliance planning purposes, a nuclear weapon country. It solidified this nuclear status in its constitution, and the U.S. intelligence community assesses that North Korea will not abandon it. In response, the U.S. government, other than then-President Donald Trump’s anomalous year of engagement, has implemented a comprehensive, sustained, and relentless international pressure campaign against North Korea, with the hope of coercing it back to the negotiating table.

The dynamics of U.S.-North Korea engagement have also reached uncharted territory. From the early 1970s up until 2019, it was mostly Pyongyang soliciting dialogue with Washington, which had the leverage and standing to accept, ignore or apply preconditions. Since 1992, the United States has chosen to engage with North Korea, but always prioritizing denuclearization on the agenda. Today, the tables have turned. It is now Washington seeking talks, ostensibly without preconditions, and Pyongyang that is shunning them. North Korea likely detects implicit preconditions in the proposal for unconditional talks — that they start at the working-level and they address denuclearization. In response to the most recent U.S. offer, Kim Yo Jong, the North Korean leader’s sister, stated that “[t]he sovereignty of an independent state can never be an agenda item for negotiations, and therefore, [North Korea] will never sit face to face with the United States for that purpose.”

The U.S.-South Korea alliance’s approach of prioritizing denuclearization above all else needs to change to fit the new reality. While the denuclearization objective originally began as an effort to reduce the North Korean threat and uphold the nonproliferation regime, it now tends to engender the opposite effect. A rigid, narrow focus on denuclearization has foreclosed opportunities for engagement and accelerated North Korea’s drive to attain a nuclear deterrent, while the constant failures to achieve it in the near term have fueled South Korean debates about pursuing indigenous nuclear capabilities.

### 1AR---Trilateral Axis

#### The alliance is real.

Tyler Austin Harper, 2-2-2024, "The US Is Raising Tensions With North Korea", Jacobin, [https://jacobin.com/2024/02/north-korea-us-relations-trilateralism Accessed 7/6/24](https://jacobin.com/2024/02/north-korea-us-relations-trilateralism%20Accessed%207/6/24) TDI

In January, two veteran Korea watchers — Robert Carlin and Siegfried Hecker — published a provocative short piece that argues that, “like his grandfather in 1950, Kim Jong Un has made a strategic decision to go to war.” Carlin and Hecker contend that in the wake of the Hanoi Summit’s failure in 2019, the Kim regime abandoned North Korea’s thirty-year goal of normalizing relations with the United States. Citing recent shifts in government rhetoric and policy, they warn that “the situation may have reached the point that we must seriously consider a worst case” — meaning North Korean military action backed up by nuclear weapons. Alarmist claims about North Korea are common, but the piece raised eyebrows precisely because the two analysts are not known for them. Both are widely respected and eminently credentialed: Carlin is the former head of the Northeast Asia Division in the Bureau of Intelligence and Research at the State Department, and Hecker is a former director of Los Alamos who has actually visited North Korean nuclear facilities. Their argument was provocative enough that it even garnered coverage in the mainstream press, with NBC News asking in a headline: “Is Kim Jong Un preparing North Korea for war?” While the Korea-watcher community has been skeptical, the article does raise some questions: what would lead two dovish analysts to warn of a strategic shift by North Korea? Is it possible the Kim government really has decided to go to war? The news from North Korea is bad and getting worse, but it does not add up to incontrovertible evidence of a pro-war strategic shift. That said, I think Carlin and Hecker are correct to draw attention to North Korea’s changing approach to the United States. Something is happening. Where once better relations were held out as a distant possibility, the Kim government now seems to be foreclosing on that option — and replacing it with closer coordination with US adversaries. But to understand why the Democratic People’s Republic of Korea (DPRK) may be making that change, we have to move beyond analyzing its relationship with the United States per se and instead explore the ongoing militarization of the Pacific, the impact of right-wing governance in South Korea, the negative consequences of US sanctions, and the Biden administration’s commitment to what is euphemistically called “great power competition.” The failed Hanoi Summit has certainly played a major role in North Korea’s shifting pose. Faced with an opportunity to limit the North Korean nuclear arsenal, the Trump administration instead demanded total disarmament — and walked away with nothing. US commentators praised Donald Trump for rejecting a bad deal, but as nuclear weapons expert Jeffrey Lewis wrote at the time, the deal was probably the best the United States could have gotten. Kim Jong Un no doubt felt he had been taken for a ride, especially given the propaganda shifts necessary to undertake negotiations in 2018 and 2019. When the summit fell apart, North Korea responded by making 2019 a record year for missile tests. In 2022, it more than doubled that record. But while Hanoi has been a key factor in North Korea’s increasingly antagonistic posture, subsequent events have been just as important. For one thing, the Biden administration simply has not made North Korea a diplomatic priority. The administration often stresses its willingness to talk “without preconditions,” but it has done little if anything to entice North Korea to the negotiating table. The DPRK’s reluctance to talk is frustrating, but as a fellow analyst recently mentioned, conditions may be exactly what the Kim regime needs to hear from the US. If you want to avoid an embarrassing repeat of Hanoi, it makes sense to want to see concrete goals and ground rules for talks ahead of time. Relations are stuck in a vicious cycle. The administration declares its willingness to talk but is unwilling to make concessions to incentivize the North Koreans to negotiate; North Korea views US messaging skeptically and refuses to talk. The US responds by beefing up “deterrence,” stressing that while it remains open to negotiations, an expanded military presence in the region is necessary to keep Kim Jong Un in check. (Perhaps more important, it also fits with the overriding US goal of countering China.) North Korea then sees these deployments as evidence of nefarious intentions and views the next US statement with even greater suspicion. The cycle continues. The point is that military assets will always speak louder than words — and the Biden administration’s approach to the Korean peninsula relies heavily on military assets. In July, it broke forty years of precedent by sending a nuclear-armed submarine to make a port call in Busan, South Korea. President Yoon Suk-yeol boarded the sub and declared publicly that any “nuclear provocation” from the North would result in “the end of the regime.” Biden has also pushed for near constant and often expanded military exercises to shore up deterrence. To cite examples from just the past year, the US–South Korean field exercises held in March 2023 were the largest in five years, and the live-fire drills that followed in May were said to be the biggest ever. Large-scale annual drills were also held in August, but amid these regular exercises there have been innumerable other drills between the US and Japan, the US and South Korea, and even trilateral exercises between all three. Is it any surprise that a country surrounded by coordinating adversaries projecting military power may have given up on the prospect of détente? Trilateralism and Empires Old and New We know that North Korea already regards bilateral exercises as provocative, so one can imagine what the Kim regime thinks of growing trilateral security cooperation. In August, President Biden hosted the leaders of South Korea and Japan at a high-profile Camp David summit. In a joint statement, the three parties declared “a new era of trilateral partnership” and committed to “raise our shared ambition to a new horizon, across domains and across the Indo-Pacific and beyond.” Among other things, this partnership will include “annual, named, multi-domain trilateral exercises on a regular basis to enhance our coordinated capabilities and cooperation.” Increased trilateralism has long been the dream of hawkish US analysts, who support a far more extensive military presence in Northeast Asia. Biden — in the name of deterrence and competition — has helped make this expansion a reality. Trilateralism is sold to policymakers and the public as a mechanism to deter North Korea, and it is true that many of its facets are directed at the Kim regime. It is likely, though, that for the United States, trilateral cooperation has more to do with China than the fiery but more or less contained DPRK. Checking Chinese power is the overarching goal of US strategy and shoring up alliances in the Pacific is a logical step in establishing an anti-China bloc. In that sense, trilateralism is similar to the AUKUS deal announced in 2021. That agreement was ostensibly about providing Australia with nuclear-powered submarines, but it only really makes sense as a way to expand the capabilities of US allies in the Pacific to counter the Chinese military. A true anti-China bloc will not be built overnight. Indeed, many Asian countries retain an ambivalent stance on China, in part because of the country’s sheer economic power. Even the Biden administration is cagey about the topic, stressing that it seeks competition rather than outright conflict. But from the administration’s standpoint, deterrence — the bedrock of “managed competition” — requires long-term planning, so it must act now if opportunities arise that could lead to closer coordination against China in the future. The election of Yoon Suk-yeol in South Korea was one such opportunity. The joint statement includes a note of praise from President Biden, who commends Japanese prime minister Kishida Fumio and South Korean president Yoon “for their courageous leadership in transforming relations between Japan and the ROK [Republic of Korea].” The note parallels comparable statements from US-based analysts, who have treated Yoon as a visionary willing to buck domestic opinion to secure the region’s long-term security. Trilateralism is indeed controversial in South Korea, although analysts typically do not state the reasons — the living memory of Japanese occupation and continued imperial apologia in Japan. Also unmentioned is the obvious reason Yoon had no problem making his “courageous” decision: South Korean conservatives have a very positive view of the Japanese right, an orientation that stretches back to collaboration during the 1910–1945 occupation. It continues today. In March, Yoon announced a settlement to the ongoing question of monetary compensation for Korean victims of wartime forced labor, about 1,800 of whom are still living. Opposing the rulings of South Korean courts (which have found Japanese companies liable) and the wishes of the victims themselves, Yoon’s proposal will instead use money from South Korean corporations to pay out compensation to claimants. Japan, the former colonial occupier, is not required to contribute. President Biden praised the deal for inaugurating “a groundbreaking new chapter” in relations between the two countries. The growth of American power in the Pacific is being accomplished by sweeping the history of Japanese colonialism under the rug. Our Man in Seoul Conservative South Korean president Yoon’s narrow victory in 2022 enabled many of the policy changes mentioned above. Earlier in his presidency, Yoon made a not-so-subtle threat to explore the possibility of a South Korean nuclear arsenal. His comments garnered the attention of the Biden administration (probably on purpose), which created the Nuclear Consultative Group to bring South Korea into deterrence planning and tamp down talk of proliferation. Yoon’s comments were likely also what pushed the US to start sending nuclear-armed subs to the peninsula, as a show of its commitment to “extended deterrence.” More broadly, conservatism in South Korea is defined by a hawkish stance toward the North, so Yoon’s foreign policy aligns with longstanding US preferences for pressure (sanctions), deterrence (military power), and denuclearization (up-front disarmament). He is a reliable partner for the Biden administration, in other words, because he already agrees with what it wants to do. Domestically, Yoon’s militarist impulse has led his administration to restart nationwide civil defense drills and organize the first military parade in downtown Seoul in a decade. The last such parade was held during the reign of disgraced conservative president Park Geun-hye, who was later deposed in the Candlelight Revolution of 2016–17. Coverage of Yoon in the United States is reminiscent of the fawning treatment given to former Japanese prime minister Abe Shinzo, who was depicted as a gentle statesman despite being a right-wing nationalist. (Steve Bannon once called him “Trump before Trump.”) Yoon has spent much of his presidency in an extreme anti–communist mode, trying to tie the domestic opposition to the DPRK. In an August speech commemorating Korea’s liberation from the Japanese Empire, Yoon warned of “anti-state forces” working to harm South Korea from within. “The forces of communist totalitarianism,” Yoon declared, “have always disguised themselves as democracy activists, human rights advocates, or progressive activists while engaging in despicable and unethical tactics and false propaganda.” The statement is shocking in its own right, but it is particularly offensive in South Korea, where activists spent decades fighting for democracy while being tarred by conservatives as North Korean operatives. Some of those activists — like former president Moon Jae-in — are now senior members of the opposition party. Yoon’s demagoguery matters because, while South Korean democracy is healthier than that of its alliance partner, it could hardly be described as stable. The situation is volatile enough that writer Tammy Kim warned of democratic erosion in a September piece for the New Yorker, citing Yoon’s threats to “protections for women, the right to associate and organize, and, most strikingly, freedom of the press.” More ominously, in early January South Korean opposition leader Lee Jae-myung was stabbed in the neck during an appearance in Busan. Lee was rushed to surgery and luckily survived. The perpetrator, a sixty-seven-year-old realtor, told police that he stabbed Lee to prevent him from becoming president. The would-be assassin apparently believed that “pro-North Korean forces” in the judiciary were delaying attempts to hold Lee accountable, and that killing him would prevent a left-wing takeover. Yoon has of course denounced the stabbing, but one wonders whether his right-wing bully pulpit has played a role in stirring up anti-communist extremism. The Emerging Pariah Bloc In October, US officials revealed that North Korea shipped more than one thousand containers of equipment and munitions to Russia for use in its war against Ukraine. National Security Council spokesperson John Kirby, lately known as the administration’s chief defender of its Israel policy, stated at the time, “We condemn the DPRK for providing Russia with this military equipment, which will be used to attack Ukrainian cities, kill Ukrainian civilians, and further Russia’s illegitimate war.” Kirby expressed concern that arms transfers could eventually go both ways, with Russia providing technology to North Korea that it could not normally receive under international sanctions. More details emerged in January when analysts found strong evidence that Russia had used the Hwasong-11, a North Korean ballistic missile, in at least two attacks against Ukraine. The news caps a year in which Kim Jong Un used a number of public appearances to show off the North Korean arms industry. Russian defense minister Sergei Shoigu visited Pyongyang in July, where he viewed two drone designs and an intercontinental ballistic missile. It was, perhaps significantly, the first state visit since North Korea closed its borders in the early days of the COVID-19 pandemic. Shoigu later told journalists that the two countries were considering a joint military exercise. And of course Vladimir Putin hosted Kim Jong Un at a September summit, where the two toured a Russian factory that constructs fighter jets. North Korean support for Russia’s war in Ukraine has been rightly met with shock and disgust, but it should not be surprising — least of all to the US government. The broad sanctions levied against Russia for its illegal invasion were bound to push it closer to other US adversaries, which share little in common except their status as economic pariahs. North Korea has been under extreme sanctions for years (especially since 2016 and 2017), and while smuggling and hacking soften the blow, they’re hardly a substitute for large-scale arms deals. In this case, the Kim government probably saw an opening — the Russian need for materiel to prosecute the war — and jumped on it. The benefits for North Korea are political as well as economic: not only do arms deals bring in much needed energy, fuel, and cash; they also throw a monkey wrench into the UN sanctions regime, which Russia until recently supported. Tellingly, Kirby confirmed in January that Russia is looking to buy additional missiles from Iran, which is subject to “arguably the most extensive and comprehensive set of sanctions that the United States maintains on any country,” according to the Congressional Research Service. Sanctions may have economically isolated US adversaries from countries within its own orbit, but they have also drawn those adversaries closer together. With the headlong plunge into great power competition, backed up by the pursuit of military primacy, sanctioned countries’ convergence into a more solidified opposition seems likely to continue. A Hostile Environment To return to our starting point, consider the environment facing North Korea: It feels burned by a United States that did not accept the deal on offer at Hanoi. It sees a constant display of military power in its backyard by three countries that are deepening their cooperation. Where once trilateralism was a mere threat, now it functionally exists — thanks to US strategy against China and the election of a hawkish South Korean president. Russia, a friendly neighbor and a fellow target of sanctions, is in need of weapons and ammunition. The DPRK is seizing the opportunity, knowing full well it will raise the ire of the United States. And why not? The American position since Hanoi has been perfectly — which is to say militarily — clear. Some might object that this analysis focuses too intently on choices made by the United States; they might even say it erases North Korea’s “agency.” But while the autocratic Kim government does bear responsibility for the state of tensions, we cannot ignore the asymmetry between a poor, besieged state and a superpower capable of changing global security conditions on a whim. Countries make their own decisions, you might say, but they do not make them as they please. They do not make them under self-selected circumstances but under circumstances existing already, given and transmitted by the superpowers’ actions of the past — including the very recent past. We may find North Korea’s choices to be appalling, even dangerous, but they are not irrational. The Kim government has assessed the security conditions, which are overwhelmingly set by the world hegemon, and placed its bets accordingly. North Korea’s decision to turn further away from the United States and toward its adversaries probably does increase the risk of war. But that is not to say the situation has reached a point of no return. The problem is that pulling back will require more than just a dramatic change in the US-DPRK relationship, which was already unlikely. That relationship is now inextricably bound up with both competition against China and tensions with Russia that stem from US support for Ukraine. These are all interlocking challenges, in other words, and the situation with North Korea is only one example of how great power competition is exacerbating tensions in regions that were already powder kegs. The stakes are high: behind all these interrelated crises lies the potential for nuclear war. North Korea’s nuclear weapons program, still unrestrained, continues to advance. The last bilateral treaty limiting US and Russian nuclear weapons expires in 2026. The United States is spending $1.7 trillion to modernize its entire nuclear arsenal over the next thirty years. Russia recently deployed tactical nuclear weapons to Belarus. China is undergoing a major expansion of its once modest nuclear arsenal. We’ve got to kill great power competition before it kills us.

### 1AR---SoKo Prolif

#### Prolif is likely because North Korean first strike is credible.

Katz et al. ’23 – Katrin Fraser Katz, Fellow at the Center for Strategic and International Studies and a Scholar in Residence at the University of Miami; Christopher Johnstone, Senior Adviser and Japan Chair at the Center for Strategic and International Studies; Victor Cha, Senior Vice President and Korea Chair at the Center for Strategic and International Studies and a Professor at Georgetown University. From 2004 to 2007, he was Director for Asian Affairs at the National Security Council. “America Needs to Reassure Japan and South Korea

DRIVERS OF DOUBT

Allied apprehension about U.S. security commitments may seem puzzling in light of the Biden administration’s emphasis on shoring up U.S. alliances and the broad alignment of the Biden, Yoon, and Kishida administrations on North Korea and regional policies. But even at the best of times, maintaining the credibility of external deterrence commitments is a challenge. Doing so requires convincing allies not just that the United States has the capabilities to deter and defend against potential attacks against them but that it also has the will to use those capabilities—even if that means putting U.S. cities at risk. This is an inherently difficult endeavor, so a baseline of allied doubt about extended deterrence is predictable and normal.

In recent years, however, the level of doubt among Japanese and South Korean officials has exceeded that normal baseline level. Rapidly intensifying threats—particularly from North Korea, China, and Russia—have created unique and urgent security challenges that Tokyo and Seoul worry the United States is either unwilling or unable to address. In 2022, for instance, North Korea embarked on an unprecedented campaign of weapons development, testing over 90 cruise and ballistic missiles of various ranges (one of which flew over Japan) and preparing for a nuclear test, which would be the seventh it has carried out since 2006. This turbocharged testing spree has enabled Pyongyang to advance toward its aim of credibly threatening to strike the U.S. homeland with a nuclear-tipped intercontinental ballistic missile, a capability that could sow doubt among U.S. allies about Washington’s willingness to put its own territory at risk to defend them. North Korea has also introduced a “first use” nuclear doctrine—threatening to use nuclear weapons in response to military interventions, regime-change efforts, or even new sanctions by outside powers—and is getting close to being able to deploy tactical nuclear weapons for use on the battlefield.

China’s sweeping military modernization is also fueling Japanese and South Korean security concerns. After more than two decades of near double-digit growth in defense spending, including efforts to improve its missile capabilities and dramatically expand its nuclear arsenal, China is increasing its maritime and air activity near Japan, including making regular incursions into the territorial waters around the Senkaku Islands (known in China as the Diaoyu Islands). China’s behavior has also increasingly unnerved South Korea as Beijing has come to see Seoul’s missile defense systems—including the Terminal High Altitude Area Defense (THAAD) battery deployed in 2017—as threats to China rather than as mere defenses against North Korea.

Russia’s invasion of Ukraine and Moscow’s “no limits” partnership with Beijing have contributed to the uneasiness of Japan and South Korea, as well. For Tokyo, these developments have underscored the need to reinforce deterrence in the Taiwan Strait. Both Kishida and Yoon have drawn direct connections between the security of Europe and the Indo-Pacific, suggesting that Russia’s moves in Ukraine could spur China to attempt to take Taiwan by force or potentially tempt North Korea to invade the South. Japan’s new national security strategy, released in December 2022, notes that “Russia’s aggression against Ukraine has easily breached the very foundation of the rules that shape the international order” and that “the possibility cannot be precluded that a similar serious situation may arise in the future in the Indo-Pacific region.” Joint Chinese-Russian exercises near Japan last May and November further jarred Tokyo, as did China’s decision to fire five missiles into Japan’s exclusive economic zone during major military exercises around Taiwan in August.

For Seoul, the war in Ukraine has amplified the sense of vulnerability that comes with being a nonnuclear state next to nuclear-armed North Korea. Both Japan and South Korea worry that Russia’s aggression in Europe will distract the United States from the rapidly evolving array of security challenges in Asia. And Yoon recently [pondered](https://apnews.com/article/politics-south-korea-north-japan-united-states-government-06eda2aee0a8b33c30419251e06cd69f) whether a prolonged war “could send a message to North Korea that the international community would fail to respond to an act of invasion with the appropriate sanctions or punishment, and that message would further encourage the North to conduct provocations.” The war in Ukraine has also provided North Korea with an ideal environment to accelerate its nuclear and missile programs, since Beijing and Moscow are no longer willing to join Washington and its allies in punishing Pyongyang for its provocations.

### 1AR---Negotiations

#### Sanctions cement mistrust and collapse negotiations.

Wang & Wang ’24 – [Yongchi Wang, School of Humanities and Social Sciences, Xi’an Jiaotong-Liverpool University, China; Zhuo Wang, Business School, The University of Adelaide, Australia. “North Korea’s denuclearization: Obstacles and prospects from multinational aspect” In Addressing Global Challenges-Exploring Socio-Cultural Dynamics and Sustainable Solutions in a Changing World, pp. 3-11. Routledge, 2024] TDI

2.1 US effort for denuclearization: negotiations and sanctions

The US and China are the two countries with the most clout outside the region. The first point to make is that the US has made significant efforts to promote North Korean disarmament. The US and DPRK signed the Agreed Framework in 1994, with the goal of freezing DPRK’s nuclear program in exchange the US gave North Korea two light-water reactors for energy generation. The accord was initially effective, but in the early 2000s, DPRK resumed its nuclear program. Since then, the US and other members of the international society have sought to negotiate an end to DPRK’s nuclear program.

One factor is the continued lack of trust between the US and DPRK. While there have been some steps toward engagement and diplomacy, both sides still have deep-rooted mistrust and suspicion. Tensions and mistrust between the US and DPRK have persisted in recent years. In 2019, the US and DPRK held a summit in Hanoi, and North Korea wants the US to lift five sanctions adopted by the United Nations in 2016–2017; however, Washington believes these sanctions are central to exerting maximum pressure on North Korea (Nguyen, 2019). Therefore, the US refused to countermand economic sanctions against DPRK in exchange for limited denuclearization measures. The North Korean delegation accused the US of trying to disrupt the negotiation process with several unrealistic demands. And at the Stockholm Summit in the same year, the negotiations quickly collapsed, with both sides unable to reach a consensus on DPRK’s nuclear program and sanctions. This is undoubtedly a repetition of the traumatic events at the Hanoi summit (Hong, 2019). In 2020, the dynamiting of the liaison office in Panmunjom, jointly managed with South Korea, one of the main communication channels between the two countries, increased tensions between DPRK and the US. For their part, North Korea has expressed its frustration with the hostile and sanctioned policies of the US. In 2021, DPRK conducted several ballistic missile tests that were deemed to violate UN Security Council sanctions resolutions (U.S. Department of Defense 2022). The US condemned North Korea’s actions and said it would continue to impose sanctions on the country. These events show that tensions and mistrust between the US and DPRK still exist despite attempts to resolve issues through dialogue between the two sides at particular times.

The US took a firm stance on DPRK’s nuclear program, insisting that North Korea give up its nukes before receiving any concessions. This approach was a way to pressure DPRK to make concessions and agree to denuclearization. Nevertheless, this repression has backfired. This policy included intensified economic sanctions and diplomatic isolation of DPRK in the belief that these measures would pressure North Korea to negotiate. For example, The United States has imposed financial sanctions on North Korea, which include freezing North Korean assets held in US banks and prohibiting US banks from doing business with North Korean banks. This has made it difficult for North Korea to access foreign currency, which it needs to fund its nuclear program. The US has also imposed diplomatic sanctions on DPRK, which include limiting North Korean officials’ ability to travel abroad and restricting the North Korean embassy’s operations in the US. This has made it difficult for DPRK to engage in diplomatic negotiations and obtain information about the outside world.

These sanctions have had a significant impact on the DPRK, particularly on the North Korean economy, causing significant harm. Sanctions have made it difficult for the DPRK to get foreign cash, resulting in shortages of vital products and a rise in the cost of living for regular North Koreans. North Korea’s capacity to acquire technology and other products required to further its nuclear program has also been hampered by sanctions. However, the efficacy of the punishments is debatable. According to some observers, the sanctions have put tremendous pressure on North Korea and have contributed to its desire to talk with the US and South Korea.

However, the sanctions have had little effect on modifying DPRK’s behavior and have only served to further isolate the government and its people. This will heighten North Korea’s knowledge of the situation, speed up its nuke development, and make it less likely that DPRK would give up its nukes.

#### Extended deterrence is collapsing but reviving diplomacy and negotiations rebuild trust.

Town ’21 – [Jenny Town, Senior Fellow at the Stimson Center and the Director of Stimson’s Korea Program and 38 North. Her areas of expertise include North Korea, US-DPRK relations, US-ROK alliance relations and extended deterrence, and Northeast Asia regional security. She holds a BA in East Asian Studies and International Relations from Westmar University and a Master of International Affairs from Columbia University School of International and Public Affairs. “Challenges of Negotiating with North Korea” Stimson Center, <https://www.stimson.org/2021/biden-review-challenges-of-negotiating-with-north-korea/>, April 7, 2021] TDI

AN UNSUSTAINABLE STATUS QUO

First and foremost, the biggest challenge the Biden administration faces is that settling for the status quo means North Korea will continue to develop the size, diversity, and lethality of its nuclear and ballistic missile programs. There is no doubt that it continued to develop its nuclear and missile technologies over the past few years, despite ongoing negotiations, as evidenced by its testing and displays of new ballistic missiles, its reporting of a new ballistic missile submarine nearing completion, and satellite imagery evidence of continued activity around its nuclear and missile related facilities. Furthermore, at the Eighth Congress of the Workers’ Party of Korea, Kim Jong Un outlined plans for advancing various WMD capabilities, conventional weapons systems, unmanned aerial vehicles, and military reconnaissance satellites. 1

As the North’s WMD programs grow, especially its long-range capabilities, it both increases Pyongyang’s ability to threaten U.S. allies in the region and starts to erode confidence in U.S. extended deterrence over time. The more North Korea can threaten the U.S. mainland, the more questions are raised—rightly or wrongly—about the choices Washington will make in a situation where both U.S. and ROK or Japanese cities fall under threat. This growing concern has already led to serious debate in South Korea about when and whether it needs to have its own nuclear capabilities to match the North’s and this trend will not reverse until significant progress is made on the denuclearization front.

Moreover, the more extensive and more advanced the North’s nuclear programs become, the more leverage it gains in future negotiations. These are all problems that are worth addressing proactively now, no matter how difficult the proposition, to help foster greater peace and security in the region and strengthen U.S. alliances.

REVIVING NEGOTIATIONS

While diplomacy is needed to address North Korea’s growing WMD capabilities, one of the first challenges the new administration will face is how to revive negotiations. Reports that the North Koreans have been unresponsive to early overtures from the U.S. should not come as a surprise as the bar for resuming negotiations on the North Korean side appears to be quite high.

Without some evidence that the Biden administration is serious about changing the relationship— not just seeking nuclear concessions—invitations to resume talks will have little appeal to Kim, who is preoccupied with domestic hardships and morale.

Since the failure to secure an agreement at the Hanoi Summit in 2019, Kim Jong Un has expressed on multiple occasions a declining belief the nature of U.S.-DPRK relations can fundamentally change. In effect—without some evidence that the Biden administration—is serious about changing the relationship, not just seeking nuclear concessions, invitations to resume talks will have little appeal to Kim, who is preoccupied with domestic hardships and morale.

The past few years of unconventional or disruptive diplomacy under Trump created interesting new opportunities, especially gaining access to Kim Jong Un directly. But the inability to transform those unconventional approaches into tangible results may be more detrimental to the prospects of continuing negotiations than anticipated. After all, the common narrative at that time was that that if anyone was willing to strike a deal with North Korea, it would be Trump; and the combination of Trump’s strongman tactics and South Korean President Moon’s overwhelming political goodwill bred an enormous amount of optimism on the Korean side of the equation that bold, swift, and positive changes were possible in the near term.

The early commitments made through the Panmunjom Summit declaration raised expectations that long-stalled inter-Korean cooperation would be restarted and that progress toward a peace regime and economic cooperation were on the horizon.

The Singapore Summit Joint Statement, while lacking a concrete plan for advancing the U.S.-DPRK relationship, committed both sides to an agenda that put equal priority on normalizing U.S.-DPRK relations, building a peace regime, and working toward the denuclearization of the Korean Peninsula. It was not simply agreeing to nuclear negotiations, but it essentially recognized the need to address the political and security environment as well, in order to make progress in any of these areas. This too raised expectations that U.S.-DPRK relations could chart a new course.

But despite all these commitments, very few results were achieved. The inter-Korean progress stalled when South Korea failed to secure sanctions exemptions to move forward with inter-Korean economic projects and negotiations with the U.S. got hung up over the nuclear pillar of the agenda. The relationship Trump often boasted he had with Kim as a result of the Singapore Summit did not translate into either unilateral gestures by the U.S. to support the diplomatic process or actual agreements.

Moreover, imprecise language about issues like U.S.-ROK joint military exercises—were they to be stopped altogether or suspended or scaled back—led to further misunderstandings, with clearly differing interpretations in Washington and Pyongyang about what was committed. The continued U.S. imposition of sanctions while negotiations were ongoing and unfulfilled of commitments from Trump—especially an end of war declaration that was reportedly promised by Trump to Kim, without conditions, at the Singapore Summit—all contributed to a disillusionment in the process.

The lessons that the North Koreans appear to have learned from the Trump era of negotiations were that the big diplomatic gamble with South Korea and the U.S. amounted to little, and that whether there was a traditional or unconventional president in the U.S., the result was the same. The unilateral gestures made by Pyongyang in 2018 to jump start the diplomatic process did not make a difference in the end, and negotiating directly with presidents did not bring about different results.

This does not mean that the prospects for future negotiations are dead. Kim Jong Un still spoke positively about the summit process in his speech to the Eighth Party Congress. However, that does not mean he is in any rush to get back to negotiations either. Instead, he essentially portrayed the door to diplomacy as unlocked, leaving the task of opening that door in the hands of Washington and Seoul.

CHALLENGES FOR NEW NEGOTIATIONS

If and when the U.S. and North Korea can find a way to revive the negotiation process, new challenges also should be expected.

For starters, since the Hanoi Summit, North Korea has changed out most of the top leaders who were involved in past negotiations with the U.S., especially in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. One of key personnel changes was the dismissal of Ri Yong Ho as Foreign Minister. While Ri did not serve as the interlocutor with the U.S. during the last round of negotiations, his past experience negotiating with Americans as far as the Agreed Framework surely influenced his views on diplomacy and advice to Kim Jong Un on such foreign policy matters. His successor, Ri Son Gwon, on the other hand, as a former army officer, has little experience dealing with the U.S. or nuclear issues. He is largely expected to bring a more hardline approach to the situation, especially given his history as a tough negotiator in inter-Korean relations.

Although the Foreign Ministry did not handle the working-level negotiations with the Trump administration, as they had in past negotiations, it was clear from public statements and the composition of summit delegations that they still played an influential role in the process. It is unclear whether they will take back that portfolio if U.S.-DPRK negotiations resume; regardless, the role they will play, or at the very least the advice they will give about dealing with the United States, is likely to take on a much harder line than before.

Another key development that arose over the past three years that will likely pose a significant challenge to future negotiations is the involvement of Kim Jong Un, himself, in negotiations. Gaining access to Kim may have created a channel for quicker and potentially bolder decisions to be made, but it also constrained the scope and authority of working-level North Korean negotiators. In the lead-up to the Hanoi Summit, for instance, instead of the usual process of negotiating the details of a potential agreement in working-level meetings and using the summit for ceremonial purposes, the North Koreans reserved the negotiation of the nuclear issue for Kim Jong Un to take up directly with Trump.

Reserving such a technical issue for the heads of state to negotiate during a formal summit  meant there was no guarantee that it would conclude with the desired outcome, especially given the enormous time constraints and pressure of the situation. Despite a build-up of expectations of a deal leading up to Hanoi, miscalculations on both sides eventually led to an early conclusion and both sides walking away empty handed.

Such a format also calls into question whether a deal, if reached, would have contained the level of detail needed to ensure both sides had the same understanding of the commitments made. Misunderstandings or differing interpretations of terms and conditions can lead to quick frustrations, after all, limiting the sustainability of even modest agreements.

Whether Kim will be willing to delegate the authority to negotiate on the nuclear issue back down to the working level going forward is unclear. Should the lead negotiator end up being someone like Ri Song Gwon, who has no experience on this issue, it seems unlikely. But it also seems unlikely that either side will want to risk the high-profile summitry again without some guarantees that they will bring home a win.

As the Biden administration considers its approach, it should take this new dynamic into consideration—a complete return to the more traditional working-level negotiation format may not be effective going forward. Instead, they may need to find ways to supplement those talks with direct communications with Kim Jong Un as well—such as utilizing the letters between Kim and now Biden in a more substantive way to ensure consensus can be reached before pageantry is planned.

GOING FORWARD

It is clear North Korea will continue to develop its WMD capabilities under the current conditions. However, Pyongyang still poses the programs as necessitated by “U.S. hostile policy.” While this term encompasses a number of political, economic and military grievances in the nature of U.S. relations toward North Korea, the conditional formulation still leaves the door open to finding a path toward denuclearization provided other aspects of the relationship evolve as well.

For the Biden administration, the continued advancements of the North’s capabilities underscore the need to be proactive on this issue, even if the road seems daunting. While there will be no easy answers, or easy negotiations ahead, the consequences of inaction are serious given how much progress North Korea has made on its WMD development in the past five years and what it could achieve next.

Given the challenges ahead, some final recommendations to the administration as they wrap up their policy review include:

Reaffirm the Singapore Declaration. The importance of upholding the Singapore Joint Statement by the new administration has been widely discussed in policy circles over the past few months including the fact that Kim Jong Un has personally signed this agreement. Of particular note is the fact that this agenda commits North Korea to a denuclearization agenda, while acknowledging the political and security related challenges that are needed to move down that road—something that the North Koreans may be more reluctant to agree to in the future. Furthermore, reaffirming the joint statement would also show that an agreement can be sustained from one U.S. administration to the next and would provide a foundation for building trust over time.

Remove unnecessary points of tension. In order to show that the U.S.-DPRK relations are not static but capable of evolving, the administration should consider removing obstacles that pose unnecessary tensions in relations. For instance, removing obstacles to humanitarian aid and medical equipment provision by U.S. nongovernmental organizations, actions which are allowed even under the current sanctions regime, and lifting the travel ban on U.S. citizens travelling to the North Korea, which would have been a logical move once formal negotiations started, would help improve the political environment.

Recalibrate expectations. The maximalist position toward North Korea of complete denuclearization up front or even a front-loaded process is unachievable and if maintained, will only prolong the status quo. While denuclearization should remain a goal of diplomacy—and is encompassed in the Singapore Joint Statement, there are more urgent needs that can be addressed first, such as stopping further progress in nuclear and missile capabilities, that can help lower tensions and allow for the relationship to evolve in order to make progress on all fronts of the U.S.-DPRK agenda. A step-by-step, phased approach to denuclearization will take time and patience, but is necessary to address Pyongyang’s broader security concerns. North Korea is not unique in establishing an incredibly high bar for being willing to voluntarily relinquish its nuclear weapons program — a rare choice among nuclear-armed states. In order to get to the end of that denuclearization road, a solid foundation of trust will need to be built over time — and proven sustainable over multiple presidential administrations — for Pyongyang to believe it will be safe from external threats without nuclear weapons while its values still clash with the West and it sits in the middle of a nuclear-armed region.

Empower South Korea to revive inter-Korean relations. Creating space for South Korea to move forward on the inter-Korean agenda would help build goodwill both in Seoul and Pyongyang as well. Movement on the peace agenda and/or inter-Korean economic cooperation in some capacity could also increase collective bargaining power, and enable Seoul to play an active and productive role in broader efforts to address peace and security concerns on the Peninsula.

As North Korea resumes missile testing and other activities that start to raise tensions on the Korean Peninsula once again, the impulse may be to set aside diplomacy for the near term. However, it is also a clear reminder that the longer we settle for the status quo, the more limited our options become. While there may be both a preference and pressure for pursuing an all-or-nothing approach to denuclearization with North Korea, this policy is doomed to fail. Instead, a long-term, step-by-step approach that offers progress in each of the lines of effort established in the Singapore Joint Statement provides the best chance of actually starting down the denuclearization road and improving the security situation for the U.S. and its allies.

## Engagement

### 1AR---Diversionary War Turn

#### Kim fears regime collapse now. Nuclear war.

Lee ’24 – Chung Min Lee is a senior fellow in the Asia Program at the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace. Prior to joining Carnegie, he taught for twenty years at the Graduate School of International Studies (GSIS) in Yonsei University in Seoul. Chung Min is a council member of the International Institute for Strategic Studies (IISS). “The Hollowing Out of Kim Jong Un’s North Korea” Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, <https://carnegieendowment.org/research/2024/04/the-hollowing-out-of-kim-jong-uns-north-korea?lang=en>, April 29, 2024]

North Korean leader Kim Jong Un continues to accelerate the country’s nuclear weapons and ballistic missile programs. At the same time, North Korea has been a [key supplier](https://en.yna.co.kr/view/AEN20240227002800315) of arms to Russia as the war in Ukraine progresses. Both of these actions are critical threats to South Korea, the United States, and Japan. But the outside world is missing an equally important development with immense implications for stability on the Korean Peninsula—the slow and irreversible breakdown of the Kim dynasty.

That said, regime collapse is not necessarily around the corner. When North Korea’s founding dictator Kim Il Sung died in July 1994, predictions were rampant about regime or state collapse. When his son and successor Kim Jong Il died in December 2011, many North Korea experts thought that then twenty-seven-year-old Kim Jong Un—Kim Jong Il’s youngest son—would not be able to stay in power. It has been thirteen years since Kim Jong Un succeeded his father, and he remains in firm control over North Korea, including the military and security apparatuses. The chances of a military coup are slim. But North Korea is still hollowing out and the Kim dynasty is in decline. This state of affairs will have major strategic consequences for the Korean Peninsula and the world.

The Biggest Threats to the Kim Dynasty

From the outside, Kim Jong Un seems to be in full control over the Korean People’s Army (KPA), the Ministry of State Security (MSS), and the Korean Workers’ Party (KWP), as well as other levers of power. But Kim’s biggest threats today all come from internal forces that he and his cronies can no longer totally control. Several ingredients of the superglue that have so far sustained the world’s only communist family dynasty since 1948 are under threat or slowly coming apart. There are four main threats to the regime:

The deepening economic malaise in North Korea, including endemic food and energy shortages; the de facto breakdown of the state rationing system that has spurred the rise of jangmadang (small local markets, which often include illicit trade); and expenditure of [some 25 to 30 percent of gross domestic product (GDP)](https://www.statista.com/statistics/747387/north-korea-share-of-military-spending-in-budget/) on defense, including development of nuclear weapons and other weapons of mass destruction (WMD).

A sharp weakening of decades of indoctrination based on intense hatred and fear of North Korea’s archenemies: South Korea, the United States, and Japan; as well as the breakdown of loyalty not just among the masses but also within the nomenklatura of the party, armed forces, security services, and the so-called donju, or moneyed elites.

The growing inability to sow ever-increasing dosages of fear into its citizens through concentration camps, public executions, and constant terror by the security services.

The uncertainties associated with a fourth dynastic succession, as Kim seems to be preparing his teenage daughter, Kim Ju Ae, to be the next Great Leader of the Kim dynasty.

#### North Korean state collapse is imminent.

Ellie Cook 1-27, Reporter, Security & Defense, Newsweek, "The End of North Korea," Newsweek, 01/27/2024, https://www.newsweek.com/north-korea-kim-jong-un-south-korea-nuclear-weapons-1863632.

The comments set the tone for the North Korea of 2024. The secretive nation is more belligerent, provocative and focused on its military than ever before. It has stepped closer to Russia, with a post-Covid clampdown reining in any half measures of change that were floated in the early years of Kim's rule.

But as the global order reshuffles, and power tips in new ways, attention is once again turning to the "Hermit Kingdom" and whether it can survive the decades to come.

It is not clear what a collapse of North Korea would look like. It could be reunification with its southern neighbor, which it has now declared its "principal enemy," or it could be the tearing down of the Kim family regime and the grip it has maintained on 26 million people.

Experts broadly agree there are a handful of events that could trigger the collapse of the pariah state. The unexpected or untimely death of Kim Jong Un could spiral, or a popular uprising may gain momentum if backed by the country's security institutions. There may be a coup in the upper echelons of power, or North Korea could find itself at war.

All scenarios are possible, and Kim is aware of it, said Scott Snyder, senior fellow for Korea studies and director of the program on U.S.-Korea policy at the Council on Foreign Relations.

#### A phased approach signals good faith.

Wertz ’18 – [Daniel Wertz is Senior Program Officer at the National Committee on North Korea (NCNK), where he has worked since 2011. Prior to his time at NCNK, Wertz was a Research Assistant at the former US-Korea Institute at the Johns Hopkins School of Advanced International Studies. Wertz received master’s degrees in International and World History in a joint program from Columbia University and the London School of Economics, and a bachelor’s degree in History from Wesleyan University. “How to Use Sanctions as a Lever, Not Just a Hammer: A Proposal for Phased Sanctions Relief” 38 North, <https://www.38north.org/2018/06/dwertz060818/>, June 8, 2018] TDI

Top of Form

The Trump administration’s “maximum pressure” campaign has led to a dramatic escalation in the scope and enforcement of US and international sanctions against North Korea over the course of the past year. These enhanced sanctions have not yet led to an economic breakdown in North Korea, and economic pressure was certainly not the only factor prompting Pyongyang to shift to its current course of diplomatic outreach earlier this year. However, as talks with North Korea move forward on both the North-South and US-DPRK tracks, the phasing and structure of sanctions relief and any economic aid packages will be a critically important issue, requiring close coordination between the US, South Korea, and China, among other actors.

Credible offers and implementation of sanctions relief and other economic inducements in return for North Korean compliance with its commitments to denuclearization will be crucial for diplomatic success. A sanctions relief package should also be designed to encourage North Korean marketization and its eventual integration into the global economy, while creating clear disincentives to backsliding on nuclear or other diplomatic commitments. To meet these goals, such a package would need to proceed in carefully designed stages, commensurate with progress toward denuclearization.

Initial Steps—Sustaining Momentum for Dialogue

The start of a sustained negotiating process could be accompanied by various sorts of confidence building measures, as well as enhanced efforts to address humanitarian needs in North Korea. Due to the breadth of the UN sanctions regime, as well as the US Treasury Department’s North Korea Sanctions Regulations (NKSR) and other unilateral sanctions policies, some minor adjustments to the existing sanctions regime would be necessary to facilitate these initial actions. These adjustments could be made without providing immediate economic relief to Pyongyang, and without fundamentally altering the architecture of US or international sanctions.

Humanitarian Aid

A good place to start might be steps to increase humanitarian assistance. Although neither US sanctions laws nor UN Security Council Resolutions are intended to restrict the activities of humanitarian agencies operating in North Korea, in practice they have made the delivery of humanitarian assistance quite complex. The [recently revised NKSR](https://www.federalregister.gov/documents/2018/03/05/2018-04113/north-korea-sanctions-regulations) prohibits US NGOs from forming “partnerships” with any branch of the North Korean government, effectively requiring them to go through the complex and time-consuming process of obtaining a specific license from the Treasury Department’s Office of Foreign Assets Control to operate in the country. UN Security Council Resolution 2397’s prohibition on the export of machinery, transportation vehicles, and metals to North Korea has also caused [complications](http://www.nydailynews.com/newswires/news/national/charities-nail-clippers-shovels-north-korean-no-nos-article-1.3782458) for humanitarian work. Easing and streamlining the regulations and procedures that allow humanitarian agencies to operate in North Korea, at both the UN and US levels, would be an easy signal of good faith.

Financial support for humanitarian programs in North Korea would also be a good first step in a post-summit environment. Funding for the treatment and control of tuberculosis (TB) and multi-drug-resistant tuberculosis in North Korea is urgently needed, given the extremely high disease burden in the country and the Global Fund’s [recent decision](https://www.nknews.org/2018/05/why-is-the-global-fund-pulling-out-of-north-korea/) to end its support for TB and malaria treatment there. Providing technical assistance to support North Korea’s reforestation efforts (a project in which Kim Jong Un has shown a strong personal interest) would also help to address a major environmental concern and mitigate the impact of seasonal flooding. However, while there is a continuing need for targeted food and nutritional assistance to vulnerable populations in North Korea, the resumption of the Sunshine-era policy of unconditional food and fertilizer aid to North Korea would be a mistake, as it could serve to prop up the ailing state-controlled distribution system and hinder the process of marketization.

### 1AR---Containment Turn

#### China’s revisionist and engagement causes nuclear war.

Beckley ’23 – [Michael Beckley, Associate Professor of Political Science at Tufts University, a Nonresident Senior Fellow at the American Enterprise Institute, and Director of the Asia Program at the Foreign Policy Research Institute. “Delusions of Détente” Foreign Affairs, <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/united-states/china-delusions-detente-rivals>, August 22, 2023] TDI

The fact is that the U.S.-Chinese rivalry is unlikely to wind down without a significant shift in the balance of power. The United States needs to make policy choices based on this reality and not get caught up in a fantasy. This does not mean cutting off diplomacy or shutting down talks completely, but being clear eyed about what that type of engagement can realistically achieve. There are reasons to hope for a medium-term mellowing of Chinese power that might open space for a real diplomatic breakthrough. To get there, however, the United States and its allies must deter Chinese aggression in the near term and avoid concessions that disrupt favorable long-term trends.

BAD BLOOD

The United States and China have become what political scientists call “enduring rivals,” meaning countries that have singled each other out for intense security competition. Over the past few centuries, such pairs have accounted for only one percent of the world’s international relationships but more than 80 percent of its wars. Think of the repeated clashes between India and Pakistan, Greece and Turkey, China and Japan, and France and the United Kingdom.

Rivals feud not because they misunderstand each other but because they know each other all too well. They have genuine conflicts of vital and indivisible interests, usually including territorial disputes, the main cause of war. Their redlines and spheres of influence overlap. One side’s attempts to protect itself, such as by modernizing its military, inherently threaten the other. If their economies are intertwined, as is often the case, rivals wield trade as a weapon, seeking to monopolize the production of strategic goods and lord it over the other side. The United Kingdom and Germany, for example, waged a fierce commercial competition before coming to blows in [World War I](https://www.foreignaffairs.com/tags/world-war-i).

Rivals also usually espouse divergent ideologies and view the success or spread of the other side’s system of beliefs as a subversive threat to their own way of life. For instance, revolutionary France not only tried to conquer its European rivals; it also threatened to topple their monarchical regimes through the power of its example. In the lead-up to [World War II](https://www.foreignaffairs.com/tags/world-war-ii), fascist powers faced off against democracies, and during the Cold War, the United States and the Soviet Union divided much of the world into capitalist and communist blocs. What is more, rivals share a history of bad blood. Their mutual hostility is fueled by past acts of aggression and the fear of more to come. Just ask the Chinese today how they feel about Japan.

Once underway, rivalries are extremely difficult to end. According to data collected by the political scientists Michael Colaresi, Karen Rasler, and William Thompson, there have been 27 great-power rivalries since 1816. These struggles lasted for more than 50 years on average and ended in one of three ways. By my count, 19 of them—the vast majority—culminated in war, with one side beating the other into submission. Another six rivalries ended with the two sides allying against a common foe. In the early 1900s, for example, the United Kingdom set aside its differences with France, Russia, and the United States to gang up on Germany; the result was World War I. Finally, there was the Cold War. When the Soviet Union collapsed, its rivalries with the United States and China ended peacefully, although in prior decades Moscow had waged a small border war against China and multiple proxy wars with Washington in different parts of the globe. Today, many people fear a new cold war between the United States and China, but historically, that type of tense standoff has been the best possible outcome because it avoids full-scale fighting.

Confronted by this record, those advocating for greater U.S. engagement with China might respond that they do not seek the immediate end of the U.S.-Chinese rivalry but merely détente, a cooling-off period that allows the sides to put guardrails on their relationship. Yet the history of great-power détente provides little comfort. Such periods have rarely lasted long, even under favorable circumstances. The most successful case, the Concert of Europe—an alliance of monarchies founded in 1815 after the Napoleonic Wars to crush liberal revolutions—had all the ingredients for a durable détente: a common ideology, a common foe, and partnerships forged in war. But its top leaders stopped meeting after 1822, sending lower-level emissaries instead. By the 1830s, the concert was riven by a cold war between its liberal and conservative members. The concert worked well when members’ core interests aligned, but when the conservative consensus cracked, so did the concert, which erupted in a hot war over Crimea in 1853. That failure illustrates a more general point: guardrails are more often the result of peace, not effective methods to maintain it. They typically are erected in good times or immediately after crises—when they are least needed—only to be destroyed in bad times. The most elaborate guardrails in history were installed after World War I, including the Kellogg-Briand Pact outlawing war and the League of Nations, a formal collective security organization; they failed to prevent World War II.

Those calling for Washington to engage more deeply with Beijing characterize the pursuit of détente as risk free: it might fail, but it can’t hurt and is worth a try. But when conflicts of interest between rivals are severe, overeager efforts to induce détente can be destabilizing. The Anglo-German détente of 1911 to 1914 contributed to the outbreak of World War I by feeding Germany false hopes that the United Kingdom would remain neutral in a continental war. Between 1921 and 1922, the world’s largest naval powers gathered in the U.S. capital to discuss disarmament at the Washington Naval Conference. The effort eventually backfired, however, inching Asia closer to World War II as the United States signaled it would oppose Japanese expansion but would not build the naval power necessary to enforce that prohibition. The Munich Agreement of 1938, which gave Germany permission to annex part of Czechoslovakia, enabled the Nazis to invade Poland the next year. In 1972, the United States and the Soviet Union declared their commitment to “peaceful coexistence” and signed arms control and trade agreements. Détente began to unravel the next year, however, as the superpowers squared off on opposite sides of the Yom Kippur War, followed by a proxy conflict in Angola in 197 5, the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan in 1979, and several terrifying nuclear crises in the early 1980s. As so often occurs, détente had meant different things to each side. The Americans thought they had frozen the status quo; the Soviets believed they had been recognized as a superpower with all the attendant privileges, including the right to spread revolution. Once events exposed those conflicting interpretations, the U.S.-Soviet rivalry came roaring back.

The bottom line is that great-power rivalries cannot be papered over with memorandums of understanding. Diplomacy is necessary but insufficient to resolve disputes nonviolently. Sustainable settlements also require stable balances of power, which usually emerge not through happy talk but after one side realizes it can no longer compete.

HATERS GONNA HATE

Today, the U.S.-Chinese relationship has all the trappings of an enduring rivalry. For starters, the main issues under dispute are essentially win-lose affairs. Taiwan can be governed from Taipei or Beijing but not both. The East China and South China Seas can be international waters or a Chinese-controlled lake. Russia can be shunned or supported. Democracy can be promoted or squelched. The Internet can be open or state censored. For the United States, its chain of alliances in East Asia represents vital insurance and a force for stability; for China, it looks like hostile encirclement. How should climate change be handled? Where did [COVID-19](https://www.foreignaffairs.com/tags/coronavirus) come from? Ask around Beijing and Washington, and one is likely to hear irreconcilable answers.

More fundamentally, the two rivals hold divergent visions of international order. The CCP wants a world in which what it sees as ancient autocratic civilizations are free to rule their traditional spheres of influence. The United States, by contrast, wants to consign those spheres to the dustbin of history by protecting the sovereignty of weaker countries and integrating them into an open trade order. The U.S.-Chinese rivalry is more than a set of diplomatic disputes—it is also a struggle to promote different ways of life.

To make matters worse, neither side can credibly reassure the other without losing some ability to hold it accountable. Advocates of reengagement call for the United States and China to respect each other’s redlines. But achieving a sustained thaw in relations would require at least one side to abandon many of its redlines altogether. China wants the United States to end arms sales to Taiwan, slash the overall U.S. military presence in East Asia, share U.S. technology with Chinese companies, reopen the U.S. market to a flood of Chinese exports, stop promoting democracy in China’s neighborhood, and let Russia win its war in Ukraine. The United States, for its part, wants China to dial back its defense spending, refrain from aggression in the Taiwan Strait, cease its militarization of the South China Sea, rein in industrial subsidies and espionage, and withdraw its support for Russia and other autocracies.

Yet neither side could grant such concessions without empowering the other to push for more. If China backed off Taiwan militarily, for example, the island could drift toward independence; but if the United States stopped arming Taiwan, the military balance would shift radically in Beijing’s favor. If China allowed Russia to lose in Ukraine, the CCP would face a reeling nuclear power on its doorstep and a triumphant United States freed to focus on Asia; but if the United States let Russia win, a Chinese-Russian axis could be emboldened to take even more territory, such as Taiwan or the Baltic states, from a demoralized West. If China abandoned its industrial policies, it would further cede technological primacy to the United States; but Washington would not abide Chinese mercantilism without hollowing out both the U.S. economy and what was left of the open global trading order. If the CCP stopped propping up autocracies, it would risk waves of popular revolutions, such as occurred in 1989 and the early years of the twenty-first century, that could energize liberal activists at home and bring to power regimes abroad that would be more inclined to sanction China for its human rights record. If the United States stopped aiding and protecting fledgling democracies, however, some could disappear behind Beijing’s digital iron curtain.

These conflicting interests cannot be traded away by diplomats sitting around a table because they are rooted not just in each country’s political system but also in their historical memories and geographies. Contemporary Chinese political culture is ingrained by two cataclysms: the “century of humiliation” (which took place from 1839 to 1949), when the country was ripped apart by imperialist powers, and the revolutions of 1989 that toppled the Soviet Union and other communist regimes and nearly undid China’s. The CCP’s prime directive is to never let China be bullied or divided again—a goal, China’s leaders believe, that requires relentlessly amassing wealth and power, expanding territorial control, and ruling with an iron fist. As an economic late bloomer, China must use mercantilist methods to climb up global value chains long monopolized by the West. With China surrounded by 19 countries, many of them hostile or unstable, the country’s leaders believe they must carve out a broad security perimeter that includes Taiwan, chunks of India, and most of the East China and South China Seas, where 90 percent of China’s trade and most of its oil flow. Expansion is also a political imperative. The CCP justifies its autocratic rule in part by promising to recover territories lost during the century of humiliation. Demilitarizing those areas now would mean surrendering the CCP’s solemn mission to make China whole again and, consequently, diminishing its ability to use anti-foreign nationalism as a source of legitimacy.

American interests are perhaps less entrenched but remain too fixed to give up without a struggle. As a rich democracy surrounded by allies and oceans, the United States likes things the way they are. Its main foreign policy goal is to prevent overseas threats from spoiling the wealth and freedom its citizens enjoy at home. Many Americans would love to avoid foreign entanglements, but the world wars and the Cold War showed that powerful tyrannies can and should be contained—and that it is better to do so early, before an aggressive country has overrun its region, by maintaining strong alliances in peacetime. Americans may eventually forget that lesson as the generations that won World War II and the Cold War pass on. But for now, it continues to shape U.S. foreign policy, especially toward China. When American policymakers observe China trying to redraw the map of East Asia, supporting Russia’s invasion of Ukraine, or locking ethnic minorities in concentration camps, they see not just a series of policy disagreements but a multifaceted assault on the order that has undergirded U.S. security and prosperity for generations. With the stakes seemingly so high, compromise, even on a single issue, is hard for leaders on both sides to stomach.

Champions of reengagement correctly point out that China and the United States are bound together by various forms of mutual vulnerability. Neither country wants war, runaway climate change, pandemics, or a global depression. The U.S. and Chinese economies are intertwined. Both governments possess nuclear arsenals and want to prevent other countries from acquiring them. With the costs of conflict so potentially devastating and the benefits of cooperation so manifest, peace should be relatively easy to maintain, at least in theory.

In practice, however, mutual vulnerability may be exacerbating the rivalry. For example, both countries are engaging in conventional military provocations, perhaps under the assumption that the other side would never risk a nuclear exchange by opening fire. Scholars call this the “stability-instability paradox,” whereby excessive faith in nuclear deterrence makes conventional war more likely. Some Chinese analysts argue that the People’s Liberation Army could destroy U.S. bases in East Asia while China’s nuclear forces deter U.S. retaliation against Chinese mainland targets. Meanwhile, some American defense planners advocate decimating China’s navy and air bases early in a conflict, believing that U.S. nuclear superiority would compel China to stand down rather than escalate. Instead of dampening tensions, nuclear weapons may be inflaming them.

The same goes for economic interdependence. As the international relations scholar Dale Copeland has pointed out in Foreign Affairs, when trade partners become geopolitical rivals, they start to fear being cut off from vital goods, markets, and trade routes. To plug their vulnerabilities, they embark on quests for self-reliance, using various instruments of state power, such as aid, loans, bribes, arms sales, technology transfers, and military force, to secure their economic lifelines. The result is a “trade-security spiral” that Copeland has shown helped fuel several of history’s greatest wars. By contrast, the independence of the U.S. and Soviet economies was a stabilizing force in the original Cold War, as the historian John Lewis Gaddis has observed.

China’s economic situation today bears more resemblance to the economies of Germany, Italy, and Japan in the first half of the twentieth century: China imports most of its raw materials through chokepoints it cannot fully control, relies heavily on exports to the United States and its allies for revenue, and has good reason to worry that those countries would cut off its access to resources and markets in a crisis. Having watched the West cripple Russia’s economy with sanctions, China is reportedly redoubling its efforts to decouple from the United States. Through its so-called dual circulation policy, China is using subsidies and trade barriers to reorient its economy around its domestic market and is carving out privileged zones abroad to secure raw materials and markets lacking at home. Those moves, in turn, have alarmed the United States, which is responding with its own campaign for economic primacy. Rather than bringing the two countries together, commerce is driving them farther apart.

ENGAGEMENT OR CONTAINMENT?

Those pushing for more engagement with China argue that the United States should “test the proposition” that diplomatic overtures could kick-start a cycle of cooperation with China, as the scholar Jessica Chen Weiss proposed in Foreign Affairs last year. But that proposition has been tested many times in recent decades, and the results have been far from reassuring. The United States made concessions during that era of engagement that would be unthinkable today, including fast-tracking China’s integration into Western supply chains, transferring weapons to China’s military and advanced technology to CCP-owned firms, welcoming China’s entry into major international organizations, quietly encouraging Taiwan to consider peaceful unification, and downplaying CCP human rights abuses. Yet internal documents reveal that top Chinese leaders repeatedly interpreted such U.S. overtures as insincere or even threatening.

The examples are plentiful. Following the 1989 Tiananmen Square massacre, U.S. President George H. W. Bush sent an apologetic letter to the Chinese leader Deng Xiaoping expressing his determination to “get the relationship back on track” after the United States had imposed sanctions in response to the CCP’s brutal crackdown. Bush presumably meant resuming work as tacit allies, with the United States dropping sanctions and furnishing technology, intelligence, and economic access to China. But Deng wasn’t buying it. Instead, as the scholar (and current National Security Council official) Rush Doshi reported, Deng thought the United States had been “deeply involved” in the “counterrevolutionary rebellion” and was “waging a world war without gunsmoke” to overthrow the CCP.

Nine years later, U.S. President [Bill Clinton](https://www.foreignaffairs.com/topics/clinton-administration) visited Beijing to cement his engagement policy, which included granting China “most favored nation” trading status without the human rights standards normally required of a “nonmarket economy,” the designation the United States assigns to former and current communist countries. In a gesture of goodwill, Clinton became the first U.S. president to publicly articulate the “three no’s” regarding Taiwan: no independence, no two Chinas, and no membership for Taipei in intergovernmental organizations. A few months later, however, the Chinese leader Jiang Zemin warned the CCP foreign policy bureaucracy that Washington’s “so-called engagement policy” had the same aim as a “containment policy”: “to try with ulterior motives to change our country’s socialist system.” Jiang further asserted that “some in the United States and other Western countries will not give up their political plot to westernize and divide our country” and would “put pressure on us in an attempt to overwhelm us and put us down.” The bottom line was that “from now on and for a relatively long period of time, the United States will be our main diplomatic adversary.”

Cold wars are awful but better than hot ones.

During the following decade, the George W. Bush administration encouraged China to become a “responsible stakeholder” in the international order and launched a series of U.S.-Chinese “strategic economic dialogues.” The Obama administration expanded those dialogues to cover all major issues in the relationship and put out a joint statement respecting China’s “core interests”—all in pursuit of “strategic reassurance.” But Chinese leaders were not reassured. As the scholars Andrew Nathan and Andrew Scobell [wrote](https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/china/2012-08-16/how-china-sees-america) in 2012, after reviewing Chinese sources: “The Chinese believe the United States is a revisionist power that seeks to curtail China’s political influence and harm China’s interests.” Although Chinese leaders welcomed U.S. technology and market access, they were more struck by the threats the United States posed to their regime, including its massive military presence in their region, its efforts to negotiate a trans-Pacific trade bloc that would have excluded Beijing, the army of U.S. nongovernmental organizations meddling in China’s internal affairs, and the numerous times that senior U.S. officials declared that the purpose of engagement was to liberalize China. Bad memories, such as the 1999 U.S. bombing of China’s embassy in Yugoslavia, were much more present in the minds of CCP leaders than good ones—a common psychological phenomenon in a rivalry.

Supporters of reengagement would like to see Washington explain that it wants to include China in a positive-sum international order. But Chinese leaders understand U.S. offers of inclusion perfectly well, perhaps better than many Americans do. They saw what happened when Soviet President Mikhail Gorbachev tried to integrate the Soviet Union into the Western order. As Deng predicted, opening the window to the “fresh air” of U.S. engagement also allowed in “flies” in the form of subversive political forces. To prevent something similar from happening in China, the CCP developed an authoritarian capitalist system designed to extract the benefits of an open global order while keeping liberal political pressures at bay. For Americans, this turned out to be as good as it got: a partial Chinese integration that helped the CCP strengthen itself for a future contest over international borders and rules.

That epic struggle now seems at hand. Determined not to suffer Gorbachev’s fate, or worse, Chinese President Xi Jinping has spent his time in power building a fortress around China and himself. His national security strategy calls for the opposite of the reforms and concessions that destroyed the Soviet Communist Party but also brought the Cold War to a peaceful end. A massive military buildup, the reassertion of party control over every institution, an epic campaign to sanctions-proof the CCP: these are not the hallmarks of a regime interested in reengaging with a liberal superpower. Rather, they are the telltale signs of an aggrieved dictatorship gearing up for “worst-case and extreme scenarios and . . . major tests of high winds, choppy waters, and even dangerous storms,” as Xi now repeatedly warns his comrades.

### 1AR---Solvency---Relations

#### The plan secures political leverage without legitimizing Kim’s foreign policy.

Motin ’22 – [Dylan Motin, Ph.D. in political science from Kangwon National University and non-resident fellow at the European Centre for North Korean Studies. He was named one of the Next Generation Korea Peninsula Specialists at the National Committee on American Foreign Policy and a Young Leader of the Pacific Forum. “On Containing China: A Realist Case for American Engagement with North Korea” The Journal of East Asian Affairs (2022)] TDI

Proponents of the forever sanctions fear that U.S. openings towards North Korea “legitimize the regime.” First of all, according to this logic, the United States should break all relations with China, Russia, Iran, Saudi Arabia, Vietnam, and the like to talk only with liberal democracies. U.S. democracy promotion efforts may even worsen the fate of North Korean democrats and harden the regime. Public criticism of the regime and sanctions give ammunition to hardliners who see U.S. schemes to subvert the DPRK everywhere. 58 Democratic reformists come to be seen as foreign agents and airdropped politicians working against the national interest. Scholarship indeed shows that sanctions and threats targeting human rights-violating regimes generally have the opposite effect of strengthening them. 59 Indeed, foreign interventions tend to excite nationalism, the most powerful political ideology on the planet.

Second, the legitimize-the-regime argument implies that simply interacting with Americans somehow increases the lifespan of the regime. 61 One wonders what causal mechanism explains this miracle. If American presidents’ handshakes have such supernatural power, one ponders how the Iranian regime in 1979 or the Afghan regime in 2021 could ever collapse. The assumption that U.S. presidents and diplomats are global kingmakers is dubious at best. But, as Morgenthau noticed long ago, “superstition still holds sway over” students of international relations and the “demonological approach to foreign policy” remains an earmark of the American worldview; however, “natural catastrophes will not be prevented by burning witches; the threat of a powerful Germany to establish hegemony over Europe will not be averted by getting rid of a succession of German leaders.”

Third, even if the current regime collapses, there is no guarantee that its successor will be a liberal democracy. The end of the Kim dynasty could be followed by a military coup or extremist ideologues seizing power. If the government falls into disarray, Beijing may impose a pro-Chinese regime that will probably not defend human rights far better than the current one. Even in the optimistic hypothesis of a liberal regime taking hold in Pyongyang, the fate of the NATO-installed regime in Afghanistan makes abundantly clear that political systems living off foreign support do not fare well.

Consequently, the most sensible option is to build up relations with Pyongyang to obtain bargaining power and leverage over the regime. Once Washington has overall cooperative relations with Pyongyang, efforts to promote more humane policies will be more efficient. It would become possible to ask for gradual improvements in exchange for economic rewards. For example, the United States successfully pushed the Egyptian government to be lenient with several political prisoners by leveraging its support. 63 As a senior U.S. State Department official advised, “in some contexts, it’s not helpful to publicly bash governments doing the wrong thing there but to raise things privately.”

## Advantage CP

### 1AR---CP---Containment

#### Balancing against China fails.

Beckley ’23 – [Michael Beckley, Associate Professor of Political Science at Tufts University, a Nonresident Senior Fellow at the American Enterprise Institute, and Director of the Asia Program at the Foreign Policy Research Institute. “Delusions of Détente” Foreign Affairs, <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/united-states/china-delusions-detente-rivals>, August 22, 2023] TDI

The fact is that the U.S.-Chinese rivalry is unlikely to wind down without a significant shift in the balance of power. The United States needs to make policy choices based on this reality and not get caught up in a fantasy. This does not mean cutting off diplomacy or shutting down talks completely, but being clear eyed about what that type of engagement can realistically achieve. There are reasons to hope for a medium-term mellowing of Chinese power that might open space for a real diplomatic breakthrough. To get there, however, the United States and its allies must deter Chinese aggression in the near term and avoid concessions that disrupt favorable long-term trends.

BAD BLOOD

The United States and China have become what political scientists call “enduring rivals,” meaning countries that have singled each other out for intense security competition. Over the past few centuries, such pairs have accounted for only one percent of the world’s international relationships but more than 80 percent of its wars. Think of the repeated clashes between India and Pakistan, Greece and Turkey, China and Japan, and France and the United Kingdom.

Rivals feud not because they misunderstand each other but because they know each other all too well. They have genuine conflicts of vital and indivisible interests, usually including territorial disputes, the main cause of war. Their redlines and spheres of influence overlap. One side’s attempts to protect itself, such as by modernizing its military, inherently threaten the other. If their economies are intertwined, as is often the case, rivals wield trade as a weapon, seeking to monopolize the production of strategic goods and lord it over the other side. The United Kingdom and Germany, for example, waged a fierce commercial competition before coming to blows in [World War I](https://www.foreignaffairs.com/tags/world-war-i).

Rivals also usually espouse divergent ideologies and view the success or spread of the other side’s system of beliefs as a subversive threat to their own way of life. For instance, revolutionary France not only tried to conquer its European rivals; it also threatened to topple their monarchical regimes through the power of its example. In the lead-up to [World War II](https://www.foreignaffairs.com/tags/world-war-ii), fascist powers faced off against democracies, and during the Cold War, the United States and the Soviet Union divided much of the world into capitalist and communist blocs. What is more, rivals share a history of bad blood. Their mutual hostility is fueled by past acts of aggression and the fear of more to come. Just ask the Chinese today how they feel about Japan.

Once underway, rivalries are extremely difficult to end. According to data collected by the political scientists Michael Colaresi, Karen Rasler, and William Thompson, there have been 27 great-power rivalries since 1816. These struggles lasted for more than 50 years on average and ended in one of three ways. By my count, 19 of them—the vast majority—culminated in war, with one side beating the other into submission. Another six rivalries ended with the two sides allying against a common foe. In the early 1900s, for example, the United Kingdom set aside its differences with France, Russia, and the United States to gang up on Germany; the result was World War I. Finally, there was the Cold War. When the Soviet Union collapsed, its rivalries with the United States and China ended peacefully, although in prior decades Moscow had waged a small border war against China and multiple proxy wars with Washington in different parts of the globe. Today, many people fear a new cold war between the United States and China, but historically, that type of tense standoff has been the best possible outcome because it avoids full-scale fighting.

Confronted by this record, those advocating for greater U.S. engagement with China might respond that they do not seek the immediate end of the U.S.-Chinese rivalry but merely détente, a cooling-off period that allows the sides to put guardrails on their relationship. Yet the history of great-power détente provides little comfort. Such periods have rarely lasted long, even under favorable circumstances. The most successful case, the Concert of Europe—an alliance of monarchies founded in 1815 after the Napoleonic Wars to crush liberal revolutions—had all the ingredients for a durable détente: a common ideology, a common foe, and partnerships forged in war. But its top leaders stopped meeting after 1822, sending lower-level emissaries instead. By the 1830s, the concert was riven by a cold war between its liberal and conservative members. The concert worked well when members’ core interests aligned, but when the conservative consensus cracked, so did the concert, which erupted in a hot war over Crimea in 1853. That failure illustrates a more general point: guardrails are more often the result of peace, not effective methods to maintain it. They typically are erected in good times or immediately after crises—when they are least needed—only to be destroyed in bad times. The most elaborate guardrails in history were installed after World War I, including the Kellogg-Briand Pact outlawing war and the League of Nations, a formal collective security organization; they failed to prevent World War II.

Those calling for Washington to engage more deeply with Beijing characterize the pursuit of détente as risk free: it might fail, but it can’t hurt and is worth a try. But when conflicts of interest between rivals are severe, overeager efforts to induce détente can be destabilizing. The Anglo-German détente of 1911 to 1914 contributed to the outbreak of World War I by feeding Germany false hopes that the United Kingdom would remain neutral in a continental war. Between 1921 and 1922, the world’s largest naval powers gathered in the U.S. capital to discuss disarmament at the Washington Naval Conference. The effort eventually backfired, however, inching Asia closer to World War II as the United States signaled it would oppose Japanese expansion but would not build the naval power necessary to enforce that prohibition. The Munich Agreement of 1938, which gave Germany permission to annex part of Czechoslovakia, enabled the Nazis to invade Poland the next year. In 1972, the United States and the Soviet Union declared their commitment to “peaceful coexistence” and signed arms control and trade agreements. Détente began to unravel the next year, however, as the superpowers squared off on opposite sides of the Yom Kippur War, followed by a proxy conflict in Angola in 197 5, the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan in 1979, and several terrifying nuclear crises in the early 1980s. As so often occurs, détente had meant different things to each side. The Americans thought they had frozen the status quo; the Soviets believed they had been recognized as a superpower with all the attendant privileges, including the right to spread revolution. Once events exposed those conflicting interpretations, the U.S.-Soviet rivalry came roaring back.

The bottom line is that great-power rivalries cannot be papered over with memorandums of understanding. Diplomacy is necessary but insufficient to resolve disputes nonviolently. Sustainable settlements also require stable balances of power, which usually emerge not through happy talk but after one side realizes it can no longer compete.

HATERS GONNA HATE

Today, the U.S.-Chinese relationship has all the trappings of an enduring rivalry. For starters, the main issues under dispute are essentially win-lose affairs. Taiwan can be governed from Taipei or Beijing but not both. The East China and South China Seas can be international waters or a Chinese-controlled lake. Russia can be shunned or supported. Democracy can be promoted or squelched. The Internet can be open or state censored. For the United States, its chain of alliances in East Asia represents vital insurance and a force for stability; for China, it looks like hostile encirclement. How should climate change be handled? Where did [COVID-19](https://www.foreignaffairs.com/tags/coronavirus) come from? Ask around Beijing and Washington, and one is likely to hear irreconcilable answers.

More fundamentally, the two rivals hold divergent visions of international order. The CCP wants a world in which what it sees as ancient autocratic civilizations are free to rule their traditional spheres of influence. The United States, by contrast, wants to consign those spheres to the dustbin of history by protecting the sovereignty of weaker countries and integrating them into an open trade order. The U.S.-Chinese rivalry is more than a set of diplomatic disputes—it is also a struggle to promote different ways of life.

To make matters worse, neither side can credibly reassure the other without losing some ability to hold it accountable. Advocates of reengagement call for the United States and China to respect each other’s redlines. But achieving a sustained thaw in relations would require at least one side to abandon many of its redlines altogether. China wants the United States to end arms sales to Taiwan, slash the overall U.S. military presence in East Asia, share U.S. technology with Chinese companies, reopen the U.S. market to a flood of Chinese exports, stop promoting democracy in China’s neighborhood, and let Russia win its war in Ukraine. The United States, for its part, wants China to dial back its defense spending, refrain from aggression in the Taiwan Strait, cease its militarization of the South China Sea, rein in industrial subsidies and espionage, and withdraw its support for Russia and other autocracies.

Yet neither side could grant such concessions without empowering the other to push for more. If China backed off Taiwan militarily, for example, the island could drift toward independence; but if the United States stopped arming Taiwan, the military balance would shift radically in Beijing’s favor. If China allowed Russia to lose in Ukraine, the CCP would face a reeling nuclear power on its doorstep and a triumphant United States freed to focus on Asia; but if the United States let Russia win, a Chinese-Russian axis could be emboldened to take even more territory, such as Taiwan or the Baltic states, from a demoralized West. If China abandoned its industrial policies, it would further cede technological primacy to the United States; but Washington would not abide Chinese mercantilism without hollowing out both the U.S. economy and what was left of the open global trading order. If the CCP stopped propping up autocracies, it would risk waves of popular revolutions, such as occurred in 1989 and the early years of the twenty-first century, that could energize liberal activists at home and bring to power regimes abroad that would be more inclined to sanction China for its human rights record. If the United States stopped aiding and protecting fledgling democracies, however, some could disappear behind Beijing’s digital iron curtain.

These conflicting interests cannot be traded away by diplomats sitting around a table because they are rooted not just in each country’s political system but also in their historical memories and geographies. Contemporary Chinese political culture is ingrained by two cataclysms: the “century of humiliation” (which took place from 1839 to 1949), when the country was ripped apart by imperialist powers, and the revolutions of 1989 that toppled the Soviet Union and other communist regimes and nearly undid China’s. The CCP’s prime directive is to never let China be bullied or divided again—a goal, China’s leaders believe, that requires relentlessly amassing wealth and power, expanding territorial control, and ruling with an iron fist. As an economic late bloomer, China must use mercantilist methods to climb up global value chains long monopolized by the West. With China surrounded by 19 countries, many of them hostile or unstable, the country’s leaders believe they must carve out a broad security perimeter that includes Taiwan, chunks of India, and most of the East China and South China Seas, where 90 percent of China’s trade and most of its oil flow. Expansion is also a political imperative. The CCP justifies its autocratic rule in part by promising to recover territories lost during the century of humiliation. Demilitarizing those areas now would mean surrendering the CCP’s solemn mission to make China whole again and, consequently, diminishing its ability to use anti-foreign nationalism as a source of legitimacy.

American interests are perhaps less entrenched but remain too fixed to give up without a struggle. As a rich democracy surrounded by allies and oceans, the United States likes things the way they are. Its main foreign policy goal is to prevent overseas threats from spoiling the wealth and freedom its citizens enjoy at home. Many Americans would love to avoid foreign entanglements, but the world wars and the Cold War showed that powerful tyrannies can and should be contained—and that it is better to do so early, before an aggressive country has overrun its region, by maintaining strong alliances in peacetime. Americans may eventually forget that lesson as the generations that won World War II and the Cold War pass on. But for now, it continues to shape U.S. foreign policy, especially toward China. When American policymakers observe China trying to redraw the map of East Asia, supporting Russia’s invasion of Ukraine, or locking ethnic minorities in concentration camps, they see not just a series of policy disagreements but a multifaceted assault on the order that has undergirded U.S. security and prosperity for generations. With the stakes seemingly so high, compromise, even on a single issue, is hard for leaders on both sides to stomach.

### 1AR---CP---Arms Control

#### Only an unconditional, unilateral, conciliatory approach solves.

---at: QPQ

Aum ’24 – [Frank Aum is senior expert on North Korea at the US Institute of Peace. From 2010 to 2017, he served in the Obama administration at the US Department of Defense, primarily as the senior advisor on the Korean Peninsula in the Office of the Secretary of Defense. “Exploring Peaceful Coexistence with North Korea” United States Institute of Peace, <https://www.usip.org/publications/2024/01/exploring-peaceful-coexistence-north-korea>, January 8, 2024] TDI

The primary focus of U.S. policy, within the reality of a nuclear North Korea, should be to strive for peaceful coexistence. This means largely normal bilateral relations that consist of low military hostility and regular engagement aimed at improving diplomatic ties, reducing security risks and tensions, enhancing economic trade and welfare, and facilitating exchanges and dialogue related to humanitarian, human rights and people-to-people matters. Throughout this process, deterrence should be maintained, but diplomacy should be maximized.

Peaceful coexistence would not require the U.S.-South Korea alliance to abandon the goals of denuclearization and unification entirely. But subsuming these intractable objectives within the broader, long-term drive for peaceful coexistence and risk reduction could provide a more productive, albeit less immediate, way to skin the cat. Even the desire for a peace treaty and official normalization, goals that might provide an imprimatur of amity but in practice are subject to political realities, legal requirements and potential reversals, should be subordinate to the actual exercise of coexisting peacefully.

Initiating this process would be extremely difficult given the history and current environment of animosity and mistrust. Strong political will and unconventional risk-taking would be necessary to transform old paradigms. True unconditional talks and even unilateral conciliatory gestures would be required to overcome diplomatic inertia and propel a cycle of reciprocation. These notions may be tough to stomach but maintaining the status quo of hostile existence could be worse. A scenario like the October 7 Hamas attack on Israel and subsequent Israeli response in Gaza may be a little farfetched for the Korean Peninsula, but North Korea has demonstrated a willingness in the past, despite the presence of alliance deterrence measures and extended periods of apparent stability, to take violent action, either to generate a crisis for leverage or to push back against alliance coercion for reputational reasons. Small crises, in an environment that now includes South Korea’s preemptive strike plans and North Korea’s automatic use of nuclear weapons, have the potential to escalate inadvertently to the worst-case scenario—a nuclear conflict that inflicts unspeakable costs on both sides.

The concept of peaceful coexistence may raise suspicion for its potential inconsistencies and disingenuousness. For example, when Nikita Khrushchev argued in 1959 that the Soviet Union and the United States should coexist in peace despite their contrary systems to avoid nuclear war, George Kennan incisively responded that the Soviet Union was seeking this to maintain the status quo of the territorial gains it had already pocketed through force and violence. He also noted the contradictory nature of engaging economically with a foreign government that controls all trade and prevents interactions with the other side. And yet, throughout the Cold War, Kennan devoted himself to promoting “serious diplomacy” to reach “an honorable settlement that would reduce tension” between Moscow and Washington.

The United States may never succeed in achieving North Korea’s denuclearization in the foreseeable future. But the two sides must never fail in preventing a nuclear war. Washington’s strategies should reflect this distinction.

# Neg

## Advantage CP

### 1NC--- Arms Control

#### The United States should enter into a limited arms control agreement with the Democratic People’s Republic of Korea.

#### Solves advantage one.

Brewer & Terry ’21 – [Eric Brewer, Senior Fellow at the Center for Strategic and International Studies who has served on the National Security Council and the National Intelligence Council; Sue Mi Terry, Senior Fellow at the Center for Strategic and International Studies who has served on the National Security Council and the National Intelligence Council. “It Is Time for a Realistic Bargain With North Korea” Foreign Affairs, <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/north-korea/2021-03-25/it-time-realistic-bargain-north-korea>, March 25, 2021] TDI

North Korea’s recent missile tests serve as a reminder that U.S. President Joe Biden faces no more intractable foreign policy problem than Kim Jong Un. Biden’s predecessors have tried every approach to North Korea short of war. Over the years, a succession of U.S. presidents have gradually tightened sanctions, including through multiple UN Security Council resolutions, while keeping the door open to diplomacy. President Donald Trump amped up the threat of military action with rhetoric about “fire and fury”—then tried unsuccessfully to convince Kim to give up his nuclear weapons at three high-profile summits in 2018 and 2019.

Throughout all of this, North Korea has continued to produce nuclear weapons at a rapid rate. Estimates vary, but the country produces sufficient fissile material to make 12 new weapons per year and could now have enough for a total of 60 weapons or more. In addition to short- and medium-range missiles that can target Japan and South Korea, North Korea also produces missiles capable of reaching all of the United States. Pyongyang might not have perfected this technology, but Americans can no longer assume they are safe from a North Korean nuclear strike. And the North is working on missiles that it can launch faster, that are more difficult to detect, and that are harder for ballistic missile defenses to stop.

Launching a preventive strike on North Korea—as Trump reportedly contemplated doing in 2017—is a terrible idea. Such a strike would be unlikely to eliminate Pyongyang’s entire arsenal but would be virtually certain to spark a regional war—and potentially a nuclear one. Another round of all-or-nothing diplomacy aimed at convincing North Korea to relinquish its nuclear weapons in return for sanctions relief would come with less downside risk but is unlikely to be any more successful than Trump’s attempts in 2018 and 2019. And as North Korea reminded the Biden administration earlier this month by reportedly failing to respond to backchannel outreach, Pyongyang gets a vote on engagement, as well. Doing nothing as sanctions continue to bite—a containment strategy—may be safer than either war or diplomacy, but it still allows North Korea to expand its nuclear and missile programs.

There is another way the Biden administration could approach North Korea, however. It could explore a more limited strategy, one that stops trying to convince Kim to disarm entirely and instead seeks to slow the growth of his arsenal of weapons of mass destruction and reduce the risk of war. In other words, the United States could seek a freeze or a partial rollback of North Korea’s capabilities and a lessening of tensions, rather than the total elimination of Kim’s nuclear arsenal. The United States should not give up the long-term goal of denuclearization, but in the meantime, it could try to strike a more realistic bargain and prevent the threat from getting worse.

Washington should test whether a limited arms control approach could work. Such a strategy is not guaranteed to succeed—far from it. But its odds are better than any of the other options at this point, as long as the Biden administration is clear about what it expects to achieve. A good arms control agreement that verifiably reduces the threat from North Korea’s nuclear weapons without endangering the security of Japan or South Korea—and that does not give the North any unearned concessions—would be a considerable improvement over the current standoff, but a bad agreement could be worse than the status quo.

GIVE AND TAKE

There is a wide range of limits that the United States might seek as part of an arms control approach, everything from shutting down North Korea’s Yongbyon Nuclear Research Center to halting the country’s production of intercontinental ballistic missiles (ICBMs). The United States might also pursue measures—perhaps even unilaterally—aimed at reducing the risk of inadvertent war, such as a strategic dialogue with North Korea.

Washington should focus its initial efforts on limiting North Korean capabilities that could pose the biggest threat to U.S. security and that Pyongyang might consider giving up—likely those capabilities that it has not yet mastered. This means focusing primarily on delivery systems rather than on nuclear warheads themselves. For instance, the Biden administration could ask for limits or prohibitions on the development, testing, production, and deployment of long-range solid-fuel missiles, multiple reentry vehicles, and ICBM warheads. Mastery of these capabilities would enable North Korea to launch missiles faster and with less warning, improve its ability to successfully strike the United States, and potentially evade U.S. missile defenses. The United States could also seek to ban the development of tactical nuclear weapons that Kim might view as more “usable” and that might therefore generate greater instability during a future crisis.

Freezing all fissile material production—and thereby preventing North Korea from increasing the size of its nuclear arsenal—would also be worthwhile. Yet it is not just the size of Pyongyang’s nuclear arsenal that matters; it is also the quality. For this reason, the Biden administration should be cautious about entering into an agreement that merely slows the growth of North Korea’s nuclear arsenal—but does not stop the improvement of its warheads or delivery systems—in return for substantial concessions.

The Biden administration must not pursue an arms control deal at any cost.

In exchange for serious, verifiable limits on emerging North Korean capabilities, the United States could offer incentives such as waivers for U.S. unilateral sanctions or the removal of some UN sanctions on North Korea’s exports or oil imports. Washington should insist on a “snapback” mechanism similar to the one contained within the 2015 Iran nuclear deal in case North Korea cheats, although China and Russia may oppose doing so after the Trump administration abused that provision of the Iran deal. In addition to sanctions relief, the Biden administration could consider declaring an end to the Korean War, allowing exchanges of liaison offices (a measure that was on the table at Trump’s 2019 summit with Kim in Hanoi), and restarting inter-Korean joint projects. Ultimately, however, the North will likely value sanctions relief above anything else.

The Biden administration must not pursue an arms control deal at any cost. Kim will no doubt drive a hard bargain for any attempt to limit North Korea’s ability to quickly and reliably target the United States—which he likely views as a key component of his deterrent—if he does not reject U.S. demands outright. Any U.S. incentives would need to be commensurate with North Korea’s verifiable concessions.

What Kim offered Trump during the Hanoi summit in 2019 was a bad deal and a good reminder of how far apart the United States and North Korea may be when it comes to even smaller agreements. Pyongyang offered the permanent dismantlement of its Yongbyon Nuclear Research facility—an older complex that is likely not its only source of material for nuclear weapons—in exchange for the lifting five UN resolutions passed in 2016 and 2017 that imposed crippling sanctions on the North’s exports of iron and coal as well as its imports of petroleum. While Kim insisted that this was “partial” sanctions relief, the removal of these sanctions would have unlocked billions of dollars in revenues that Pyongyang could have then funneled back into the very programs the United States seeks to halt. Trump was right to reject this offer, and Biden should not accept such a one-sided deal, either.

### 1NC---Containment

#### The United States should

#### ---invest in asymmetric and self-defense capabilities for Japan, India, South Korea, Taiwan, and the Philippines.

#### ---Implement co-production arrangements and technology sharing with Japan, India, South Korea, Taiwan, and the Philippines.

#### ---Pre-position equipment and ammunition, and modernize logistics infrastructure to accommodate the flow of troops.

#### East Asian balancing solves containment and primacy.

Grieco & Kavanagh ’24 – Kelly Grieco is a Senior Fellow in the Reimagining U.S. Grand Strategy Program at the Stimson Center, a Nonresident Fellow with the Marine Corps University’s Brute Krulak Center for Innovation and Future Warfare, and an Adjunct Professor at Georgetown University. Jennifer Kavanagh is a Senior Fellow in the American Statecraft Program at the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace. “America Can’t Surpass China’s Power in Asia” Foreign Affairs, <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/united-states/america-cant-surpass-chinas-power-asia>, January 16, 2024] TDI

IF YOU CAN'T BEAT THEM, BALANCE THEM

The Biden administration’s limited progress should raise questions about whether the United States can or should even try to sustain primacy in Asia. Some U.S. leaders hope that as China’s military threat grows, the coalition required to defend U.S. preeminence will eventually emerge, organically sustaining the United States’ dominance indefinitely. This optimism is unwarranted. The region’s maritime geography conspires against Biden’s coalition-building aspirations—and, ultimately, its goal to maintain regional primacy.

The vast Pacific and Indian Oceans create powerful defensive barriers that encourage free-riding and complacency among geographically dispersed states. China’s regional neighbors are certainly wary of Beijing’s aggression. But countries such as Indonesia and Malaysia tend not to see Beijing as an existential threat. And the maritime nature of the Indo-Pacific theater itself undermines the credibility of U.S. deterrence. The air and naval forces most relevant to the region are highly mobile—easy to deploy and easy to withdraw. This mobility makes potential allies fear abandonment and reduces the benefits—like U.S. investments in land bases—that they can anticipate from joining a U.S.-led coalition. Many Asian states already harbor understandable skepticism about the durability of U.S. guarantees to the region, given how halfhearted some of Washington’s efforts to “pivot” to Asia have been—and given how extensive the United States’ military commitments are in Europe and the Middle East.

The United States can, however, choose a different approach—and it should. A smarter, more sustainable U.S. strategy would focus on balancing China’s power, not overmatching it. A balancing strategy would still require the United States to build a friendly coalition in Asia, but it would be a different kind of coalition. In a balancing approach, the sheer quantity of U.S. allies and partners and available access locations become less important. More important is the quality and strategic value of the United States’ coalition members and access points.

The United States should focus foremost on keeping the region’s major centers of industrial power—most notably India, Japan, and South Korea—out of Beijing’s grip by helping them develop their self-defense capabilities and better supporting their attempts to reduce their economic dependence on China. Washington must also commit more energy to safeguarding the region’s key waterways, specifically the Strait of Malacca and parts of the East China and South China Seas, enlisting the help of India, Japan, the Philippines, and Singapore. While the United States should maintain its regional treaty commitments and continue to invest in strategically important partners, countries with fewer implications for the balance of power should receive less U.S. attention. The United States need not exceed every move China makes in the Pacific Islands or in continental Southeast Asia.

MENTAL BALANCE

A balancing approach would prioritize shifting much of the United States’ defense burden to allies and partners, requiring that they assume primary responsibility for their security and putting the U.S. military in a supporting role. Washington should encourage all of its allies in the region, but especially Japan and the Philippines, to become harder to conquer by investing heavily in asymmetric and self-defense capabilities. U.S. leaders must more urgently push Taiwan, too, to quickly adopt a similar self-defense posture.

For many Asian countries, meeting the challenge of modernizing their defense will not be easy after decades of underinvestment and given personnel shortages. But Washington can do far more than it currently does to induce them to armor up. It can attach conditions to the extensive U.S. military assistance and arms deals it offers, pushing allies and partners away from buying expensive prestige items like fighter jets and toward acquiring large amounts of relatively cheap and mobile military assets such as uncrewed ships, aerial drones, naval mines, antiship missiles, and air defenses. Washington can also use incentives like co-production arrangements and technology sharing to encourage its allies to invest in their own defense industries. Most of all, Washington will need to make clear to allies and partners that U.S. involvement has limits.

Balancing is the only fiscally sustainable way to protect U.S. interests in Asia for decades to come.

Emphasizing the benefits that defense investments offer to a country’s economy as well as its security can help the United States avoid damaging vital relationships. Washington can also more consciously rely on the barrier afforded by the region’s oceans by deploying fewer forward-based forces to the Asian theater. Instead, the United States should bolster its ability to rapidly deploy reinforcements by pre-positioning more equipment and ammunition (including what the navy calls “afloat forward staging bases”), improving the air and missile defenses at its existing bases, and modernizing its logistics infrastructure to coordinate a surging flow of troops. The United States has an opportunity to let the region’s geography serve as its first line of defense, helping its allies and partners help themselves while freeing up military capacity for other regional security concerns.

### 1NC---Sanctions

#### The United States should increase its comprehensive cyber sanctions on the Democratic People’s Republic of Korea and enforce all secondary sanctions on the People’s Republic of China.

#### That forces Kim to negotiations by targeting his revenue.

Ruggiero ’24 – Anthony Ruggiero, senior fellow and senior director of the Nonproliferation and Biodefense Program at the Foundation for Defense of Democracies. “The Robust North Korea Sanctions Mirage” 38North, https://www.38north.org/2024/02/the-robust-north-korea-sanctions-mirage/, February 13, 2024] TDI \*edited for language

Washington should return to the robust North Korea sanctions campaign of 2016-2018. The majority of all sanctions placed against North Korea since 2005 occurred in this period. The impact goes beyond just numbers: During this time frame, Washington made an unprecedented qualitative change. The United States was willing to sanction Chinese banks, individuals and companies. These sanctions violators had allowed North Korea to launder more than $1 billion through the US financial system.

While Pyongyang’s nuclear weapons and ballistic missile development continued, the Kim regime changed its approach once sanctions were fully implemented. Over 20 countries ended diplomatic or commercial relationships with North Korea, severely impacting its overseas network. China started implementing sanctions, including on cross-border trade and overseas North Korean laborers, and the Wall Street Journal reported in 2018 that Pyongyang could face an economic crisis in 2019. China also prohibited its banks from opening new accounts for North Korea.

Faced with increased sanctions pressure, the Kim regime turned to negotiations and leader-level summits with former President Donald Trump in 2018.

The United States has lost that sanctions focus—and we have seen the consequences of ignoring North Korea’s weapons and diplomatic advances. The best way to change Kim’s approach is to put his strategic priorities—nuclear weapons, ballistic missiles, elites and the military—at risk. Pursuing this strategy will either lead to negotiations or reduce the DPRK’s ability to simultaneously develop its prohibited nuclear and missile programs while also aiding Putin’s war in Ukraine.

The administration can do that by targeting Kim’s revenue. The administration should start by issuing comprehensive sanctions against North Korea’s cyber activities; interdicting vessels carrying prohibited coal exports and petroleum imports; and cutting off access to commerce and financing in China. Only with new actions do we have a chance of achieving new results.

The US-China relationship is different now than the 2016-2018 period, and the Chinese government will object to this new focus, but its banks will comply because they fear losing access to the US financial system. Reports recently emerged of this dynamic on Russia sanctions where Chinese banks are reportedly scrutinizing relationships with Russia because of US sanctions. Biden should use that same focus on the North Korea problem.

If the administration does not act, Congress must conduct oversight of the administration’s policy and force it to justify its ineffective sanctions policy.

The Kim regime is building a nuclear arsenal targeting the homeland and US troops in the region. If Kim is worried about his revenue, then he will curtail his extracurricular activities. Biden should stop treating Kim like a spoiled toddler and begin protecting Americans from North Korea.

## Non-Proliferation

### 1NC---Regional Stability Turn

#### The plan jeopardizes non-proliferation and exacerbates tensions in Korea.

Kelly ’22 – [Robert Kelly is a professor of international relations in the Political Science and Diplomacy Department of Pusan National University in South Korea. "In Defense of North Korea Sanctions." Korea Observer 53, no. 2 (2022)] TDI \*\*bracketed for language

B. Strategic: Constricting North Korean Growth for Security

Sanctioning North Korea to slow its GDP growth is in the national security interest of South Korea, its democratic partners, and the wider international community. North Korea has for decades posed a direct and existential threat to South Korea. Even before Pyongyang's recent nuclearization and missilization, it has long stationed a massive conventional force, including long-range artillery and short-range rockets, flush against the South Korean border with regular threats to turn the ROK capital into a 'sea of fire.' The North's WMD programs expand its ability to strike South Korea's partners, jeopardizing their security as well. Stephen Walt (1987) argues that states balance threats rather than power, and this well fits North Korea. Despite its small economy, the DPRK threatens a wide array of states through its rhetoric and capabilities.

Sanctions ~~retard~~ [slow] the North Korean economy's ability to support its national military, including its WMD programs. Sanctions may not be able to reduce its WMD and conventional arsenals, but they do slow their growth. Sanctions help by making threats from the DPRK against democracies less worse. Were North Korea given normalized access to the world economy, it would likely embark on a weapons-buying spree with its new access and new resources from improved growth (Stanton 2021). It might also proliferate WMD elements in a less surveilled economic environment (Kim 2021b). This is obviously not in the interest of the international community.

Such sanctioning is not unusual (Hufbauer et al. 2007; Drezner, Farrell, and Newman 2021). Democracies have long used economic pressure to target threatening totalitarian and authoritarian states, including the Soviet Union, other cold war Marxist states, Russia today, and, quite possibly, China in the future. Sanctions are not intended to completely shut down an economy but, rather, to exact an economic cost for international norms violation. When necessary, democracies have simultaneously offered humanitarian assistance to soften the blow to sanctioned populations, and of course, the targeted nondemocracies could also change policy to seek sanctions relief. These aid and policy change options remain open to the DPRK. Sanctioning a state like North Korea in the interest of national security is conventional and hardly unique.

Yet sanctions opponents such as Frank often read blunting North Korean GDP growth as a negative outcome and the cause of the North's humanitarian problems. It is unclear why this is so. There are multiple options for Pyongyang to relieve its domestic humanitarian travails, including aid receipt, policy change in pursuit of sanctions relief, and less domestic military spending in favor of more welfare spending. The North Korean regime chooses not to do these things. Other states have been sanctioned without losing their ability to feed their population or falling into a humanitarian crisis. Sanctioned Russia and Iran, for example, have endured economic dislocation over the last decade, but neither face North Korean levels of human insecurity. They do not mimic North Korean choices, such as 25% of GDP spent on defense despite chronic malnutrition, an inefficient planned economy, and widespread corruption.

Finally, North Korea is quite dangerous. It is governed by a closed elite steeped in a personality cult with record of brutality. It has developed, and possibly trafficked, the world's most dangerous weapons outside of any international oversight and threatened to use them. It has a long record of destructive international behavior including drug and other trafficking, assassinations, terror-sponsorship, and so on (Stanton 2015b). It seems natural to sanction such a frightening and disruptive state.

#### Sanctions produce political pressure, maintain regional stability, and avoid the cost of military operations, which turns the case.

Yeung ’23 – Man Fung Yeung, Ph.D. candidate from the Graduate Institute of International Affairs and Strategic Studies at Tamkang University (Taiwan). “The Role of Economic Sanctions in Promoting North Korea's Denuclearization Revisited” North Korean Review 19, no. 1, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/10.2307/27217096>, Spring 2023] TDI

There are two problems that need to be addressed during the implementation of economic sanctions. First, it does not produce an immediate effect in altering North Korea’s policy. Second, the third-party effect and North Korea’s sanctions evasion tactics undermine the effectiveness of economic sanctions. Even though these issues exist in enforcing sanctions on North Korea, it is hasty to assert that economic sanctions do not work.

Although economic sanctions take time to produce a political impact, economic sanctions have a lower cost to impose pressure on North Korea. Throughout the period, the U.S. did not need to adopt an actual military means against North Korea. The enforcement of economic sanctions can simultaneously produce pressure on North Korea, maintain stability on the Korean Peninsula, and avoid unnecessary loss while conducting military operations. However, the cost of using military means would be more onerous for the U.S. and Northeast Asian countries to overcome. For instance, a war between the U.S. and North Korea would engender a profusion of refugees going to China, thereby triggering a humanitarian crisis in Northeast Asia. In the meantime, North Korea could launch an attack on South Korea or Japan; it would cause disarray in Northeast Asia.100 In other words, implementing economic sanctions can avoid these unwanted consequences.

Furthermore, the existence of a third-party effect in economic sanctions does not mean economic sanctions fail. To address this impact, the U.S. (along with the UN) should amplify sanctions enforcement. Meanwhile, it is necessary to adopt other policy instruments with economic sanctions so that it helps produce political pressure on North Korea, thereby counterbalancing the impact of third-party effects.

#### External pressure is successful, counterfactuals are worse, and ‘maxed out’ sanctions are a myth.

Kelly ’22 – [Robert Kelly is a professor of international relations in the Political Science and Diplomacy Department of Pusan National University in South Korea. "In Defense of North Korea Sanctions." Korea Observer 53, no. 2 (2022)] TDI

B. Sanctions are Somewhat Effective

Sanctions have not driven North Korea to denuclearize, and Mueller, Frank, and others are likely correct that they will not. But the complete, verifiable, and irreversible disarmament (CVID) of the DPRK, the formal goal of US policy particularly, was always an unrealistic demand. It is likely maintained because no US president wants to be the one to actually admit that North Korea is a nuclear weapons state (Kazianas 2021). A more realistic standard against which to judge sanctions' effectiveness on the North's WMD program would be a counterfactual world without sanctions.

Richard Lebow argues that counterfactuals turn on their "plausibility" (2000, 565ff): a credible, focused causal mechanism returning believable outcomes in a minimally changed alternate world. In the North Korea case then, is it plausible or credible that DPRK WMD programs would be further along if the North were unsanctioned? The North's pre-2006 behavior - before the start of UN sanctions with Resolution 1718 - strongly suggests this. North Korea used its easier access to world finance in the wake of the 1990s Agreed Framework to import weapons rather than agricultural materials, and to participate in the A. Q. Khan proliferation network. And the North's sanctions running since 2006 has continued its long-standing illicit activities to fund WMD development (Greitens 2014; Griffiths 2017; Kim 2021b; Byrne 2021), strongly suggesting that if unsanctioned Pyongyang would do this even more.

In 2015, North Korea analyst Joel Wit suggested three possible 'nuclear futures' for North Korea. His worst-case scenario suggested that Pyongyang could have one hundred nuclear warheads by 2020, while his middling one suggested fifty by 2020 (2015, 7). Yet it appears that the North had less than forty by 2020 (Davenport 2020b). There may be other causes for this lower-than-expected figure, but certainly the wide breadth of sectoral sanctions makes it very hard for the North to import the machinery, chemicals, and metals necessary to build complicated systems like warheads and missiles. The North previously participated in the Khan network; such behavior is harder now because of greater oversight (US Treasury 2020). And North Korean financial operations, such as money-laundering, to support its WMD program, are also harder as the US pursues Northern illicit money in banks around the world (Zarate 2013, ch. 9; US Treasury 2017; Ward 2018). Hence, sanctions are likely 'working,' if only by preventing the North Korean WMD program from being even worse than it currently is, an achievement overlooked because of the misplaced focus on CVID. Thomas Bierstecker and Zuzana Hudáková (2021) make a variation on this argument as well, claiming a partial success of sanctions at blunting even more WMD development.

Proponents of sanctions have also observed that sectoral sanctions are new and difficult to enforce, so more time is to needed to gauge their effectiveness. Joshua Stanton (2015a) and David Feith (2017) have pointed to the 'myth of maxed-out sanctions' on North Korea - the widespread belief in the media that North Korea is the most sanctioned country in the world (which is only recently the case). Sectoral sanctions began just five years ago, and the previous Donald Trump administration implemented its 'maximum pressure' campaign against Pyongyang only erratically at best (Stanton 2020). Further, Kim sought sanctions rollback from both Trump and Moon in his meetings with them, suggesting they are indeed painful (Stanton 2020). Heavy sanctioning of Iran and Myanmar arguably pushed them to relent (Stanton, Lee, and Klinger 2017).

Finally, implementation is a widely understood problem (Albright, Burkhard, and Fargasso 2020; Compliance and Capacity Skills International 2019). For opponents like Frank (2018, 12), this indicates the pointlessness of sanctions: if they cannot be made air-tight, then they will not work and just hurt the population. But proponents note that Russia and China and others voted for the resolutions every time and are legally obligated to them. The sanctions are international law. The response, then, is not to surrender sanctions but to build coalitions to enforce them (Stanton, Lee, and Klinger 2017). And despite Sino-Russian non-compliance, North Korean trade with the rest of the world has dropped dramatically (Koen and Beom 2020, 24ff)

One specific incident does suggest that Pyongyang will respond to serious external pressure. In 2005, the administration of then-US President George Bush barred a littleknown Macanese bank from the US financial system. North Korean monies there were frozen, and other banks hosting Northern money began to back away too. As Victor Cha notes (2012a, 265), the North panicked so much that the contemporaneous Six Party Talks became solely about the return of the North's frozen dollars. Former US Treasury official Juan Zarate (2013, x), who oversaw some of this effort writes, "a North Korean deputy negotiator at the time quietly admitted to a senior White House official, 'You finally found a way to hurt us.'" Hence Cha, Zarate, and others endorse financial anctions; North Korea is clearly vulnerable here (Cha 2012a, 465; Zarate 2013, 227ff; US Treasury, 2017; Stanton, Lee, and Klinger 2017, 74-75).

### 1NC---Negotiations

#### Kim will pocket concessions.

https://www.japantimes.co.jp/opinion/2020/12/04/commentary/world-commentary/joe-biden-north-korea-sanctions-relief/

#### Incentives require restrictions.

Terry ’24 – [Sue Mi Terry, Senior Fellow at the Center for Strategic and International Studies who has served on the National Security Council and the National Intelligence Council. “The Coming North Korean Crisis” Foreign Affairs, <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/north-korea/coming-north-korean-crisis>, May 16, 2024] TDI

ALL THINGS CONSIDERED

So far, Biden and his aides have largely ignored the Korean Peninsula—and understandably so. With wars raging in Ukraine and Gaza and tensions rising with [China](https://www.foreignaffairs.com/regions/china) and Iran, the administration has had little bandwidth to focus on Kim’s antics. But North Korea is one of only three countries, along with China and Russia, that could plausibly launch a nuclear strike against the continental United States, and it menaces two major U.S. allies, Japan and South Korea, as well. And so the administration has little choice but to focus on the peninsula.

Admittedly, Washington has few good options, particularly given that Kim is less isolated than he was even three years before. His newfound strength has prompted some Korea watchers to argue that it is time for Washington to drop its unrealistic pursuit of denuclearization and focus on risk reduction via negotiations. They urge the Biden administration to lure Pyongyang back to the negotiating table by offering to relax sanctions in return for confidence-building negotiations, such as a freeze or even a slowdown in nuclear enrichment. Such an approach could be modeled on the 1963 Nuclear Test Ban Treaty signed by U.S. President John F. Kennedy and Soviet leader Nikita Khrushchev, which banned most types of nuclear tests and slightly thawed tensions at the height of the Cold War.

There are few downsides to exploring negotiations with Pyongyang. But the reality is that North Korea has not shown much interest in talking since Trump’s 2019 summit ended early without any agreement. The North Korean leader has even less incentive to make compromises now than he did then, thanks to the assistance the regime gets from China and Russia. And even if Kim were interested in making some kind of deal with the United States, it would make sense for him to first advance North Korea’s nuclear program as far as possible to increase his bargaining leverage. Kim might also imagine that, by making trouble for Biden, he could facilitate the return of President Donald Trump, who was eager to meet with him and even claimed that the two leaders had fallen in love. Kim was disappointed by the 2019 summit with Trump in Hanoi, but he must be even more disappointed by the Biden administration, which has largely ignored his regime. For an attention-hungry tyrant, indifference is the cruelest blow of all.

Now is not the time to lift sanctions. Now is the time to double down.

This reality means that Biden has little choice but to keep strengthening U.S. deterrence against North Korea. To that end, he should double down on his efforts to protect South Korea and enhance defense cooperation between Seoul and Tokyo. He could, for example, provide more real-time data and intelligence to South Korea and collaborate on the development of missile defense systems, surveillance equipment, drones, and weapons enabled with artificial intelligence—leveraging the technological strengths of both countries. Given the increased risk of a conventional confrontation, Seoul and Washington also need to boost conventional deterrence capabilities, including by adding more air-to-surface missiles that can attack enemy radars, such as the S-400 air defense system Russia may provide to North Korea.

There are also steps that the United States can take to keep up economic pressure on North Korea, despite Beijing and Moscow’s entente. According to Joshua Stanton, the principal architect of a 2016 bill that strengthened sanctions against North Korea, the Biden administration can build a coalition of the willing to limit Pyongyang’s access to illicit finance. The Kim regime, for example, earns revenue by sending laborers abroad to work at restaurants, construction sites, and sweatshops in countries around the world. These workers smuggle cash back to North Korea in bulk, and they engage in money laundering and cybercrimes. Washington and its allies can trace and expose the supply chains behind products made with North Korean forced labor and ban them from being sold in their borders.

There are critics of stringent approaches. For example, the historian John Delury has argued that stricter sanctions enforcement will only foreclose opportunities for diplomacy and further raise tensions on the Korean Peninsula. Tougher sanctions, Delury argues, are “not only futile” but also “counterproductive and dangerous.” But this analysis is incorrect. As Stanton points out, history has shown that Pyongyang is in fact more willing to negotiate when restrictions are effective and more inclined to self-isolate, proliferate, and provoke when they are not. North Korea, he observed, returned to negotiations between 2005 and 2007, and again between 2018 and 2019, following periods of relatively strong sanctions enforcement. Pyongyang’s nuclear tests in 2006, 2009, and 2016, by contrast, coincided with periods when Washington was relatively lax. Tellingly, Kim’s principal demand during past negotiations with the United States was sanctions relief. “It was all about the sanctions,” Trump told reporters in 2019. “They wanted the sanctions lifted in their entirety, and we couldn’t do that.”

Now is not the time to lift sanctions, either. Now, in fact, is the time to double down. If Biden wants to prevent North Korea from acting out, he needs to first provide the government with new incentives to talk—and that means new restrictions Washington can use as carrots. Biden, in other words, needs to take North Korean policy off autopilot and launch a proactive effort to deter Pyongyang. Otherwise, he risks encouraging an already emboldened Kim to stage a major provocation.

#### Korea signaled they won’t negotiate and don’t care about lifting sanctions.

Corrado & Lee ’24 – [Jonathan Corrado, director of policy for The Korea Society, where he produces programming and conducts research on the U.S.-Korea alliance and the Korean Peninsula; Rachel Minyoung Lee, senior fellow with the 38 North Program at the Stimson Center. “WHY IS THE NORTH KOREA PROBLEM SO HARD TO SOLVE?” War On The Rocks, <https://warontherocks.com/2024/05/why-is-the-north-korea-problem-so-hard-to-solve/>, May 31, 2024] TDI

Long-time North Korea watchers tend to believe that North Korea may make tactical adjustments along the way, but its strategic goals remain unchanged. An offshoot of this thinking is that the North Korean leadership continues to view the United States as indispensable for regime security. That is certainly what prompted Kim Il Sung to improve relations with Washington in the 1990s and Kim Jong Il and Kim Jong Un to continue this policy. But are we confident that this remains Kim Jong Un’s priority? As explained above, the signaling from North Korea indicates otherwise. There is a real threat of failing to recognize that North Korea is changing and thus failing to recalibrate U.S. policy accordingly.

Additionally, it’s crucial to acknowledge that the offer at the core of former strategies — the lifting of sanctions or provision of economic aid packages in return for North Korea’s steps toward denuclearization — do not have the same allure for Pyongyang as they once did. For one, the strides North Korea has made in its weapons programs since the collapse of the Hanoi summit mean the terms of negotiations will not be the same as they were in 2018 or 2019. Let’s not forget that Kim has effectively drawn the line: no denuclearization. Next, North Korea’s calculus vis-á-vis the United States, China, and Russia has changed. Additionally, the growing rift between the United States and both China and Russia, combined with North Korea’s improved relations with Beijing and Moscow, have facilitated Pyongyang’s illicit economy. Notably, Russia recently vetoed a U.N. group tasked with monitoring North Korea’s sanctions evasions. The horse has truly left the barn.

The current state of the policy debate pits deterrence against engagement and assurance, ignoring the fact that all three will be needed to solve the problem. One dilemma is that it’s counter-productive to reward or incentivize bad behavior, but it’s also necessary to provide an off-ramp from this negative cycle the United States and North Korea are stuck in. The challenge is to pursue a policy that moves the ball in the right direction whether or not Pyongyang is in the mood to work on the relationship. The current debate also fails to address the reality that North Korea’s intransigence stems from regional division and global competition between rival blocs. So long as China and Russia continue to be at odds with the United States and even benefit from North Korea’s confrontation with Washington, it’s foolhardy to expect them to abandon their ally of convenience.

### 1NC---Tensions

#### The humanitarian crisis is caused by Korea’s choices, not sanctions.

Kelly ’22 – [Robert Kelly is a professor of international relations in the Political Science and Diplomacy Department of Pusan National University in South Korea. "In Defense of North Korea Sanctions." Korea Observer 53, no. 2 (2022)] TDI

A. The Humanitarian Critique and the Culpable North Korean State

The humanitarian critique of sanctions is emotionally powerful given the North's dire human insecurity, but it is empirically contestable in that it downplays the culpability of the North Korean state. There are three counter-arguments specifically:

1) North Korea's mismanagement of its economy is the primary cause of the DPRK's humanitarian troubles (Eberstadt 2004; 2007; 2013; Commission of Inquiry 2014, 195ff; UN Human Rights 2019; Zadeh-Cummings and Harris 2020, 17). In the 1970s, the North, like other planned economies, slid into stagnation from which it has never fully recovered (Eberstadt 2013, 121). These economic problems long predate the imposition of sanctions.

North Korea accepted aid from the Soviet Union and China almost from its inception yet, crucially, never used those inputs to build a resilient economy, one which could eventually survive without aid or withstand predictable external shocks such as poor weather. If aid-recipients treat aid as a permanent input rather than as a temporary windfall to be used judiciously, then any withdrawal of aid will automatically trigger a crisis. North Korea has done precisely this, using food aid as means to subsidize commercial imports rather than fund domestic resilience (Commission of Inquiry 2014, 198). This is unrelated to sanctions.

Similarly unrelated is the North's lavish military spending. Perhaps up to 25% of North Korean GDP goes into the military (Jo 2020), which is higher than any other state in the world according the World Bank (n.d.). Prioritizing guns over butter this way has stripped resources from civilian agriculture for decades, leaving millions in chronic food insecurity and dependent on foreign assistance to eat (Eberstadt 2013, 121-22, 128; Commission of Inquiry 2014, 195-97). With a DPRK GDP of just twenty bi lli on USD (Trading Economics, n.d.), the opportunity costs of such high military spending are the worsening deprivation of an already small civilian economy. UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan made this point about North's own responsibility to balance defense spending with its population's basic needs (in Commission of Inquiry 2014, 197),

These are choices the regime makes. These are distinct from sanctions and mostly predate them. The regime could make other choices, but it does not. As the Centre for Humanitarian Leadership concluded in its review of DPRK aid operations (ZadehCummings and Harris 2020, 17), "The North Korean regime's actions are, and likely will continue to be, the key driver determining humanitarian need. Without significant and comprehensive reform, which is unlikely, the DPRK's low production and import capacities are likely to continue."

The most obvious example of this state mismanagement - unaffiliated with sanctions - is the famine of the late 1990s. Its most proximate causes may have been poor weather and the withdrawal of Soviet subsidies, but the regime had also made no preparations for such predictable risks, nor made any serious policy adjustments in real-time to respond to the catastrophe. The military-first songun policy, which directed state resources to the army, was not altered. The military's manipulation of the harvest was not relaxed, nor were private gardens endorsed. External food aid with conditionality was rejected (Commission of Inquiry 2014, 195-197). As Amartya Sen argued (1981), modern famines are man-made, because they, paradoxically, take place in a world of highly productive, post-green revolution agriculture and a global glut of calories. The regime responded apathetically as one million of its people died (Natsios 2001).

Kim Jong Un - with his byungjin line of dual economic and military development - is a better economic manager than his father who oversaw the famine, but the deep perestroika necessary for North Korea to reliably feed its own people has not occurred (Lee 2021d), nor is sanctions-relieving policy change forthcoming, nor has Pyongyang redi rected i ts enormous mi li tary spendi ng (Jo 2020; Commi ssi on of Inqui ry 2014, 197). These are regime choices, unrelated to sanctions, to worsen food insecurity, and Pyongyang continues to make them (Lee 2021a). Nor is it obvious that lifting sanctions would do much for the majority of the population, as most of the new economic surplus generated would likely be captured by the state and spent on the military (Stanton 2021).

The Korea Peace Now report makes no mention of the North Korean state's culpability, but the regime's resources are obviously far greater than those of humanitarian NGOs (Zadeh-Cummings and Harris 2020, 7), so sheer budgetary fungibility places the primary blame on Pyongyang. Put more bluntly, it could spend less on the army and more on its people.

2) Sanctions are in fact designed to accommodate humanitarian concerns. There are carve-outs and exemptions for humanitarian assistance, and for NGOs and imports to support their work. At the time of this writing, the US Congress is considering an "Enhancing North Korean Humanitarian Assistance Act" (H.R. 1504/S. 690) to further streamline the waiver process, and Aaron Arnold (2021) notes that there is widespread UN support for a funding mechanism for NGO operations consonant with sanctions on DPRK WMDsupporting financial operations. Foreign governments have also routinely offered North Korea aid during its various crises, most recently covid. And international organizations committed to food security, particularly the World Food Program, provide resources.

Yet again however, the core problem is the counter-humanitarian behavior of the regime, which long pre-dates sanctions (Bennett 1999). The North routinely rejects aid offers, usually for reasons which betray its indifference to its own people and cannot reasonably be attributed to sanctions (Commission of Inquiry 2014, 200): it fears aid workers are spies (Kim 2009); it dislikes US-ROK military drills (Shim 2020); the offer is too small (Kim 2019b); punishing its own people pressures South Korea to change policy (Borowiec 2019). It rejected covid assistance as well for no stated reason (Park 2021).

Critics contend that the exemption process is complex and slow (Korea Peace Now 2019, 10ff). Perhaps, but that is marginal compared to the regime's political manipulation of food aid (Bennett 1999; Natsios 2001, Commission of Inquiry 2014, pp. 197ff). The regime knows the outside world cares more for its people than it does itself. The Kim regime instrumentalizes its population's suffering by rejecting aid in pursuit other foreign policy goals. This is unrelated to and pre-dates sanctions.

3) To blame sanctions substantially for North Korea's humanitarian problems is to contend that foreigners are more responsible for Northerners' health and well-being than their own government. This is facially absurd as a general principle in state-centric international relations. It implies that every country which cuts off subsidies, does not provide untethered aid, or imposes sanctions is morally culpable for any recipient dislocations or suffering which follow.

In the North Korean case, this logic would blame the Russians for the 1990s famine, because Moscow ended Soviet-era subsidies on which North Korea had grown dependent. Yet this argument is rarely heard, because it is understood that North Korea had decades to prepare for life without Soviet subsidization yet squandered that time and money. As early as 1985, with Mikhail Gorbachev's ascension, Pyongyang could see that the USSR was changing, yet it continued to absorb Soviet assistance as indefinite welfare rather than a contingent windfall. Sanctions have been similarly telegraphed in advance, yet, just as in the 1990s, North Korea has not changed to accommodate these pressures by, for example, directing more state resources to agriculture or responding to the military concerns which triggered the sanctions.

The Westphalian state system places the onus of domestic governance on the state. To accept as principle that foreign humanitarianism preempts the leading developmental role of the state would foment chaos. This would create a massively intrusive version of the 'responsibility to protect' concept (R2P), which is already hotly disputed. And deeply nationalist and statist North Korea would obviously not accept R2P or any humanitarian interference principle. It is simply using the sanctions-cause-starvation argument strategically, to push for sanctions relief by cynically trading on foreigners' concern for its population.

#### War is not imminent. The only scenario for escalation is upending deterrence.

Seiler ’24 – Sydney Seiler, national intelligence officer for North Korea at the National Intelligence Council from 2020 to 2023 and is one of the nation’s top experts on North Korea. Previously, he was the U.S. Forces Korea (USFK) senior analyst and senior defense intelligence expert for North Korea from 2016 to 2020, serving as the principal adviser and senior expert on Korean Peninsula security issues to the USFK commander and the U.S. Defense Intelligence Enterprise. “North Korea: Preparing for War, Mere Blustering, or Something in Between?” Center for Strategic and International Studies, <https://www.csis.org/analysis/north-korea-preparing-war-mere-blustering-or-something-between>, February 1, 2024] TDI

Of Course War Preparations Are Underway

At a certain level, the answer to that question is, of course, yes. Every country’s military prepares for war. Such preparation is crucial to that military’s success in battle as well as to its deterrence of potential adversaries in peacetime. For a militant garrison state such as North Korea, whose national identity and leadership legitimacy are inextricably tied to a perpetual struggle with outside enemies, real or concocted, there is a need for the million-man Korean People’s Army (KPA) to be portrayed by North Korea’s propaganda apparatus as training and enhancing its force capability so as to be ready for war.

On the other hand, the Korean Peninsula since 1953 has survived repeated concerns that war might be imminent, yet with no resultant war. A large reason for that has been the U.S. security commitment to South Korea, the presence of United States Forces South Korea (USFK) to support that commitment, and the role of the United Nations Command (UNC) in maintaining the armistice. Deterrence has worked. There is every reason to believe that is the case today. Yes, North Korea’s growing nuclear and missile capabilities are concerning. Yes, Pyongyang’s proclivity toward provocative language and actions, to include lethal strikes to advance both tactical and strategic political goals, warrants continued attention. And yes, the United States and South Korea should be concerned about the possibility that Kim Jong-un might conclude that using or threatening to use nuclear weapons could be a viable option down the road. But, for now, there is no reason to question what U.S. secretary of defense Lloyd Austin proclaimed in describing the U.S.-South Korea alliance as “one of the most robust, capable and interoperable alliances on earth” that has “deterred greater conflict on the Korean Peninsula for seven decades,” adding that “if necessary, we remain ready to fight tonight.”

Avoiding Nuclear Complacency? Already There

All of this is not designed to dismiss Pyongyang’s growing nuclear threat and the possibility of increasingly aggressive and coercive North Korean behavior. In fact, experts on the country’s nuclear program, particularly those within the U.S. intelligence community, have been thinking about the possibility of a nuclear war launched by North Korea for many years. Director of National Intelligence Avril Haines in June 2023 authorized the declassification of a National Intelligence Estimate—the most authoritative and comprehensive analysis published by the intelligence community—that addresses the likelihood of North Korea’s coercive or offensive use of nuclear weapons to achieve a variety of strategic objectives, including dominating South Korea and seizing the lead in determining the future of the Korean Peninsula. In this regard, recent analysis that suggests North Korea may be preparing for nuclear war is not new in a strategic warning context—this is something about which the United States has been concerned for many years, and will need to be concerned going forward.

That said, the types of indicators one would expect to see on the eve of a North Korea attack simply have not been observed. The 2024 rhetoric—particularly Kim’s proclamation that reunification with South Korea is no longer a national goal of North Korea—has been troubling, but not unprecedentedly so. Most importantly, there is nothing in recent rhetoric of high predictive value: the atmosphere is clearly conducive to provocative behavior, but it is difficult to know the what and when of Pyongyang’s intent. The element of surprise traditionally has been a crucial element of North Korea’s provocations, making it the best tool Pyongyang has to establish and maintain escalation control by complicating U.S. and South Korean in-kind, proportionate responses. What North Korea threatens—such as blowing up conservative South Korean media companies, shelling the launch site of South Korean balloon launches, or destroying a Christmas tree near the border—it does not actually follow up on. When it does decide to engage in lethal provocations, such as the 2010 sinking of the South Korean navy vessel Cheonan or the shelling of the South Korean island of Yeonpyeong-do, it does not telegraph such actions in advance.

For Now, It’s the Economy

Ascertaining Kim’s intent is difficult, but North Korea is not the “black hole” some describe it to be. For the past several years, Kim has used major Workers’ Party of Korea (WPK) meetings, particularly in the final days of the year, to present reports or speeches that summarize advances across political, ideological, economic, national defense, diplomacy, and inter-Korean relations sectors over the past year, describe the environment and challenges that North Korea faces, and lay out goals and priorities for the coming year. Such reports should be taken with a grain of salt: there is no way of verifying claims of accomplishments, prioritization of goals, or precise details of the various objectives. That said, such documents serve as guidelines or “commander’s intent” for North Koreans across all sectors of society, and are often reinforced with various rallies, study sessions, project launches, resource and personnel movements, and other efforts.

Two recent significant political meetings—the 9th Expanded Plenum of the WPK Central Committee 8th Party Congress in late December 2023 and the 19th Enlarged Meeting of the Political Bureau of the 8th Central Committee of the WPK in January 2024—provided opportunities for Kim to articulate his policies for the near term, with a focus on economic development. While Kim admitted that the road ahead would be difficult, he made an impassioned call for maximum state and party efforts to be directed toward improving economic conditions throughout the country. Reports of discharged soldiers being sent to the countryside, and the KPA doing its part to contribute to national development, reflect the fact that North Korea is not a country mobilizing for imminent war.

#### Tensions won’t escalate.

Smith ’24 – [Josh Smith, Senior Reuters Correspondent, Seoul, South Korea: Nov. 2017-present & Master of Arts in Modern War, King’s College. “North Korea signals confrontation, no signs of war preparation” Reuters, <https://www.reuters.com/world/asia-pacific/north-korea-signals-confrontation-no-signs-war-preparation-2024-01-26/>, January 28, 2024] TDI

SEOUL, Jan 26 (Reuters) - North Korea is stepping up confrontation with the United States and its allies, but officials in Washington and Seoul say they have spotted no signs Pyongyang intends to take imminent military action.

Kim Jong Un's government is likely to continue or even increase provocative steps, officials and analysts say, after it made strides in ballistic missile development, bolstered [cooperation](https://www.reuters.com/world/north-korea-threat-could-change-drastically-given-russia-cooperation-us-official-2024-01-18/) with [Russia](https://www.reuters.com/world/asia-pacific/russia-welcomes-north-korean-foreign-minister-talks-deepening-ties-2024-01-15/) and scrapped its decades-long goal of peacefully [reuniting with South Korea.](https://www.reuters.com/world/asia-pacific/threatening-shift-north-korea-moves-redefine-relations-with-south-2024-01-04/)

Analysts at a prominent think tank said in a [report, opens new tab](https://www.38north.org/2024/01/is-kim-jong-un-preparing-for-war/) this month that Kim "has made a strategic decision to go to war", just as his grandfather did in 1950, taking advantage of a U.S. distracted by wars in Ukraine and the Middle East, and doubts caused by its withdrawal from Afghanistan.

But U.S. and South Korean officials do not sense a looming war.

"While we are not seeing indications of a direct military threat at this time, we continue to monitor for the risk of (North Korea) military action against (South Korea) and Japan," a U.S. official said.

South Korean Defence Minister Shin Won-sik this month rejected as an "excessive exaggeration" claims by some U.S. experts that the likelihood of war on the Korean Peninsula was the highest since the Korean War, which ended in an armistice in 1953 - leaving the North and South still technically at war.

Such arguments play into the hands of North Korea's psychological warfare, Shin told a radio station.

That’s according to the founder of the activist group,

Japan is closely following Pyongyang's rhetoric and actions, a foreign ministry spokesperson said, declining to specify whether Tokyo believed North Korea was planning some kind of military action.

'NOT LOOKING AT WAR'

"I can rest pretty darn assured we're not looking at war," said Sydney Seiler, who retired as national intelligence officer for North Korea at the U.S. National Intelligence Council last year. "North Korea just is not ready for it. It's not postured for it."

Adding uncertainty to the outlook, Donald Trump is polling strongly against U.S. President Joe Biden ahead of a likely rematch in November's election. As president, Trump threatened to withdraw U.S. troops from South Korea and engaged in both fiery brinkmanship and unprecedented diplomacy with Kim, at one point saying ["we fell in love"](https://www.reuters.com/article/world/we-fell-in-love-trump-swoons-over-letters-from-north-koreas-kim-idUSKCN1MA03L/) after the two exchanged letters.

Trump has denied a [report, opens new tab](https://www.politico.com/news/2023/12/13/trump-north-korea-nuclear-weapons-plan-00131469) that, if elected again, he would consider a deal with Kim that would let North Korea keep its nuclear weapons while offering it financial incentives to stop making bombs.

Whoever occupies the White House next year will face a Pyongyang emboldened by its unchecked ballistic missile and nuclear weapons arsenal, and increased backing from Russia and China that has fractured a tenuous international sanctions regime against Pyongyang.

North Korea could further increase pressure on the allies around South Korean parliamentary elections in April, as well as the U.S. vote, Shin acknowledged.

"Before the U.S. presidential election, the North could try to tip the strategic environment in its favour with high-intensity provocations such as the launch of spy satellites and intercontinental ballistic missiles or a seventh nuclear test, aimed at influencing the withdrawal of hard-line North Korea policies," the defence minister told Yonhap news agency.

'MILITARY SOLUTION'?

The report stirring the war debate was by two longtime Korea watchers: U.S. former intelligence analyst Robert Carlin and nuclear scientist Siegfried Hecker. They warned of "wreckage, boundless and bare" if Washington, Seoul and Tokyo failed to heed warning signs.

"The North’s view that the global tides were running in its favour probably fed into decisions in Pyongyang about both the need and opportunity - and perhaps the timing - toward a military solution to the Korean question," they wrote in an article for the 38 North project at the Stimson Center think tank in Washington.

North Korea has fundamentally changed its strategic thinking, abandoning the goal of eventually improving ties with Washington after failed Kim-Trump summits, improving ties with China and Russia, and drastically hardening its stance toward the South, they argued.

But many other observers say the greater risk is border clashes or other small if deadly incidents.

North Korea could take an "adventurous act" such as firing artillery near a disputed maritime border, as it did this month, or sinking a South Korean warship, as it did in 2010, said a Japanese former government security adviser.

From Kim's perspective, he is responding in a "very rational and understandable" way to changes such as heightened cooperation by the U.S., South Korea and Japan to check North Korea, he said.

Seiler, the U.S. former intelligence official who now works with the Center for Strategic and International Studies, said Kim's near-term domestic priority seems to be addressing economic disparities in the provinces.

"We know that Kim is looking at economic objectives," he said. "This is not a country that is going to a war footing."

#### Kim admitted sanctions destroyed the economy.

Lee ’24 – [Chung Min Lee is a senior fellow in the Asia Program at the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace. Prior to joining Carnegie, he taught for twenty years at the Graduate School of International Studies (GSIS) in Yonsei University in Seoul. Chung Min is a council member of the International Institute for Strategic Studies (IISS). “The Hollowing Out of Kim Jong Un’s North Korea” Carnegie Endowment, <https://carnegieendowment.org/research/2024/04/the-hollowing-out-of-kim-jong-uns-north-korea?lang=en>, April 29, 2024] TDI

Kim Cannot Start a War, Reform North Korea, or Give Up Nuclear Weapons

Since the fall of 2023, Kim has been rattling his saber loudly and announced a major U-turn in North Korea’s policy toward South Korea. In January 2024, he told the rubber-stamp Supreme People’s Assembly that the North Korean constitution will be revised to rule out any possibility of peaceful unification with South Korea. As one analyst noted, “declaring the South as a permanent adversary, not as a potential partner for reconciliation, could also be aimed at improving the credibility of Kim’s escalatory nuclear doctrine, which authorizes the military to launch preemptive nuclear attacks against adversaries if the leadership is under threat.” In the same month, Kim also proclaimed that not only was South Korea a sworn enemy, but that North Korea also had absolutely no interest in reunifying with the South peacefully. Kim stated, “We can specify in our constitution the issue of completely occupying, subjugating and reclaiming the ROK and annexing it as a part of the territory of our republic in case a war breaks out on the Korean Peninsula.”

Many North Korea observers have argued that tensions are now the highest between the two Koreas in recent memory and that prospects for conflict are growing, but the reality is that Kim’s North Korea is hollowing out economically and diplomatically. Most importantly, loyalty among the North’s masses and the elites is weakening. If Kim opts for major conflict or even war, South Korean and U.S. forces will face enormous casualties. North Korea has become a bigger threat owing to its rapidly advancing nuclear weapons programs, and it has carried out more than 200 missile tests, well over triple the amount performed under his father and grandfather. But as explained above, Kim is ruling over a North Korea that is a failed state by almost all measures, save for its 1.1-million-strong armed forces and its nuclear weapons.

Even with the North Korean economy in dire straits—Kim admitted as much at a January 2024 KWP meeting, saying that the economic crisis was a “serious political issue” since the government was unable to “provide even basic necessities”—Kim’s most important political goal is to lay the groundwork for Kim Ju Ae or any of his other children to succeed him when the time comes. Tinkering with economic reforms that could unleash a torrent of social upheavals and power imbalances would be detrimental to making sure that a fourth dictator from the Kim family continues to rule over the North Korean mafia state.

So long as Kim is determined to continue to build up North Korea’s arsenal of nuclear weapons and other WMD—estimated between 40 and 60 nuclear warheads—in addition to maintaining a conventional force of more than a million across the country’s armed services, he does not have the money to pursue his original policy of the so-called byungjin noseon, or “parallel line,” of economic development and a strengthened military. According to the U.S. State Department’s 2021 “World Military Expenditures and Arms Transfers” report, in 2019 North Korea’s defense spending was around $4 billion, or 26 percent of its GDP, the highest portion out of 170 countries. Figures from Statista indicate that, North Korea is estimated to have spent 33 percent of its GDP on defense in 2022.

North Korean men serve at least ten years in the armed forces. Women are also conscripted for three to five years and are a key source of free labor for construction, factories, and farms. If Kim pares down the military, he would have to find civilian jobs for all of these demobilized forces, which would be impossible. And given the supreme need for militarizing the state, the KPA is not just a symbol of military might: it is also the conduit for ensuring that all able North Korean citizens are perpetually on a war footing.

### 1NC---NoKo War

#### No Korea war.

Roy ’24 – Denny Roy is a Senior Fellow at the East-West Center in Honolulu specialising in Asia-Pacific strategic and security issues. He holds a PhD in political science from the University of Chicago.“North Korea is not about to start a war” Lowy Institute, <https://www.lowyinstitute.org/the-interpreter/north-korea-not-about-start-war>, January 31, 2024] TDI

We don’t need to rely on Kim’s word. He would not be sending stocks of [ammunition](https://www.politico.eu/article/vladimir-putin-kim-jong-un-russia-pyongyang-beats-brussels-to-a-million-ammunition-rounds/) and [missiles](https://www.reuters.com/world/white-house-north-korea-recently-provided-russia-with-ballistic-missiles-2024-01-04/) to Russia if he planned to fight a war on the Peninsula in the immediate future.

An even stronger reason to doubt the Carlin-Hecker thesis is this: the combined forces of the United States and South Korea give them overwhelming military superiority over the DPRK at both the conventional and nuclear levels.

This year will see important elections in both the United States and South Korea. A return of Donald Trump to the White House is possible. Pyongyang might hope that a sharp jolt will force an overstretched Washington to return to negotiations ready to offer concessions, such as relief from economic sanctions, to reduce the number of global hotspots. Therefore, it might make sense for Kim to order a lethal military action as a means of gaining political leverage – but only if he was confident Seoul and Washington would understand the attack as limited and isolated.

This leads to an important observation: it is likely that much of the credibility of the Carlin-Hecker thesis rests on the widely-held but questionable assumption that Kim’s decision-making [is](https://www.koreatimes.co.kr/www/nation/2024/01/178_292458.html) “[erratic](https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2020-06-24/kim-jong-un-s-erratic-behavior-shows-north-korea-is-stuck),” and therefore need not make sense.

#### No North Korea war — both sides keep the risk of escalation low.

Sheena Chestnut Greitens 20, assistant professor of political science at the University of Missouri and a non-resident senior fellow at the Brookings Institution and the CSIS Korea Chair, will become Associate Professor at the LBJ School of Public Affairs at the University of Texas-Austin, "Why North Korea-U.S. Relations Will Remain Stable Unless Kim Really Needs Coronavirus Aid," National Interest, 5-15-2020, https://nationalinterest.org/blog/korea-watch/why-north-korea-us-relations-will-remain-stable-unless-kim-really-needs-coronavirus

U.S.-North Korea relations are likely for the rest of 2020 to follow the adage, “the more things change, the more they stay the same.”

On the U.S. side, the Trump administration appears to have shifted focus away from North Korea, except to claim success in de-escalating tensions as part of President Trump’s re-election campaign. The president has downplayed North Korea’s short range missile tests as “very standard,” and tweeted well-wishes to Kim Jong-un upon his reappearance after a long, potentially health-related absence from public view.

The administration’s apparent desire to keep U.S.-DPRK relations on the back burner seems likely to continue throughout the rest of the year. The administration has little to gain from putting North Korea into the headlines, or making its combination of maximum pressure and high-level diplomacy into a campaign issue between now and November. For instance, the latest UN Panel of Experts report concludes that North Korea continues to advance its nuclear and missile programs, and that the regime has developed robust evasion strategies to bypass the sanctions regime. These factors, plus the logistical demands of a re-election campaign, make another Trump-Kim summit in 2020 unlikely.

How North Korea approaches the U.S. for the rest of 2020, by contrast, depends on how much North Korea has to gain from renewed confrontation vs. a period of relative quiet. Complete inaction by the DPRK is unlikely: North Korea continues to test short-range missiles, having likely interpreted the administration’s comments to mean that these tests fall short of the U.S. threshold for response despite their costs to U.S. forces and allies in East Asia. Such tests allow Kim Jong-un to continue making technical improvements to North Korea’s missile program. Moreover, they also give Pyongyang a means to respond to lower-level U.S. or international actions—such as exercises—in a way that maintains consistency with domestic rhetoric but keeps the risk of military escalation relatively low.

What about testing long-range missiles or warheads? Absent compelling technical reasons to test, Pyongyang’s logic will likely be based on how it sees the strategic game heading into a second Trump or new Democratic administration in 2021. Here, it’s not clear what North Korea gains from confrontation: any crisis comes with risks, and the current international environment appears to be tolerable enough for North Korea. If that interpretation is accurate, Pyongyang’s best bet is probably to sit tight until it has more information on what the U.S.-DPRK chessboard will look like in 2021.

Unforeseen events could, of course, throw off this calculus in unanticipated ways. Perhaps North Korea’s suspected COVID-19 outbreak will heighten the need for sanctions relief so much that a provocation in search of assistance seems like Pyongyang’s best bet. Or perhaps Kim Jong-un will have another health scare, and North Korea’s uncertain line of succession will again generate risks for internal and international stability. Neither of these scenarios is farfetched—meaning that, as ever with North Korea, U.S. strategy must also prepare for the unexpected.

### 1NC---SoKo Prolif

#### Internal link is nonsense and counter-prolif sanctions solve.

Whitehouse ’24 – [David Whitehouse, PhD, freelance journalist in Paris. “US Sanctions and Rallying Around the Flag in North Korea and Cambodia” The Diplomat, <https://thediplomat.com/2024/02/us-sanctions-and-rallying-around-the-flag-in-north-korea-and-cambodia/>, February 16, 2024] TDI

Steve Hanke was an economic advisor to President Ronald Reagan in the 1980s and has worked with governments around the world in the decades since.

He is now a professor of applied economics at Johns Hopkins University in the U.S., and an influential proponent of the idea that the U.S. should not – in any circumstances – impose sanctions on foreign regimes.

In July 2020, the then U.S. Secretary of State Mike Pompeo called Hanke to discuss the imposing of sanctions on Hong Kong as its autonomy was being undermined by China. Pompeo told him that a final decision would be made by President Donald Trump the following day and that Hanke’s opinion had been requested. Pompeo argued for sanctions, while Hanke was adamantly against them. The final decision was not to go ahead with the sanctions.

Hanke opposes the use of such tools on grounds of both principle and practice. In an interview, he said that he was a strong supporter of free markets and free trade, and that he opposes “all forms of protectionism, whether they be tariffs, quotas, non-tariff barriers, or sanctions.” In practical terms, Hanke said, sanctions “rarely achieve their stated objectives. Sanctions typically generate large, costly unintended consequences. In short, they backfire.” He gave the example of European sanctions on Russia, which, he argued, have done more economic damage to the former than the latter.

The debate over the overall economic effectiveness of sanctions is complex and a huge literature exists on the subject. The discussion has been hampered by the assumption that states are the sole focus of international relations. That idea is challenged in a book by Aleksi Ylönen, “The Horn Engaging the Gulf: Economic Diplomacy and Statecraft in Regional Relations,” published by Bloomsbury this year.

Ylönen argues that current interpretations of international relations focus on powerful states as sole unitary actors, an assumption that emerged in the U.S. after World War I and continues to provide the dominant framework for analysis. Ylönen writes that in the Horn of Africa, governments often lack the capacity to monopolize the state’s foreign connections, and sub-state and non-state actors develop their own external ties, notably with the Middle East.

The result, his book shows, is that foreign relations between the two regions can’t be reduced to inter-state relations, as a complex web of non-state actors deploys pragmatic combinations of incentives and sanctions against each other.

This suggests that a debate on sanctions conducted through the exclusive prism of sovereign states is of limited use in the case of regimes that rely on non-state actors to prop them up. In Asia, Cambodia and North Korea are examples of authoritarian regimes that are committed to transmitting power on a hereditary basis, without any suggestion that this process is, or will be, open to public discussion. Both regimes are entirely willing to use violence against their populations to ensure their survival. Both make negligible contributions to global trade, and there is no reason to imagine this will change in future.

The U.S. has a range of counter-proliferation sanctions in place against North Korea, designed to prevent the further development of nuclear weapons, in addition to a set of human-rights-related sanctions, including economic sanctions and travel restrictions on Kim Jong Un. Washington has also in isolated cases imposed sanctions against figures associated with the Cambodian regime, such as Try Pheap, a former adviser to Hun Sen who built a large-scale illegal logging operation.

#### No South Korea prolif.

Dr. Bruce W. Bennett et al. 23, Adjunct International/Defense Researcher, RAND Corporation. Professor, Pardee RAND Graduate School; Dr. Kang Choi, PhD, President, Asan Institute for Policy Studies; Cortez A. Cooper III, MA, Senior International/Defense Researcher, RAND Corporation. Affiliate Faculty Member, Pardee RAND Graduate School; Dr. Bruce E. Bechtol, Jr., PhD, Professor, Political Science, Angelo State University; Dr. Myong-Hyun Go, PhD, Adjunct Senior Fellow, Energy, Economics & Security Program, Center for New American Security; Gregory S. Jones, Adjunct Defense Policy Analyst, RAND Corporation; Du-Hyeogn Cha, Visiting Research Fellow, Asan Institute for Policy Studies; Uk Yang, Research Fellow, Asan Institute for Policy Studies, "ROK Nuclear Assurance in Changing Conditions," in Options for Strengthening ROK Nuclear Assurance, Chapter 6, 10/25/2023, pg. 115-116.

The third option is for the ROK to produce its own nuclear weapons, which is the apparent preference of the ROK people, consistent with the findings of ROK public opinion polls (see, for example, Kim, Kang, and Ham, 2022). This option would provide recognition that the ROK is a major power, “increasing South Korea’s prestige in the international community” (Dalton, Friedhoff, and Kim, 2022, p. 2).9 \*\*\*FOOTNOTE BEGINS\*\*\* This poll reports that the main reasons respondents gave regarding a ROK nuclear weapon program are (1) defending the ROK from threats other than North Korea (39 percent), (2) increasing ROK international prestige (26 percent), (3) countering the North Korean threat (23 percent), and (4) fearing that the United States will not defend the ROK if it is attacked (10 percent). But this poll was done before the extensive North Korean provocations and belligerent rhetoric in 2022 and thus likely underrepresents current concerns about the North Korean threat (Dalton, Friedhoff, and Kim, 2022). \*\*\*FOOTNOTE ENDS\*\*\* The ROK might especially expect such recognition if it builds hundreds of nuclear weapons to maintain parity with the number of North Korean nuclear weapons projected in this report. The option would also give the ROK discretion in its use of nuclear weapons against North Korea and allow the ROK to pose threats against the North that are stronger than those threats that United States has been willing to pose and therefore could increase both deterrence of North Korean nuclear weapon use and ROK nuclear assurance.

However, it seems likely that many ROK government leaders and the ROK public have not appreciated how serious the potential risks and downsides are of this option (Brewer and Dalton, 2023).10 First, North Korea would strongly object and likely cause serious crises, including committing major provocations, trying to prevent having nuclear weapons in the ROK. Second, ROK progressives would likely object, as would ROK citizens living near whichever military bases would be chosen for nuclear weapon storage, knowing that their communities would become high-priority nuclear weapon targets for North Korea. The citizens against having nuclear weapons in the ROK would likely pursue demonstrations against the nuclear weapons as against THAAD, although they would likely make those demonstrations far more serious and of greater magnitude. A future ROK president could simply cancel the ROK nuclear weapon program. Third, the cost of the ROK producing its own nuclear weapons would be very high. Production would take considerable time especially because the ROK lacks uranium enrichment and plutonium reprocessing capabilities. Fourth, to produce its own nuclear weapons, the ROK would need to leave the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty. If it does so, the Nuclear Suppliers Group might refuse to provide the uranium needed for either ROK nuclear power plants or ROK nuclear weapons, potentially reducing or significantly eliminating perhaps 25 to 30 percent of ROK electrical power.11 Fifth, the ROK could also suffer international economic sanctions that could be particularly devastating because of the ROK economy’s emphasis on exports. Sixth, China would find it highly problematic that the ROK would create hundreds of nuclear weapons and might put substantial economic pressure on the ROK to not do so, including financial sanctions potentially much greater than those used against the THAAD deployment. And seventh, the United States could decide to withdraw from the ROK-U.S. military alliance. None of these potential outcomes is inevitable, but they are all quite possible. In trying to defend against the growing North Korean nuclear weapon threat, it is possible that the ROK could do serious damage to its security, economy, and reputation by pursuing this option.

#### They lack the technical capacity.

Robert Einhorn 23, Special Advisor, Nonproliferation & Arms Control, US Department of State. Senior Fellow, Foreign Policy, Strobe Talbott Center for Security, Strategy, & Technology, Arms Control & Non-Proliferation Initiative, Brookings Institute. Member, Council on Foreign Relations. Member, International Institute for Strategic Studies, "South Korea’s Nuclear Options," in Deterring a Nuclear-Armed North Korea, Chapter 1, May 2023, pg. 19.

No one doubts that South Korea has the technical capability and financial resources to produce nuclear weapons. But if it decided to go nuclear, South Korea would want a sizable, sophisticated, and publicly demonstrated nuclear capability, not a few primitive, untested bombs in the basement. That would be a major, costly, and time-consuming undertaking. South Korea has a large and worldclass civil nuclear energy program, but it doesn’t have the specialized facilities in place to produce a substantial nuclear arsenal. It has no uranium enrichment facilities or readily accessible sources of uranium. It has done plenty of research on ways to separate plutonium from spent fuel but only on a laboratory scale and would need to build a much larger facility. It would have difficulty acquiring uranium that it could irradiate to produce plutonium or identifying spent reactor fuel already in South Korea that could be reprocessed without violating contractual obligations with suppliers or that would provide the optimal grade of plutonium for weapons. It would have to develop a workable bomb design and test it, presumably more than once. Finding a technically suitable and politically acceptable test site in densely populated South Korea could be an insurmountable challenge. Achieving a secure retaliatory capability with survivable basing arrangements could take several years, and it would divert resources from other defense and national priorities.

#### Testing AND other costs.

Anna C. Arndt et al. 23, Policy Fellow, ELN; Dr. Maximilian Hoell, PhD, Senior Policy Fellow, ELN; Joel P. Ivre, Policy Fellow, APLN; Alice Saltini, Research Coordinator, ELN, "Strategic Risks in the Asia-Pacific: Examining Australian, British, Japanese, and South Korean Perspectives," Asia-Pacific Leadership Network & European Leadership Network, June 2023, pg. 23-24.

In light of these discussions, some project participants stressed that South Korea was not seriously considering developing nuclear weapons as this would undermine the country’s commitment to peaceful uses of nuclear power, including reactor exports and its expanding domestic nuclear power sector.48 Against this backdrop, one analyst suggested that the South Korean public tended to underestimate the political, diplomatic, and economic costs of developing and possessing nuclear weapons. For example, if South Korea were to withdraw from the NPT, it could lose almost a third of its total electricity production from nuclear power generation as international cooperation with the country’s nuclear energy programme, including imports of enriched uranium fuel on which South Korea’s reactors depend, would most likely be suspended.49 Additionally, a withdrawal from the NPT would lead to the perception that South Korea is in violation of its safeguards agreement with the IAEA, which would make it difficult for the international community to justify South Korean exports of nuclear technology due to proliferation concerns. The growing South Korean reactor export industry could collapse as a result. South Korea is a resource-poor, trade-dependent country that can ill afford to lose such important trade relationships. Additionally, the US-South Korea civil nuclear agreement stipulates that Seoul cannot use US-supplied nuclear materials and equipment for weapons purposes. If those terms were breached, Washington could request the return of these materials and equipment.50 Finally, the risks and benefits equation should also consider the impact of nuclear testing, which would contravene the Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty (CTBT) and could trigger public opposition.

#### International AND US sanctions.

Robert Einhorn 23, Special Advisor, Nonproliferation & Arms Control, US Department of State. Senior Fellow, Foreign Policy, Strobe Talbott Center for Security, Strategy, & Technology, Arms Control & Non-Proliferation Initiative, Brookings Institute. Member, Council on Foreign Relations. Member, International Institute for Strategic Studies, "South Korea’s Nuclear Options," in Deterring a Nuclear-Armed North Korea, Chapter 1, May 2023, pg. 21-23.

South Korea would pay a high price for going nuclear. Even if one assumes that a U.S. administration would swallow its disappointment over Seoul’s decision, opt for maintaining close ties with its strategically important ally, and work to spare it from harsh punishment as much as possible—and it’s hard to predict whether a future administration would react that way—the ROK would still pay a high price. If it so desired, the United States would be able to block Security Council sanctions, but countries opposed to South Korea’s nuclearization, especially China but perhaps also Russia and others, could be expected to adopt their own unilateral punitive measures. The U.S. administration would be able to waive a number of U.S. sanctions laws that would be triggered by South Korea’s actions, but under some laws, sanctions would be imposed automatically and could be waived only by a vote of Congress and not by the president. That would include the Glenn amendment, which would be triggered by a nuclear test and mandate a cutoff of a wide range of bilateral cooperation, including arms sales and various forms of financial assistance. (The far-reaching Glenn amendment sanctions against India and Pakistan were imposed in May 1998, relaxed incrementally, and finally removed only in September 2001.29) In addition, South Korea’s trading partners could become wary of providing the ROK with dual-use and other high technology items that they believed could contribute to its nuclear and missile programs.

South Korea’s civil nuclear energy program would be especially hard hit. Under the U.S.-ROK civil nuclear agreement, bilateral nuclear cooperation would have to cease; South Korea could not use any nuclear reactors, equipment, or materials previously supplied by the United States in its nuclear weapons program; and Washington would even have the right— albeit a hard one to enforce—to demand that such reactors, equipment, and materials be returned to the United States.30 In addition, members of the multilateral Nuclear Suppliers Group (NSG), including all the world‘s major nuclear suppliers, would be committed under their guidelines to halt all nuclear cooperation with South Korea.31 South Korea’s civil nuclear power program, which relies entirely on foreign supplies of enriched uranium to fuel its light water reactors and which produces about 27% of the country‘s electricity (with plans to reach nearly 35% by 2036),32 would come to a halt. So would South Korea‘s hopes of becoming one of the world’s leading exporters of nuclear reactors.

Acquiring an indigenous nuclear weapons capability is not the answer to South Korean security concerns. It would do little, if anything, to enhance deterrence against North Korea and could even undermine ROK security by increasing tensions and crisis instability on the Peninsula, weakening the U.S.-ROK alliance, and antagonizing neighbors, especially China. South Korea’s nuclearization would attract widespread international opprobrium and damage the global nuclear nonproliferation regime, undermining its image as a responsible and increasingly influential international player. It would require a major investment of time and financial resources, with significant opportunity costs to other national priorities, including strengthening conventional defense and deterrence capabilities. And South Korea could become the target of economic sanctions and other pressures, with especially disruptive effects on its civil nuclear program.

### 1NC---Trilateral Alliance

#### There’s no axis nor impact.

Mishra & Louis ’24 – Dr. Rahul Mishra is a senior research fellow at the German-Southeast Asian Center of Excellence for Public Policy and Good Governance, Thammasat University, Thailand, and Associate Professor at the Centre for Indo-Pacific Studies, Jawaharlal Nehru University, New Delhi. Yanitha Meena Louis is analyst at the Institute of Strategic and International Studies (ISIS) Malaysia. Meena completed an MA in European Regional Integration at Universiti Malaya and a BSc in Psychology at the University of Madras. “The China-Russia ‘Axis’ Is Overhyped” The Diplomat, <https://thediplomat.com/2024/06/the-china-russia-axis-is-overhyped/>, June 29, 2024] TDI

The recent visits of Russian President Vladimir Putin to China, North Korea, and Vietnam attracted a lot of international attention given the Russia-Ukraine conflict and Moscow’s attempt to deal with the consequences of its isolation at the hands of the West. While Putin’s visits to North Korea and Vietnam led to the strengthening of ties between Russia and its Asian partners, it was his recent visit to China that reignited strategic discourse around the “organic and formidable” China-Russia partnership against the West.

The complex and multilayered strategic dynamics of the Indo-Pacific region as well as the expansion of BRICS+ inherently prevent any aggressive outcomes from the China-Russia relationship.

China-Russia relations are often sensationalized in the popular media as an emerging “alliance system” against the West. Such narratives fail to appreciate two critical points: First, the very nature of the China-Russia partnership is not of an “alliance” but a tactical partnership – a “marriage of convenience” where China is the bigger beneficiary.

The strong trade ties between the two revisionist states are also often used as an example of their so-called “iron-clad partnership,” which, again, is misleading. China is the largest trade partner of almost all of the ASEAN (Association of Southeast Asian Nations) member states, Australia, and India, too. China is Japan’s second largest trade partner and still the fourth largest partner of the United States. Strong trade ties do not necessarily make any of these countries a reliable friend to China.

The tactical nature of the China-Russia relationship is manifested in the fact that unlike North Korea, which has allegedly promised to send its troops to the Russia-Ukraine warzone to assist Russia after the two parties signed a strategic pact, China has made no such commitments.

China, as a crucial “transactional partner” to Russia, helps further isolate Moscow from the international community. Despite President Xi Jinping’s cordial interactions with Putin during his visit, the underlying message from Beijing was that the United States should be cautious of the “strong” China-Russia partnership and the emerging multipolar world. China’s strategic engagement with Russia serves its broader geopolitical ambitions, including counterbalancing U.S. influence and promoting a multipolar global order. That said, the Chinese approach to Russia is driven by its self-interest rather than any strong alliance behavior.

Second, such an assessment tends to overlook or downplay Russia’s relations with two very important partners – India and Vietnam – whose national security concerns are partly driven by the China threat. This aspect significantly tempers Russia’s strategic engagement with China.

Despite the perception that Moscow’s ties with New Delhi and Hanoi are deteriorating due to various strategic decisions, including their fast-growing relationships with Washington, the reality is that few international relationships exhibit the enduring stability of Russia’s partnerships with Vietnam and India. Russia’s relationships with both these countries are built on a foundation of mutual respect, historical ties, and extensive cooperation in various sectors, including defense, space, and nuclear energy. A comprehensive assessment of the China-Russia relationship cannot afford to ignore these aspects.

Although India recognizes Russia as the aggressor in the Russia-Ukraine war, it does not support Moscow’s exclusion from multilateral processes in the Indo-Pacific. This stance was evident during the G-20 summit last year, where India’s leadership resulted in the G-20 New Delhi Leaders’ Declaration, which did not explicitly condemn Russia’s actions in Ukraine. (Notably, Xi Jinping did not attend the G-20 summit.) India has also been open to dialogue with Ukraine and helping find a peaceful solution to the ongoing war in Ukraine.

Diplomatically, India holds substantial influence in its relations with Russia, as demonstrated by Indian Minister of External Affairs S. Jaishankar securing a meeting with Putin despite not being his direct counterpart. This underscores the deep-rooted institutional memory and trust that underpin India-Russia relations. Despite strong ties with Russia, India has not let these dynamics affect its ties with the United States and Quad.

Likewise, even Vietnam has made it amply clear that while its ties with Russia are historical and crucial, its partnership with Moscow will not hurt its ties with Washington.

As with all wars, the conflict in Ukraine will eventually end, and Moscow will benefit from remaining active and relevant in the international system – a reality the China-Russia “alliance” cannot provide. Meanwhile, India’s deliberate “inclusion” of Russia in Indo-Pacific discussions is recognized by Russian policymakers.

India’s strategic autonomy and its balanced approach to international relations position it as a key player in maintaining regional stability. By fostering inclusive dialogues and promoting cooperative frameworks, India ensures that Russia remains an integral part of the international community, thus mitigating the potential for a polarized world order. The expansion of BRICS+, with Malaysia and Thailand aspiring to join the grouping, further democratizes the grouping and moves it further away from being just a Sino-Russian club.

Furthermore, Vietnam and India’s engagement with Russia is characterized by pragmatism and mutual benefits. Both Vietnam and India continue to procure defense equipment and energy resources from Russia, ensuring their strategic needs are met. In return, Russia values India’s support in multilateral forums and its efforts to maintain a balanced global order. This symbiotic relationship contrasts with the transactional nature of China-Russia relations, where China’s dominance often overshadows mutual interests.

In conclusion, the China-Russia “axis” is gravely overhyped, and the intricate strategic dynamics of the Indo-Pacific region and emerging dynamics of BRICS+ ensure that any aggressive outcomes from their relationship are tempered.

#### Axis unsustainable. Russia-Korea cooperation breaks Russia-China alignment.

von Essen ’24 – [Hugo von Essen, analyst at the Stockholm Centre for Eastern European Studies (SCEEUS), where he leads the SCEEUS Eastern Europe Policy Project. “The Russia-China-North Korea Trilateral Masks Hidden Differences” The National Interest, <https://nationalinterest.org/feature/russia-china-north-korea-trilateral-masks-hidden-differences-211552>, June 21, 2024] TDI

On Tuesday, June 18, Putin made his first official trip to North Korea since 2000 for talks with his fellow autocrat Kim Jong Un. The visit is Putin’s fourth foreign trip since his “re-election” in March, following visits to Beijing, Minsk, and Tashkent in May.

Russia and North Korea have seen their cooperation increase significantly during the past year. Politically, several high-level meetings have taken place, as Putin and Kim met in Vladivostok in September, North Korea’s Foreign Minister visited Moscow in January 2024, and Russia’s then-Defense Minister Shoigu went to Pyongyang in July 2023. Recently, North Korean state media called Putin the “Korean people’s best friend.”

In the military cooperation sphere, North Korea has provided Russia with a large amount of ammunition to bolster Russia’s war efforts, dwarfing the EU’s ammunition provisions to Ukraine so far. In return, Moscow has supported Pyongyang economically, technologically, and diplomatically. Interestingly, Russia has made a quick turn in its stance on North Korea, from supporting sanctions against Pyongyang as late as 2017 to blocking the renewal of North Korea sanctions monitors in March 2024.

Many have argued that Russia’s growing ties with North Korea, together with China, Iran, and potentially others, signifies an emerging axis of “evil” or “upheaval.” These countries increasingly coordinate and cooperate strategically, economically, and militarily to counter and sabotage Western sanctions, global interests, and efforts to uphold the liberal world order and democracy worldwide.

Indeed, for China, improving ties between Russia and North Korea has beneficial consequences. Both Moscow and Pyongyang are globally isolated junior partners who serve vital functions for Beijing and who must be supported. Essentially, China wants to prop up both pariah states without risking economic and diplomatic relations with the West. If North Korea can provide Russia with ammunition, and Russia can support North Korea’s economic needs, then China gets what it wants without having to bear the responsibility or blame itself for the results in the eyes of the West.

However, an improvement in Moscow-Pyongyang relations might negatively impact Chinese interests and pose challenges to Moscow-Beijing alignment and relations.

First, this might be detrimental to China’s regional goals in Northeast Asia. Moscow’s support, especially if it extends into the military-technological and nuclear realm, might embolden Pyongyang into more aggressive behavior. An unstable Korean peninsula is not in Beijing’s interests, especially if it necessitates and hastens further U.S.-Japan-South Korea military cooperation and regional strategic alignment. One trio could thus strengthen another.

This might also further complicate China’s already tricky navigation through rivalry with the United States, as it constrains Beijing’s room for maneuver in the region.

Second, if the rest of the world, including the so-called “Global South,” increasingly comes to view China as part of a toxic trio with Russia and North Korea, this might be counterproductive to Beijing’s narrational efforts to strengthen its image as a responsible international actor and suitable replacement for the United States as global hegemon. It also runs counter to China’s standard criticism of U.S. “block thinking” and “Cold War mentality.” Moreover, this authoritarian club is likely a much less appetizing operationalization of “multipolarity” for China than organizations such as BRICS and SCO.

Third, relatedly, throughout Russia’s full-scale invasion of Ukraine, China has carefully balanced between supporting Russia’s economy and war efforts on the one hand and keeping up diplomatic and economic relations with the West on the other by not providing direct lethal aid to Russia. This might be made more difficult if China is increasingly associated with two nuclear saber-rattling rogue states.

Fourth, relatedly, potential Russian nuclear-technological support for North Korea might clash with China’s red lines. China has previously signaled against Russian nuclear rhetoric (although potentially mainly to satisfy Western audiences) and has complex relations with North Korea’s nuclear ambitions, having both supported sanctions against Pyongyang while providing extensive support to circumvent them. It is, therefore, unclear how China would react to clear evidence of Russian technological support for North Korea’s nuclear arms program.

Fifth, a discrepancy between Russia’s and China’s interests is that both want the other to serve as a distraction for the West, particularly the United States, in their respective theatres of geopolitical conflict, allowing them more freedom of maneuver in their own. Thus, if Russia’s ties with North Korea draw more Western and U.S. attention and resources to China’s proximity, this is good for Russia but bad for China.

Thus, taking all these aspects into consideration, Russia’s actions in building relations with North Korea, partly in misalignment with China’s interests and wishes, demonstrate that Moscow and Pyongyang increasingly are playing similar roles for China—useful but unstable and toxic anti-Western strategic partners that Beijing struggles to control but is forced to support.

#### The partnership is weak.

Chang ’23 – Gordon Chang, American journalist and writer, BA and JD from Cornell University. “China, Russia and North Korea: A fearsome but weak axis” The Hill, <https://thehill.com/opinion/national-security/4212055-china-russia-and-north-korea-a-fearsome-but-weak-axis/>, September 20, 2023] TDI

In these circumstances, Kim and Putin are openly showing disrespect for America. They met at a space launch site as an in-your-face gesture. United Nations Security Council Resolution 1718, adopted in 2006, essentially prohibits North Korea from launching objects into space because such launches employ ballistic missile technology, which the nation is not permitted to have or use.

Yet for all the expressions of friendship and solidarity, there are obstacles to a North Korea-Russia partnership. Kim Jong Un, along with his father and grandfather, long played Beijing and Moscow off against the other, and relationships have always been cold and transactional.

Moreover, although Russia, North Korea and China can form a fearsome-looking coalition, the nature of their regimes makes the formation of durable, long-term relationships impossible. One of them — North Korea — is totalitarian, another is fast moving back to totalitarianism — China — and authoritarian Russia has always been suspicious of others. Totalitarian and suspicious societies rarely get along with other states for long, at least on an equal basis.

To make matters worse, Chinese leaders are pushing the notion that they have the right to rule tianxia — “all under heaven” — which, by definition, makes cooperation with the others only short-term. The “contradictions,” as China’s communists say, are irreconcilable.

During a conversation with David Maxwell of the Foundation for Defense of Democracies, he called the trio a “threesome of convenience” and said it was weak “because their relationship is not built on trust and each serves its own interests only.”

Free societies, on the other hand, are better able to form strong alliances. Maxwell, a U.S. Army Special Forces veteran who served five tours of duty in South Korea, compares the Russia-China-North Korea combination to the grouping now called JAROKUS, composed of Japan, the Republic of Korea and the United States.

JAROKUS, he points out, “is built on a foundation of trust, with strong people-to-people relationships, mutual interests and the shared values of freedom, free-market principles, rule of law and human rights.”

There has been more than a century of historical animosity dividing Japan and Korea, however. Japan and the United States are treaty allies and South Korea and the U.S. are treaty allies, but Japan and South Korea are not allies and have often treated the other as an adversary. It has been a longstanding U.S. policy to get Tokyo and Seoul to work closely with each other.

Former President Moon Jae-in often stoked hatred of Japan, but his successor, current President Yoon Suk Yeol, has worked hard to bridge the divide. Yoon has suffered politically for his efforts to normalize relations with Tokyo, but eventually, the South Korean public will see things as Yoon does, in large part because China and North Korea are threatening South Korea.

### 1NC---LIO

#### The LIO is structurally constrained and conceptually meaningless.

Staniland ’18 [Paul; July 29; Associate Professor of Political Science and Chair of the Committee on International Relations at the University of Chicago; Lawfare, “Misreading the ‘Liberal Order:’ Why We Need New Thinking in American Foreign Policy,” <https://www.lawfareblog.com/misreading-liberal-order-why-we-need-new-thinking-american-foreign-policy>]

Pushing back against Trump’s foreign policy is an important goal. But moving forward requires a more serious analysis than claiming that the “liberal international order” was the centerpiece of past U.S. foreign-policy successes, and thus should be again. Both claims are flawed. We need to understand the limits of the liberal international order, where it previously failed to deliver benefits, and why it offers little guidance for many contemporary questions.

First, advocates of the order tend to skim past the policies pursued under the liberal order that have not worked. These mistakes need to be directly confronted to do better in the future.

Proponents of the order, however, often present a narrow and highly selective reading of history that ignores much of the coercion, violence, and instability that accompanied post-war history. Problematic outcomes are treated as either aberrant exceptions or as not truly characterizing the order. One recent defense of the liberal order by prominent liberal institutionalists Daniel Deudney and G. John Ikenberry, for instance, does not mention Iraq, Afghanistan, Vietnam, or Libya. Professors Stephen Chaudoin, Helen Milner, and Dustin Tingley herald the order’s “support for freedom, democracy, human rights, a free press.” Kori Schake writes that Western democracies’ wars are “about enlarging the perimeter of security and prosperity, expanding and consolidating the liberal order.” Historian Hal Brands argues that the order has advocated “political liberalism in the form of representative government and human rights; and other liberal concepts, such as nonaggression, self-determination, and the peaceful settlement of disputes.”

Other analysts have persuasively argued that these accounts create an “imagined” picture of post-World War II history. Patrick Porter outlines in detail how coercive, violent, and hypocritical U.S. foreign policy has often been. To the extent an international liberal order ever actually existed beyond a small cluster of countries, writes Nick Danforth, it was recent and short-lived. Thomas Meaney and Stephen Wertheim further argue that “critics exaggerate Mr. Trump’s abnormality,” situating him within a long history of the pursuit of American self-interest. Graham Allison—no bomb-throwing radical—has recently written that the order was a “myth” and that credit for the lack of great power war should instead go to nuclear deterrence. Coercion and disregard for both allies and political liberalism have been entirely compatible with the “liberal” order.

The last two decades have been a bumpy ride for U.S. foreign policy. Since 9/11, we have seen the disintegration of Syria, Yemen, and Libya, a war without end in Afghanistan, the collapse of the Arab Spring, the rise and resurgence of the Islamic State, and the distinctly mixed success of strategies aimed at managing China’s rise. At home, the growth of a national-security state has placed remarkable power in the hands of Donald Trump. Simply returning to the old order is no guarantee of good results. Grappling openly with failure and self-inflicted wounds—while also acknowledging clear benefits of the order—is essential for moving beyond self-congratulatory platitudes.

Second, the liberal order in its idealized form had very limited reach into what are now pivotal areas of U.S. security policy: Asia, the Middle East, and the “developing world” more broadly. The core of the liberal order remains transatlantic, but Asia is now growing dramatically in wealth and military power. What is the record of the order in the region? There was certainly some democracy promotion when authoritarian regimes began to totter, but there was also deep, sustained cooperation with dictators like Suharto and Ferdinand Marcos; while there are some regional institutions (such as ASEAN), they are comparatively weak; while there are some rules, they have been deeply contested. Close U.S. allies like Japan, Taiwan, and South Korea (the latter two experiencing long bouts of U.S.-allied autocracy) were not integrated into a broad alliance pact like NATO. India and Pakistan were never part of the core order, and China was only very partially integrated (primarily into the economic pillar of the order, and through ad hoc security cooperation from the 1970s). Southeast Asia has been a site of warfare and authoritarianism for much of its post-1945 history.

The United States has long considered the Middle East vital to its security, but the extent to which the United States should invest its own blood and treasure in protecting the area was always up for debate. It was only in the 1970s that the United States decided it was prepared to use force to defend the region; “dual containment” in the 1990s was always controversial, while the invasion of Iraq and its chaotic aftermath revealed deep fissures over how much presence was enough. Meanwhile, liberalism, democracy, human rights, and international institutions have not made much of a mark in the region. Jake Sullivan, in a rather odd defense of the order, suggests that “Middle Eastern instability has been a feature, not a bug, of the system.” This is not reassuring about the order’s ability to structure politics in the area. The same can be said about the order’s history in Africa, with deep Western involvement in civil wars, support for authoritarian regimes, and often-counterproductive demands for economic liberalization contributing to ongoing instability.

The legacy of the “liberal order” is both far more complex and shallower outside of the north Atlantic core than within it. Invocations of the order are seen with greater cynicism and suspicion in these areas than in Washington or Berlin. Yet they are precisely the regions that are increasingly the focus of U.S. security policy.

Finally, and as the preceding already suggests, the idea of “liberal order” is itself frequently too vague a concept, and was too incomplete a phenomenon, to offer guidance on a number of key contemporary questions. Allison goes so far as to call it “conceptual Jell-o.” The extremely abstract principles that experts use to define the order are confronted with a reality of extreme historical variation. This amorphousness undermines its usefulness as an actual guide to future foreign policy.

U.S. alliances in Western Europe since World War II looked dramatically different than those in East Asia. Both have achieved their basic goals, so which should be the model for the future? The United States often applied pressure to coerce its allies into adopting economic and security policies conducive to U.S. interests—going so far as to threaten abandonment of close European allies—even as it simultaneously built key elements of the liberal order. The core of the liberal order was a more tenuous and contested political space than we often remember.

This inconsistency applies to involvement in the domestic politics of other states. The United States has regularly embraced authoritarian leaders (and distanced itself from democratic regimes), while at other times it has helped to push these leaders out in the face of domestic mobilization. Advocates of the order tend to stress the latter and dismiss the former as aberrant, but both strategies contributed to the ultimate victory of the liberal order over the Soviet bloc.

The order’s history offers support for aggressively promoting democracy, accepting democratization when it emerges, and strongly supporting friendly dictators. This makes it unhelpful for grappling with the question of whether and how to promote democracy. The same is true of military interventions and covert operations abroad. U.S. leaders invested heavily in Cold War proxy wars and the overthrow of foreign regimes, while at other times and places they avoided such interventions.

This history carries important implications for addressing today’s policy challenges. Simply appealing to the order does not, for instance, tell us much about how to deal with a rising China: Since the liberal order included highly institutionalized alliances, loose “hub-and-spoke” arrangements, and coalitions of the willing, and was characterized by both preventive wars and containment, it is extremely unclear what the order suggests for America’s China strategy. While “rules-based” order is a term in vogue, it doesn’t tell us what the rules should actually be, or how they should be decided.

Nor does appealing to the liberal order help us understand whether the United States needs to be deeply involved or largely absent from the Middle East, or somewhere in between. Under the order, democracy promotion and assertive liberal intervention sometimes occurred, but so too did restraint and an acceptance of autocracy. There are no answers in the liberal international order for navigating the enormously difficult terrain of the contemporary Middle East.

## Engagement

### 1NC---Containment Turn

#### Containment causes interstate war in Asia and turns non-proliferation.

Larison ‘23 – [Daniel Larison, Ph.D. in History from the University of Chicago.“When The US Follows Its Better Angels In The Asia-Pacific” Responsible Statecraft, <https://responsiblestatecraft.org/2023/01/17/when-the-us-follows-its-better-angels-in-the-asia-pacific/>, January 17, 2023]

The Asia-Pacific has remained at peace for over forty years thanks to a combination of several factors that have discouraged interstate conflict and deepened economic interdependence.

While it is popular in Washington to attribute much or all of this to the stabilizing role of the United States, its alliances, and its forward-deployed military presence, that is not the whole story of why the peace has endured and it overlooks how the U.S. has sometimes been a bystander or a destabilizing force in Asian affairs.

This is the paradox that Van Jackson identifies in his new book, [Pacific Power Paradox: American Statecraft and the Fate of the Asian Peace](https://www.amazon.com/Pacific-Power-Paradox-American-Statecraft/dp/0300257287/ref%3Dsr_1_1?keywords=pacific+power+paradox&qid=1673623898&sprefix=pacific+power%2Caps%2C107&sr=8-1). Itis an incisive and engaging account of how the U.S. has acted both to promote and undermine Asian peace and security since 1979. Policymakers in the United States would do well to read and learn from it to avoid taking the U.S. down the path of destructive rivalry and militarism that it is currently on.

Jackson sees the U.S. as having occupied three distinct roles in the Asia Pacific: the “aloof hegemon” that has stood at the margins and did not involve itself in regional institutions, the “vital bulwark” that has provided security and deterrence through its alliance commitments, and the “imperious superpower” that has acted according to its own designs without regard for the consequences that its actions might have on the peace.

The U.S. needs to understand the full record of how it has acted in Asia if it is to make smart policy choices in the coming years, and it needs to recognize that the Asian peace is fragile and has grown much weaker as one of the main supports of that peace — U.S.-Chinese détente — has been replaced by an increasingly contentious rivalry.

The book proceeds chronologically through each administration from the start of the peace in 1979, and it identifies how the U.S. contributed and detracted from the peace under each president. Jackson takes us from the early tentative days of U.S.-Chinese détente under Carter and traces how the two governments deepened their cooperation and expanded economic ties under every administration until Trump.

He explains how the Asian peace was built up and consolidated as a result of multiple reinforcing factors that have made the peace as resilient and long-lasting as it has been.

Jackson identifies six distinct factors undergirding the peace: U.S. forward military presence, U.S. alliances, great-power détente, economic interdependence, regionalism, and democracy and good governance. This is what he calls a “layered peace” with many sources. All of these have been important, but he argues that it was détente between Washington and Beijing that “underwrote or made a constructive contribution to nearly all the factors for the Asian peace.”

The danger for the U.S. and Asia today is that some of these factors are at risk of being ignored or rejected, and that in turn puts the peace in greater jeopardy than it has been before.

Most Americans don’t appreciate how close the U.S. and North Korea were to war in 2017, but this was one of the most dangerous moments in the last forty years and the closest that the world has come to nuclear war since the depths of the Cold War. Jackson has previously documented how dangerous the 2017 nuclear crisis was in his earlier book, [On the Brink](https://www.amazon.com/Brink-Trump-Kim-Threat-Nuclear/dp/1108473482/ref%3Dtmm_hrd_swatch_0?_encoding=UTF8&qid=&sr=), and he weaves parts of that story into the account of the Trump administration’s role in threatening the peace, through both a maximum pressure campaign of sanctions as well as threatening preventative war.

If U.S. policymakers don’t understand how close the U.S. came to a major war in that case, it will be much harder for them to avoid future crises and to devise a more successful North Korea policy. While [Trump’s erratic and aggressive behavior](https://www.nbcnews.com/politics/white-house/trump-un-north-korean-leader-suicide-mission-n802596)was a major factor in making that crisis as dangerous as it was, this was not just a Trump problem but a persistent problem with U.S. policy towards North Korea.

Trump justifiably gets the worst marks in Jackson’s assessment of U.S. policies over the last forty years, but he makes an important point that Trump also represented a great deal of continuity with earlier administrations. Jackson wants us to remember that “the United States has often been the imperious superpower whose actions made war more likely rather than less.”

As he notes in the preface, “the Trump era was an amplification of habits that had always been in U.S. statecraft but simply not in our narrative about it.” As in many other things, Trump’s bad conduct revealed ugly truths about how the U.S. has operated in the world long before he came to office.

Washington’s new hawkish consensus has concluded that the U.S. was wrong to pursue engagement with China as much and for as long as it did, but détente and engagement have been very important in stabilizing the region and allowing Asian countries to flourish economically. Without U.S.-China détente, the modern history of East and Southeast Asia would have likely been more fraught and violent than it was.

As Jackson says, “U.S. détente with China—the flawed but long-lasting cooperative relationship between Asia’s two largest powers—has been a vastly underappreciated source of regional stability since the 1970s.”

Replacing that détente with rivalry will have serious consequences for peace in Asia. He warns that “rivalry has its own price, and the loss of such a foundational source of the Asian peace requires compensation if stability is to persist.” What troubles is that the U.S. has so quickly “embraced a paradigm of rivalry with China without recognizing the tremendous work that Sino-U.S. détente had been doing to keep Asia stable.” Détente has been one of the pillars holding up the structure of the peace, and now that it has been knocked out without any replacement the entire structure is at risk of crumbling.

#### Military force is unnecessary and emboldens China and Russia.

John Mueller ‘21, Adjunct Professor of Political Science and Senior Research Scientist at the Mershon Center for International Security Studies, "The Rise of China, the Assertiveness of Russia, and the Antics of Iran," in The Stupidity of War: American Foreign Policy and the Case for Complacency, Chapter 6, 02/17/2021, pg. 163-167.

Complacency, Appeasement, Self-destruction, and the New Cold War

It could be argued that the policies proposed here to deal with the international problems, whether real or imagined, presented by China, Russia, and Iran constitute exercises not only in complacency, but also in appeasement. That argument would be correct. As discussed in the Prologue to this book, appeasement can work to avoid military conflict as can be seen in the case of the Cuban missile crisis of 1962. As also discussed there, appeasement has been given a bad name by the experience with Hitler in 1938.

Hitlers are very rare, but there are some resonances today in Russia’s Vladimir Putin and China’s Xi Jinping. Both are shrewd, determined, authoritarian, and seem to be quite intelligent, and both are fully in charge, are surrounded by sychophants, and appear to have essentially unlimited tenure in office. Moreover, both, like Hitler in the 1930s, are appreciated domestically for maintaining a stable political and economic environment. However, unlike Hitler, both run trading states and need a stable and essentially congenial international environment to flourish.128 Most importantly, except for China’s claim to Taiwan, neither seems to harbor Hitler-like dreams of extensive expansion by military means. Both are leading their countries in an illiberal direction which will hamper economic growth while maintaining a kleptocratic system. But this may be acceptable to populations enjoying historically high living standards and fearful of less stable alternatives. Both do seem to want to overcome what they view as past humiliations – ones going back to the opium war of 1839 in the case of China and to the collapse of the Soviet empire and then of the Soviet Union in 1989–91 in the case of Russia. Primarily, both seem to want to be treated with respect and deference. Unlike Hitler’s Germany, however, both seem to be entirely appeasable. That scarcely seems to present or represent a threat. The United States, after all, continually declares itself to be the indispensable nation. If the United States is allowed to wallow in such self-important, childish, essentially meaningless, and decidedly fatuous proclamations, why should other nations be denied the opportunity to emit similar inconsequential rattlings? If that constitutes appeasement, so be it. If the two countries want to be able to say they now preside over a “sphere of influence,” it scarcely seems worth risking world war to somehow keep them from doing so – and if the United States were substantially disarmed, it would not have the capacity to even try.

If China and Russia get off on self-absorbed pretensions about being big players, that should be of little concern – and their success rate is unlikely to be any better than that of the United States. Charap and Colton observe that “The Kremlin’s idee fixe that Russia needs to be the leader of a pack of post-Soviet states in order to be taken seriously as a global power broker is more of a feel-good mantra than a fact-based strategy, and it irks even the closest of allies.” And they further suggest that

The towel should also be thrown in on the geo-ideational shadow-boxing over the Russian assertion of a sphere of influence in post-Soviet Eurasia and the Western opposition to it. Would either side be able to specify what precisely they mean by a regional sphere of influence? How would it differ from, say, US relations with the western-hemisphere states or from Germany’s with its EU neighbors?129

Applying the Gingrich gospel, then, it certainly seems that, although China, Russia, and Iran may present some “challenges” to US policy, there is little or nothing to suggest a need to maintain a large US military force-in-being to keep these countries in line. Indeed, all three monsters seem to be in some stage of self-destruction or descent into stagnation – not, perhaps, unlike the Communist “threat” during the Cold War. Complacency thus seems to be a viable policy.

However, it may be useful to look specifically at a couple of worst-case scenarios: an invasion of Taiwan by China (after it builds up its navy more) and an invasion of the Baltic states of Estonia, Lithuania, and Latvia by Russia. It is wildly unlikely that China or Russia would carry out such economically self-destructive acts: the economic lessons from Putin’s comparatively minor Ukraine gambit are clear, and these are unlikely to be lost on the Chinese. Moreover, the analyses of Michael Beckley certainly suggest that Taiwan has the conventional military capacity to concentrate the mind of, if not necessarily fully to deter, any Chinese attackers. It has “spent decades preparing for this exact contingency,” has an advanced early warning system, can call into action massed forces to defend “fortified positions on home soil with precision-guided munitions,” and has supply dumps, booby traps, an wide array of mobile missile launchers, artillery, and minelayers. In addition, there are only 14 locations that can support amphibious landing and these are, not surprisingly, well-fortified by the defenders.130

The United States may not necessarily be able to deter or stop military attacks on Taiwan or on the Baltics under its current force levels.131 And if it cannot credibly do so with military forces currently in being, it would not be able to do so, obviously, if its forces were much reduced. However, the most likely response in either eventuality would be for the United States to wage a campaign of economic and military (including naval) harassment and to support local – or partisan – resistance as it did in Afghanistan after the Soviet invasion there in 1979. 132 Such a response does not require the United States to have, and perpetually to maintain, huge forces in place and at the ready to deal with such improbable eventualities.

The current wariness about, and hostility toward, Russia and China is sometimes said to constitute “a new Cold War.”133 There are, of course, considerable differences. In particular, during the Cold War, the Soviet Union – indeed the whole international Communist movement – was under the sway of a Marxist theory that explicitly and determinedly advocated the destruction of capitalism and probably of democracy, and by violence to the degree required. Neither Russia nor China today sports such cosmic goals or is enamored of such destructive methods. However, as discussed in Chapters 1 and 2, the United States was strongly inclined during the Cold War massively to inflate the threat that it imagined the Communist adversary to present. The current “new Cold War” is thus in an important respect quite a bit like the old one: it is an expensive, substantially militarized, and often hysterical campaign to deal with threats that do not exist or are likely to selfdestruct.134

It may also be useful to evaluate terms that are often bandied about in considerations within foreign policy circles about the rise of China, the assertiveness of Russia, and the antics of Iran. High among these is “hegemony.” Sorting through various definitions, Simon Reich and Richard Ned Lebow array several that seem to capture the essence of the concept: domination, controlling leadership, or the ability to shape international rules according to the hegemon’s own interests. Hegemony, then, is an extreme word suggesting supremacy, mastery, preponderant influence, and full control. Hegemons force others to bend to their will whether they like it or not. Reich and Lebow also include a mellower designation applied by John Ikenberry and Charles Kupchan in which a hegemon is defined as an entity that has the ability to establish a set of norms that others willingly embrace.135 But this really seems to constitute an extreme watering-down of the word and suggests opinion leadership or entrepreneurship and success at persuasion, not hegemony.

Moreover, insofar as they carry meaning, the militarized application of American primacy and hegemony to order the world has often been a fiasco.136 Indeed, it is impressive that the hegemon, endowed by definition by what Reich and Lebow aptly call a grossly disproportionate military capacity, has had such a miserable record of military achievement since 1945 – an issue discussed frequently in this book.137 Reich and Lebow argue that it is incumbent on IR scholars to cut themselves loose from the concept of hegemony.138 It seems even more important for the foreign policy establishment to do so.

There is also absurdity in getting up tight over something as vacuous as the venerable “sphere of influence” concept (or conceit). The notion that world affairs are a process in which countries scamper around the world seeking to establish spheres of influence is at best decidedly unhelpful and at worst utterly misguided. But the concept continues to be embraced in some quarters as if it had some palpable meaning. For example, in early 2017, the august National Intelligence Council opined that “Geopolitical competition is on the rise as China and Russia seek to exert more sway over their neighboring regions and promote an order in which US influence does not dominate.”139 Setting aside the issue of the degree to which American “influence” could be said to “dominate” anywhere (we still wait, for example, for dominated Mexico supinely to pay for a wall to seal off its self-infatuated neighbor’s southern border), it doesn’t bloody well matter whether China or Russia has, or seems to have, a “sphere of influence” someplace or other.

More importantly, the whole notion is vapid and essentially meaningless. Except perhaps in Gilbert and Sullivan’s Iolanthe. When members of the House of Lords fail to pay sufficient respect to a group of women they take to be members of a ladies’ seminary who are actually fairies, their queen, outraged at the Lords’ collected effrontery, steps forward, proclaims that she happens to be an “influential fairy,” and then, with a few passes of her wand, brushes past the Lords’ pleas (“no!” “mercy!” “spare us!” and “horror!”), and summarily issues several edicts: a young man of her acquaintance shall be inducted into their House, every bill that gratifies his pleasure shall be passed, members shall be required to sit through the grouse and salmon season, and high office shall be obtainable by competitive examination. Now, that’s influence. In contrast, on December 21, 2017, when the United States sought to alter the status of Jerusalem, the United Nations General Assembly voted to repudiate the US stand in a nearly unanimous vote that included many US allies. Now, that’s not influence.

In fact, to push this point perhaps to an extreme, if we are entering an era in which economic motivations became paramount and in which military force is not deemed a sensible method for pursuing wealth, the idea of “influence” would become obsolete because, in principle, pure economic actors do not care much about influence. They care about getting rich. (As Japan and Germany have found, however, influence, status, and prestige tend to accompany the accumulation of wealth, but this is just an ancillary effect.) Suppose the president of a company could choose between two stories to tell the stockholders. One message would be, “We enjoy great influence in the industry. When we talk everybody listens. Our profits are nil.” The other would be, “No one in the industry pays the slightest attention to us or ever asks our advice. We are, in fact, the butt of jokes in the trade. We are making money hand over fist.” There is no doubt about which story would most thoroughly warm the stockholders’ hearts.

### 1NC---Diversionary War Turn

#### Kim hates “normal” security environments AND economic integration.

Pak ’20 – [Jung H. Pak is SK-Korea Foundation Chair in Korea Studies at the Brookings Institution. "What Kim Wants: The Hopes and Fears of North Korea's Dictator." Foreign Aff. 99 (2020)] TDI

Nevertheless, although Kim is just as rational as other leaders and shares their desire to be seen as a player on the world stage, his incentive structure and threat perceptions do not necessarily resemble theirs. In the minds of well-meaning peace activists and academics encouraged by Kim’s turn to diplomacy, North Korea has always wanted a security guarantee from the United States, and its development of nuclear weapons is a reaction to the perceived threat that Washington poses to Pyongyang. Some scholars also insist that Kim wants to be a great economic reformer; according to the historian John Delury, Kim wants “North Korea to become a normal East Asian economy ” and seeks to “ catch up with and integrate into the region.

In this view, what North Korea really wants is peace and prosperity. In reality, the regime requires a hostile outside world to justify its diversion of scarce resources into military programs, to be able to cast blame on others for the problems in the country’s economy, and to maintain the foundational myth that the Kim family is the sole protector of North Korea’s existence.

Kim does not want a “normal” security environment; he wants to preserve his garrison state. He trusts only himself to safeguard North Korea’s security and his own survival: after all, even allies such as China and Russia chose to normalize relations with South Korea and have signed on to UN sanctions against North Korea. He puts little faith in the democratic governments of his rivals.

Kim doesn’t trust his own people, either, and fears the influx of information from outside his propaganda machine that would accompany regional economic integration. That is why he has tightened borders and instituted draconian punishments for those who attempt to defect, engage in unsanctioned market activities, or date to consume South Korean soap operas, films, books, or music. In addition to these defensive measures, Kim has created a closed-off intranet that substitutes for the global Internet and has encouraged the development of a consumer culture around domestically produced luxury goods and services. For example, in recent years, the regime has introduced online shopping portals for smartphone users, offering high-end clothing, women’s accessories, cosmetics, and specialty food items. And since he came to power, Kim has ramped up a massive building boom, constructing ski resorts, amusement parks, a new airport, a dolphinarium, restaurants, and high-rise luxury apartment buildings to showcase North Korea’s modernity.

#### Economic liberalization undermines regime legitimacy.

Bennett et al. ’18 – [Dr. Bruce Bennett, RAND; Dean Cheng, Heritage Foundation; Dr. Richard Cronin, Stimson Center; Ken Gause, CNA; Shihoko Goto, Wilson Center; Dr. James Hoare, Chatham House; Dr. Gregory Kulacki, Union of Concerned Scientists; Soojin Park, Wilson Center; Dr. James Platte, United States Air Force Center for Strategic Deterrence Studies; Anthony Rinna, Sino-NK; Brig Gen Rob Spalding, United States Air Force; Yun Sun, Stimson Center. “Marketization of the North Korean Economy – A Korea Strategic Outcomes Virtual Think Tank Report” NSI, <https://nsiteam.com/marketization-of-the-north-korean-economy/>, July 2018] TDI

\*\*note: this is a summary of responses from ViTTA expert contributors.

Reassuring Precedent from China’s Approach to Reform

Several contributors suggest that China’s approach to reform might be perceived by the North Korean regime as a reassuring precedent.14 Some of the same factors that drove economic reform in China are likely to be behind North Korea’s efforts to reshape its economic policies. Therefore, North Korea may find reassurance in, and be encouraged by, China’s ability to integrate itself into the international system in a way that promotes significant growth and development of its economy while also preserving the security and legitimacy of its political system and regime. China’s success on this front may entice North Korea into employing a similar approach. Brig Gen Rob Spalding of the United States Air Force emphasizes this point, offering a concise assessment of the dynamics:

Many Asian leaders have witnessed China’s stunning growth and realize you can develop economically yet remain authoritarian because the West will open their societies to you if you act peacefully. It is probable that Kim has finally seen the wisdom of the Chinese approach. This will encourage them to copy China’s economic development model.

Hoare, on the other hand, raises doubt about just how far the North Korean regime would be willing to follow any sort of Chinese model. North Koreans, Hoare argues, “have a very ambivalent relationship with China and resent being told that they should follow a Chinese model. And, of course, they were an industrialized nation well before China.”

Key Factors Inhibiting Broader North Korean Marketization Efforts

There are also three key factors that expert contributors cite as inhibitors to broader North Korean marketization efforts.

* The Kim regime’s perception of economic liberalization and broad marketization as a serious and direct threat to its fundamental interest, the security and survival of the regime.
* The Kim regime’s tight grip on the flow of information in the country and its desire to create ideological purity.
* Structural factors (e.g., productive capacity is severely lacking, the economy is severely constrained by limited foreign investment, there is currently no financing mechanism for providing capital at the individual level, legal protections for foreign businesses are quite weak, markets are still technically illegal and rife with corruption, and international sanctions have prevented the benefits afforded by globalization).

Fear of Economic Liberalization Threatening the Regime’s Fundamental Interests

The Kim regime appears to view economic liberalization and broad marketization as a serious and direct threat to its fundamental interest, the security and survival of the regime.15 Thus, while Kim has demonstrated a willingness to accept some degree of marketization inside North Korea, he is not likely to tolerate any sort of political reform or interference coinciding with economic reform initiatives. Nor is Kim likely interested in fully opening the North Korean economy to broad marketization, as doing so could risk the kind of significant economic and social change that could spark political instability. It would also likely reduce the regime’s ability to maintain absolute control over the population and undermine the regime’s legitimacy.16 As Park explains, “a totalitarian state like North Korea which is maintained under strict control over its people and society becomes increasingly vulnerable when it allows greater liberalization…while willing to accommodate some marketization, the regime is still very vigilant to keep it at a manageable level.”

The Kim regime seems to ultimately be facing an interesting dilemma between balancing its political aspirations, which seemingly best align with a centrally planned and controlled economy, and its economic aspirations, which may be best served by great economic liberalization. Dr. Bruce Bennett of RAND offers further reflection on this dilemma: “the regime knows that if it allows too much market activity, the legitimacy of the regime will be undermined. But if the regime cuts the markets back too much, the North Korean economy will begin to fail.”

Tight Control Over the Flow of Information

The Kim regime’s tight control over the flow of information across the country is cited by contributors as a key factor inhibiting broader North Korean marketization efforts.17 The Kim regime strives to maintain absolute control over the population. In North Korea, this also extends to having absolute control over the flow of information. This information control is a part of Kim’s initiative to create what he calls “ideological purity” across North Korea.18 Platte explains that “to enforce ideological purity and reduce chances for bottom-up political reform, Kim Jong Un likely will retain or strengthen controls meant to limit external influence on North Korean people. News, pop culture, and other media from the outside world, especially from South Korea, will be limited to trusted classes, as will interaction with outsiders.” The current, fully controlled information environment that provides most North Koreans with little to nothing in terms of information freedom, together with the regime’s ideological purity initiative, create conditions that are fundamentally contradictory to the idea of broader marketization.

#### Diversionary war—draws in China and Japan, causes refugee waves and loose nukes.

Seitz ’16 – [Sam Seitz, doctoral candidate in the Department of Politics and International Relations at the University of Oxford, “North Korea’s Arsenal: A Clear and Present Danger” <https://politicstheorypractice.wordpress.com/2016/07/21/north-koreas-arsenal-a-clear-and-present-danger/>, July 21, 2016] TDI

The other concern is domestic instability within North Korea and what this might portend for North Korea’s nuclear arsenal. Regime collapse or domestic unrest offer at least two scenarios for conflict. The first is the employment of a diversionary war by the Kim regime. Faced with domestic opposition and civil unrest, Kim Jong Un might try to engineer a small war to generate patriotic nationalism and a “rally around the flag effect.” In other words, Kim might intentionally initiate a war to give the people an enemy other than himself (11). For diversionary wars to be effective, of course, they need to be small and winnable. After all, the only thing worse than domestic strife is a full-scale U.S. invasion and routing of the North Korean army. There will therefore be significant pressures on Kim to limit his war goals, making diversionary war potentially containable. Unfortunately, warfare is very rarely so easily contained, and it is exceedingly likely that South Korea would use even a small scale war as a justification for reunification. If this were to happen, the war would quickly become a massive conflict involving both Koreas, the United States, China, and possibly even Japan. North Korea, facing an unstoppable onslaught of enemy forces, might be tempted to utilize its small nuclear arsenal to raise the costs of war in an attempt to cling to power (12). With nothing to lose, the Kim regime would likely be willing to utilize every potential resource at its disposal to forestall its dissolution.

The other potential conflict scenario involves the collapse of the Kim regime before the U.S. or China were able to intervene. Were this to occur, the entire region would be destabilized due to massive refugee flows and “loose nukes” – missing North Korean weapons lost during the collapse of the regime. With the U.S. and China both racing to secure North Korean WMDs and chaos reigning throughout North Korea, the risk of conflict or miscalculation would be very real (13). Indeed, we are already witnessing tensions between the U.S. and China over the deployment of U.S. THAAD missile defense batteries. China views them as a threat to its strategic deterrent, while South Korea and the U.S. view them as crucial to defending against North Korean missiles (14). With tensions rising over peacetime deployment of missile defense, it is easy to imagine tensions escalating to dangerous levels during the stress and confusion of a full-scale North Korean state collapse.

In short, North Korea continues to remain a long-term challenge for the United States and its East Asian allies. Despite its economic backwardness and corrupt regime, it has been able to generate significant progress in both nuclear and rocket technology. With its mercurial foreign policy and unstable regime, it is highly likely that conflict will occur on the peninsula in the near future. If this were to happen, North Korea’s nukes will become a serious issue requiring rapid response from the U.S. and effective coordination between China, South Korea, and the United States. It is thus crucial that policymakers and commanders effectively consider every contingency regarding the Korean Peninsula. The U.S. cannot afford to be caught flat-footed.

### 1NC---Engagement

#### Removing sanctions won’t normalize relations or kickstart political progress.

Silberstein ’23 – [Benjamin Katzeff Silberstein, Associate Fellow at the Swedish Institute for Foreign Affairs and a Postdoctoral Fellow at the Safra Center for Ethics at Tel Aviv University. “The complicated truth about sanctions on North Korea” East Asia Forum, https://eastasiaforum.org/2023/07/05/the-complicated-truth-about-sanctions-on-north-korea/, July 5, 2023] TDI

North Korea is under one of the harshest multilateral sanctions regimes of any country in the world. But the country still circumvents sanctions regularly through complex smuggling operations at which it is by now very adept. This situation raises questions about whether sanctions on North Korea have failed.

It is true that sanctions have not reached the stated political goal of inducing North Korea to give up its nuclear weapons. The country has made impressive advances in missile technology and is evidently capable of acquiring the necessary technology despite sanctions. The ‘spy satellite’ launch would be one of around 30 missiles tested in 2023.

Though North Korea has ways to evade sanctions, this does not mean sanctions have no impact. Sanctions interplay with domestic governance and economic systems in ways that are complex and often hard to fully evaluate. The alternative to sanctions is not an open, liberal and free-trading North Korea, but likely a slightly more well-off version of its current state.

The issue of evasion illustrates why the impact of sanctions is so hard to evaluate. Sanctions-evading actions are not rare events, but are institutionalised within North Korea’s economy. Since the 1970s, North Korea has systematically smuggled alcohol, tobacco, drugs and other contraband through its diplomatic networks abroad. These activities continue today and with North Korean capabilities expanding into the cyber realm, sources of illicit income will likely continue to constitute an underestimated part of the regime’s hard-currency revenue flows.

But sanctions evasion and smuggling are very expensive activities. For Chinese, Taiwanese and Singaporean trading companies and entities to risk smuggling oil to North Korea, Pyongyang must pay a massive risk premium on its purchases. North Korea has to pay well above market prices to give sellers a reason to take the risk of arrest and prosecution for sanctions violations.

The same is true for illicit North Korean exports. Sanctions do not stop coal exports entirely, but they slash the prices that North Korea can charge. Any buyer — almost always China — will only risk importing from North Korea if prices are cheap enough to outweigh the risks. Even prior to the harsher sanctions levied in 2016 and 2017, China, through its position as a virtual monopoly buyer, consistently paid below-market prices for North Korean coal. This dynamic is likely even stronger today, as Chinese imports of coal and other sanctioned North Korean goods continue but go mostly unrecorded.

Despite North Korea’s evasion tactics, sanctions are indisputably hurting the North Korean economy. The country’s exports are estimated to be worth only a few hundred million dollars per year — much smaller than its trade losses. The UN Panel of Experts estimated, for example, that North Korea earned around US$370 million from sanctions-violating coal exports in 2019. This is only a fraction of the US$1.19 billion it earned from such exports in 2016, before the harsher sanctions.

The civilian impact of sanctions is unclear. On one hand, sanctions have likely dealt a harsh blow to labour-intensive industries like textiles, where a high proportion of workers are women, resulting in increased unemployment and lower wages. The falling incomes of North Koreans working in sanctioned industries substantially dampen the wider economy. On the other hand, there is no evidence that sanctions have driven up the price of food or other essential goods.

Sanctions have undoubtedly worsened North Korea’s food shortage by hindering imports of fertiliser and spare parts for agricultural equipment. North Korea’s own border closure, though, likely also provided an obstacle to foreign trade. But the impact of sanctions on North Korea’s food system is minimal compared with the regime’s refusal to undertake basic reforms in agriculture. The government bristles at dismantling collective farms or letting farmers sell their products on open markets.

Trade by evasion should logically become easier and cheaper. For sanctions to be effective against North Korea, China — which constitutes more than 90 per cent of North Korea’s foreign trade — would have to implement them. As US–China tensions continue to grow, reasons for China to implement sanctions on North Korea are diminishing.

Reports of North Korean trade deals in weapons and labour with Russia in the wake of Russia’s invasion of Ukraine are already circulating. Very little is confirmed about these transactions, but there is evidence to support increased economic exchange between the countries. Earlier this year, satellite imagery from the border area indicated that Russia was increasing oil exports to North Korea while exporting unknown goods that could be arms destined for the Wagner Group.

But this does not change North Korea’s situation. Combined with its poor global reputation, sanctions will continue to make North Korea dependent on a very small number of trade partners — mainly China and Russia — who can charge highly unfavourable prices.

None of this is to say that the current thinking on North Korea sanctions is without serious flaws. The demand that denuclearisation should come before any relief on sanctions, for example, is unrealistic. But many also exaggerate the possible gains of abolishing sanctions. A common misperception is that, were sanctions to be lifted, North Korea would open its doors to foreign investors who would flock to the country for its strategic geographic location and cheap labour.

Removing sanctions would not change the basics of North Korea’s economic system. Despite a permissive attitude towards markets during former Supreme leader Kim Jong-il’s reign and the first few years of Kim Jong-un’s, harsh state control over the economy best serves the regime’s political and social goals by allowing it to control the distribution of resources. Sanctions hurt, but removing them is no silver bullet for political or economic progress.

#### Plenty of alt causes.

Roy ’24 – Denny Roy is a Senior Fellow at the East-West Center in Honolulu specialising in Asia-Pacific strategic and security issues. He holds a PhD in political science from the University of Chicago. “North Korea is not about to start a war” Lowy Institute, <https://www.lowyinstitute.org/the-interpreter/north-korea-not-about-start-war>, January 31, 2024] TDI

Carlin and Hecker say Kim Jong-un has chosen “a military solution” because there are “no good options left” – but the authors don’t say what problem Kim is trying to solve, nor how an elective war would solve it.

Alternatively, Carlin and Hecker’s analysis is far better suited to a more reasonable conclusion: that since 2019, Kim’s government has shifted its efforts, to court outside assistance in the pursuit of its security and economic objectives away from reaching agreements with the United States and South Korea and toward a closer partnership with the China/Russia Bloc. That conclusion implies continued tensions on the Korean Peninsula, but not a second Korean War.

Kim gave a lengthy [speech](https://kcnawatch.org/newstream/1705369092-194545332/respected-comrade-kim-jong-un-makes-policy-speech-at-10th-session-of-14th-spa/) to the DPRK legislature on January in which he elaborated  about relations with South Korea. As widely reported, Kim said the DPRK will no longer work toward reunification, and will henceforth characterise the South as the “invariable principal enemy” rather than “consanguineous”. He called for revising the DPRK constitution to remove verbiage implying that North and South are parts of the same country and calling South Koreans “compatriots.”

As some analysts have [pointed out](https://www.ft.com/content/4a4b115b-c117-4095-82ed-e6db86f93eec), recasting South Koreans as enemies rather than cousins might reduce the psychological dissonance that would accompany a decision to go to war. For decades up to now, however, Pyongyang’s official policy of striving for reunification did not prevent the DPRK government from making threats of mass violence against South Koreans (see, for example, the threat make Seoul a “[sea of fire](https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/pdf/10.1080/14672715.1994.10430149)”).

Furthermore, in the same speech, Kim said plainly that he does not plan to start a war. “We will never unilaterally unleash a war if the enemies do not provoke us,” he said. “There is no reason to opt for war, and therefore, there is no intention of unilaterally going to war.”

Kim says the policy change on reunification is a reaction to an “escalation” in hostility from the DPRK’s adversaries. He specifically cites South Korean discussion about the possible “collapse” of the North Korean state, “remarks made by the US authorities about the ‘end of our regime’”, US-South Korea joint military exercises, the US policy of nuclear-weapons-capable platforms regularly visiting South Korea, and enhanced trilateral cooperation between the United States, South Korea and hated Japan. Relatedly, South Korea has announced it is building a capability to [pre-emptively kill](https://www.nknews.org/2023/12/drills-on-assassinating-kim-jong-un-remain-an-option-rok-defense-chief-says/) Kim and other top North Korea officials. Pyongyang’s seemingly warlike behaviour is partly reactive.

### 1NC---China

#### China’s not revisionist.

Chan et al. ’19 – Steve Chan, College Professor of Distinction at the University of Colorado; Weixing Hu is Professor and Head of Department of Politics and Public Administration at University of Hong Kong; Kai He is Professor of International Relations at Griffith Asia Institute & Centre for Governance and Public Policy, Griffith University. “Discerning states’ revisionist and status-quo orientations: Comparing China and the US” (2019) European Journal of International Relations, https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/pdf/10.1177/1354066118804622

Labels such as revisionist and status-quo orientations tend to be a product of social and political construction. They are often intended to frame discourses intended for political persuasion and mobilization, and sometimes bear little correspondence with what the pertinent states have said and done. This tendency reminds one of Antonio Gramsci’s (1971) remarks about the hegemony of certain ideas: that these ideas can have a strong influence on people’s thoughts, beliefs, and perceptions even though they are based on shaky premises and questionable evidence.

Both Beijing and Washington can find themselves out of step with the world’s majority opinion reflecting most other states’ preferences. Their foreign policy orientations also vary by issue areas, and these orientations have evolved over time. Thus, a country can be a defender of the status quo on some issues while being motivated by a revisionist agenda on other issues. Its motivations cannot be adequately assigned to simple binary categories, and they are hardly static or fixed. Like other great powers, China and the US have not hesitated to defy public opinion or international conventions when they feel that their vital interests would be otherwise compromised. As Graham Allison (2016) has remarked: “None of the five permanent members of the UN Security Council have ever accepted any international court’s ruling when (in their view) it infringed their sovereignty or national security interests.” Beijing has rejected the Permanent Court of Arbitration’s jurisdiction to judge its maritime disputes in the South China Sea. Washington has likewise refused to accept the International Court of Justice’s ruling against it for mining Nicaragua’s ports and supporting contras seeking to overthrow its government.

The basic trend is unmistakable. Although the People’s Republic of China was ostracized by the international community in its early years, it has assumed a more active and constructive role in international organizations over time. It has joined various multilateral accords or arrangements (such as those on nuclear non-proliferation and peacekeeping missions) that it had denounced earlier. In contrast, whereas the US was the champion of international institutions in the 1940s and 1950s, it has recently become sharply critical of them and has turned increasingly against multilateralism. This evidence raises questions about the existing literature’s assignment of status-quo and revisionist orientations to the US and China, respectively. It suggests quite conclusively that a greater stake and more extensive engagement with the international community has inclined Beijing to become a more responsible stakeholder, whereas the direction and extent of change in US conduct and attitudes over time point to the opposite conclusion. Therefore, a rising power does not necessarily present a greater threat to the international order simply because it now has more capabilities to upend it. On the contrary, its increased stake can influence it to become more committed to the prevailing international order. One vivid example is China’s recent initiation of the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank (AIIB), which has played a complementary, instead of substitutive, role to the existing global financial governance arrangements, such as the World Bank and International Monetary Fund (Thies and Nieman, 2017). At the same time, it would be wrong to assume that a declining hegemon will always be committed to this order as its stake in it diminishes. The latter phenomenon can instead incline it to become more revisionist and reluctant to support the existing order.

#### Self-fulfilling prophecy. Containment encourages aggression.

Murray ’19 — Michelle; Associate Professor of Political Studies; Director of Global Initiatives at Bard College. PhD in International Relations at University of Chicago. 2019; “Identity, Insecurity, and China’s Place in the World”; *The Struggle for Recognition in International Relations: Status, Revisionism, and Rising Powers*; Accessed Online via University of Michigan Libraries; //CYang

China’s view of, and future place in, the international order are importantly connected to its experiences during the Century of Humiliation and the dual concepts of national humiliation and national rejuvenation that constitute its self-understanding. The Century of Humiliation began with the first Opium War in 1839, when Britain forced China to open its ports to the opium trade, and did not end until the success of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) in the civil war of 1949. During this time, China was the target of repeated international interventions, lost large pieces of its territory to Western powers and Japan, saw the collapse of its millennia old imperial system, and was torn apart by internal uprisings.44 According to the national humiliation narrative, the first Opium War represents a distinct turning point in Chinese history, when a powerful and successful ancient civilization was forced into a semi-colonial position at the hands of foreign interventions. National humiliation is an active part of contemporary Chinese collective identity. It serves as an important resource for those cultivating Chinese nationalism, unifying the Chinese people against foreign others who perpetrated these past humiliations and legitimating the CCP, the party seen as leading China’s reemergence as a major power.

The Century of Humiliation, however, is not just about recounting a particular interpretation of the past. Rather, it actively informs beliefs about how the world works and is used to interpret the dynamics of international relations today.45 Specifically, the national humiliation narrative constructs China’s self-understanding and its place in the international system, shaping its interests and aspirations as a rising power. First, the narrative of national humiliation represents China as a victim of Western subjugation. When articulated in the context of current international relations, this representation works to breed suspicion of outside actors, including the United States, and gives an emotional valence to seemingly inconsequential interactions. For example, in 2001 a US spy plane collided with a Chinese fighter jet over the South China Sea, sparking an international incident and inflaming tensions between China and the United States. As the incident played itself out, it became apparent that “resolving this problem did not involve military retaliation or economic reparations so much as symbolic recognition: China demanded a public apology from the United States.”46 Thus, understood through the prism of national humiliation, interactions with the West are always contextualized in a history where China suffered humiliating losses at the hands of Western expansion, and where Western power is, in and of itself, the instrument of that subjugation.

Second, the narrative of national humiliation constructs Chinese understandings of its military power and that of the United States by imposing a moral subtext to power politics. Building from its treatment during the Century of Humiliation, the international community’s actions toward China are viewed as unjust, reinforcing suspicion of foreign powers’ intentions.47 Within this frame, a self–Other dynamic is created, whereby Chinese history is reimagined as one of benevolent hegemony, when China governed and projected its influence in peaceful ways. This is positioned in contrast to the use of force and coercion common to Western hegemony. Today these self–Other representations guide Chinese understandings about the purpose and meaning of Chinese and American power. In China’s eyes, its burgeoning military power is consistent with its history and thus is not threatening. These representations are at work in Chinese rhetoric that characterizes its growing power as its “peaceful rise.” As Zheng Bijan argued, China’s rise will be different than that of previous major powers, as “China will transcend ideological differences to strive for peace, development, and cooperation with all countries of the world.”48 At the same time, US foreign policy is contextualized within this narrative by reference to Western aggression during the Century of Humiliation. Since the end of the Cold War, the United States has more forcefully criticized China’s human rights record, undermined its bid to host the 2000 Olympics, increased arms sales to Taiwan, and strengthened its presence in the region.49 While US foreign policy has been couched in the language of engagement, many in China view this as a simple euphemism for containment.50 This is especially the case with the Obama administration’s recent “strategic rebalancing,” known popularly as the “pivot to Asia.” As a consequence, any attempt by the United States to contain or limit Chinese power is seen as an act of misrecognition and an unjust and aggressive attempt to subjugate China once again.

Finally, the narrative of national humiliation highlights China’s “historical experience with territorial loss and intrusion,” thus placing the maintenance of sovereignty at the center of China’s national identity.51 The Century of Humiliation is understood to be representative of a loss of sovereignty, where outside forces were able to expose the state’s weakness and delegitimize its institutions. Therefore, any perceived infringement of China’s sovereignty is read through the lens of national humiliation and understood to be an existential threat to China’s security. Importantly, these threats are not material in nature, for China’s physical security is not in doubt. Rather, they represent a symbolic threat, suggesting that China continues to be vulnerable to outside influence. Moreover, sovereignty is the cornerstone of the current international order. Thus any perceived violation of sovereignty is understood to be another subjugation of China, refusing it the rights and privileges that other states in the system enjoy.

This narrative of national humiliation operates alongside the goal of national rejuvenation, which provides the motivation for China’s contemporary foreign policy interests. If national humiliation recounts the losses China suffered at the hands of the West and Japan, national rejuvenation promises to restore for China the status it lost during the Century of Humiliation. In articulating China’s self-understanding in these terms, China’s major power status is understood as a right: respect that China should regain by virtue of its former status as a great nation.52 Thus, China’s rise to major power status is not about obtaining something new or a gaining an advantage over others, but rather as a “restoration of fairness.”53 These discourses of humiliation and rejuvenation infuse Chinese foreign policy, shaping a range of behaviors from its voting record in the United Nations Security Council to its regional relationships to its burgeoning leadership role in the global economy.

Constructing China’s (Un)Peaceful Rise

China’s rise, guided by the twin narratives of national humiliation and rejuvenation, is likely inevitable. What this means for the international order will be a function of China’s interactions with the United States and the representations that animate that relationship. US foreign policy toward a rising China is often cast as a choice between engagement and containment. So-called “optimists” call for increased engagement by integrating China deeply into the global economy and institutional architecture of the international order, whereas “pessimists” see future security competition as an inevitable outgrowth of Chinese power and advocate a policy of containment.54 Both containment and engagement strategies, however, are built off of assumptions about China’s material needs and do not pay sufficient attention to China’s distinct identity needs. Thus, both approaches risk exacerbating China’s dilemma of social insecurity, and constructing China’s unpeaceful rise.

Proponents of containment do not have a sanguine view of China’s rise and argue that as China grows more powerful it is likely to lead to an intense security competition with the United States.55 Containment is a straightforward application of realist understandings of international politics, and presumes that under all conditions China will seek to overturn the international order and thus its power must be preemptively checked. China is motivated, as are all emerging major powers, by security and the related desire for power. In this view, the anarchic structure of international system forces states seeking only security to behave aggressively toward one another in an attempt to gain more power and alter the international status quo. Rising powers are revisionist powers.56 China’s economic power and influence will be the springboard for military dominance in the region because economic power is the basis of military power. China is building a blue-water navy that will allow it to project naval power well beyond the Chinese coast “from the oil ports of the Middle East to the shipping lanes of the Pacific, where the United States Navy has long reigned as the dominant force.”57 Moreover, China’s integration in regional politics is indicative of its growing influence. As it becomes less susceptible to American economic pressure, China will have increasing leverage over weaker Asian countries and the United States.58 In short, while China is not in a position to militarily challenge the United States at the present, a much more powerful China should be expected to take increasing steps to push the United States out of the Asia–Pacific region and challenge the terms of the US-led international order.59 Therefore, US foreign policy must be reoriented to contain the impending threat that China poses to the United States’ security and economic interests.

Containment, however, is based on the faulty assumption that China harbors revisionist intentions. It is not an impartial assessment of actual Chinese objectives and therefore runs a real risk of producing a self-fulfilling prophecy.60 The more militarily aggressively the United States behaves, the more threatened China will feel and thus the more likely it will be to respond aggressively to the United States. A potentially severe security dilemma is almost certain to emerge and intensify through a containment strategy, therefore reproducing international relations’ fraught history with power transitions. Moreover, containment is a deterrent strategy, designed to raise the costs of Chinese expansionism and in doing so to limit Chinese power. Deterrent strategies assume that revisionist intentions emerge within states — not from their interactions with other states, and thus ignore China’s recognition-needs. But, as the struggle for recognition highlights, treating a socially insecure state as if it were greedy will only exacerbate its insecurity, fuel its interest in revisionism, and construct China’s unpeaceful rise.

#### Miscalc is wrong.

Hal Brands 20, Henry A. Kissinger Distinguished Professor of Global Affairs at the Johns Hopkins University School of Advanced International Studies and a Resident Scholar at the American Enterprise Institute, "If America and China Go to War, It Won’t Be an Accident," 8/7/20, Bloomberg, <https://www.bloomberg.com/opinion/articles/2020-08-07/war-between-china-and-america-won-t-happen-by-accident>

There is a venerable argument that states can stumble into a major conflict that neither truly desires, and it has been revived as tensions between the two great powers escalate. Nevertheless, history shows that big wars don't just happen inadvertently.

The accidental war thesis was [raised](https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/united-states/2020-08-03/beware-guns-august-asia?utm_medium=social) recently by former Prime Minister Kevin Rudd of Australia. Noting the many flashpoints at which U.S. and Chinese interests collide, he argued that there is a growing danger of them “stumbling into conflict.” An accidental collision between ships or planes in the South China Sea, or several other plausible scenarios, could lead to crisis, escalation and war. Just as the great powers of the early 20th century “[sleep-walked](https://www.amazon.com/Sleepwalkers-How-Europe-Went-1914/dp/0061146668)” into World War I, China and America could blunder their way to disaster today.

World War I is often [considered](https://www.amazon.com/Sleepwalkers-How-Europe-Went-1914/dp/0061146668) the [classic](https://www.amazon.com/Guns-August-Pulitzer-Prize-Winning-Outbreak/dp/0345476093) example of an unwanted war: a devastating conflict that none of the participants would have chosen had they known what was coming. During the Cold War, U.S. policymakers worried that crises over Berlin or Cuba could get out of control. There is a body of [political](https://www.amazon.com/Arms-Influence-Preface-Afterword-Lectures/dp/0300143370) [science](https://books.google.com/books?hl=en&lr=&id=cs1J3h_28AUC&oi=fnd&pg=PA1&dq=accidental+war&ots=Vfdc3HCKxi&sig=gh8pOSz58LDIvtAAUn--95sVb2E#v=onepage&q=accidental%20war&f=false) [literature](https://books.google.com/books?hl=en&lr=&id=nveiS7HeqQUC&oi=fnd&pg=PR5&dq=inadvertent+escalation&ots=GqOsJAq4dp&sig=6basMxSMJtCAc4RgaXD2dQzd4fM#v=onepage&q=inadvertent%20escalation&f=false) devoted to understanding how accidental war can occur.

Yet there is one big problem: It is hard to identify any major wars that came about even though no one wanted them. The trouble in July and August 1914, it turns out, was [not](https://www.jstor.org/stable/2538909?seq=1#metadata_info_tab_contents) that inflexible mobilization schedules and military plans thrust political leaders into conflict. It was that several [powers](https://www.mitpressjournals.org/doi/pdfplus/10.1162/isec.2007.32.2.155?casa_token=0eJtoLZIUrwAAAAA:2jsybd83Q7GFlGM8sk37zRqE8uXiUmz0tpzrqiFTVsUhVR93fHP3Y-Fc661XhF58471cqOc-2_wr), most notably but [not](https://www.amazon.com/July-1914-Countdown-Sean-McMeekin/dp/0465060749) solely Austria-Hungary and Imperial Germany, insisted on pursuing aggressive policies that they knew risked a localized war at best and a continental war at worst. They nearly all [believed](https://www.mitpressjournals.org/doi/full/10.1162/ISEC_a_00173#.VCBM_RYXOVo), moreover, that if war had to come, better it should come sooner rather than later.

A generation after that, Franklin Roosevelt may not have foreseen that slapping an oil embargo on Japan would lead to the aerial assault on Pearl Harbor. But he certainly understood that war was a distinct possibility once the U.S. began strangling the economy of a country that was already pillaging Asia.

Likewise, the Six Day sWar of 1967 is sometimes [treated](https://www.google.com/books/edition/Avoiding_War/RMtmAAAAMAAJ?hl=en&gbpv=1&bsq=alexander+george+avoiding+war&dq=alexander+george+avoiding+war&printsec=frontcover) as an inadvertent conflict. But again, Egyptian leaders were hardly blind to the [danger](https://www.google.com/books/edition/Six_Days_of_War/lEklDwAAQBAJ?hl=en&gbpv=1&dq=michael+oren+six+days+of+war&printsec=frontcover) of war when they mobilized forces in the Sinai Peninsula, blockaded Israel’s port on the Red Sea and took other belligerent steps.

The reality, as the historian Marc Trachtenberg has [shown](http://www.sscnet.ucla.edu/polisci/faculty/trachtenberg/cv/inadvertent.pdf), is that countries tend to avoid war when neither really desires it. Yes, leaders do sometimes misjudge how wars will turn out and how destructive they will be. Tensions can gradually ratchet up in a way that makes de-escalation progressively harder.

Yet there is no more monumental decision than to initiate a major conflict. So when countries really do want to avert a showdown, they are generally willing to tack or retreat, even at the cost of some embarrassment.

During the Cold War, there was plenty of superpower brinkmanship, and some hair-raising incidents involving U.S. and Soviet military forces. There were [several](https://www.amazon.com/We-Now-Know-Rethinking-Relations/dp/0198780710) near misses in the Cuban Missile Crisis alone. But in that case and every other case, the crisis was defused and the superpowers drew back, precisely because they didn’t believe that the stakes merited a nuclear bloodbath.

Accidental war also seems unlikely today. There are plenty of circumstances in which the U.S. and China could find themselves in a crisis: a replay of the [EP-3 incident](https://www.nytimes.com/2001/04/02/world/us-plane-in-china-after-it-collides-with-chinese-jet.html) of 2001, when a midair collision led to a diplomatic standoff; or an interaction between the Chinese and Japanese air forces in the East China Sea that unexpectedly turns deadly. But U.S. and Chinese policymakers know that a war could very well become an extremely [grave](https://www.rand.org/pubs/research_reports/RR1140.html) affair. If both sides truly seek to avoid one, they will probably find a way of doing so.

### 1NC---Alliances

#### States won’t risk war, isolation, AND are already stagnant.

John Mueller 21, Adjunct Professor of Political Science and Senior Research Scientist at the Mershon Center for International Security Studies, "The Rise of China, the Assertiveness of Russia, and the Antics of Iran," in The Stupidity of War: American Foreign Policy and the Case for Complacency, Chapter 6, 02/17/2021, pg. 163-167.

Complacency, Appeasement, Self-destruction, and the New Cold War

It could be argued that the policies proposed here to deal with the international problems, whether real or imagined, presented by China, Russia, and Iran constitute exercises not only in complacency, but also in appeasement. That argument would be correct. As discussed in the Prologue to this book, appeasement can work to avoid military conflict as can be seen in the case of the Cuban missile crisis of 1962. As also discussed there, appeasement has been given a bad name by the experience with Hitler in 1938.

Hitlers are very rare, but there are some resonances today in Russia’s Vladimir Putin and China’s Xi Jinping. Both are shrewd, determined, authoritarian, and seem to be quite intelligent, and both are fully in charge, are surrounded by sychophants, and appear to have essentially unlimited tenure in office. Moreover, both, like Hitler in the 1930s, are appreciated domestically for maintaining a stable political and economic environment. However, unlike Hitler, both run trading states and need a stable and essentially congenial international environment to flourish.128 Most importantly, except for China’s claim to Taiwan, neither seems to harbor Hitler-like dreams of extensive expansion by military means. Both are leading their countries in an illiberal direction which will hamper economic growth while maintaining a kleptocratic system. But this may be acceptable to populations enjoying historically high living standards and fearful of less stable alternatives. Both do seem to want to overcome what they view as past humiliations – ones going back to the opium war of 1839 in the case of China and to the collapse of the Soviet empire and then of the Soviet Union in 1989–91 in the case of Russia. Primarily, both seem to want to be treated with respect and deference. Unlike Hitler’s Germany, however, both seem to be entirely appeasable. That scarcely seems to present or represent a threat. The United States, after all, continually declares itself to be the indispensable nation. If the United States is allowed to wallow in such self-important, childish, essentially meaningless, and decidedly fatuous proclamations, why should other nations be denied the opportunity to emit similar inconsequential rattlings? If that constitutes appeasement, so be it. If the two countries want to be able to say they now preside over a “sphere of influence,” it scarcely seems worth risking world war to somehow keep them from doing so – and if the United States were substantially disarmed, it would not have the capacity to even try.

If China and Russia get off on self-absorbed pretensions about being big players, that should be of little concern – and their success rate is unlikely to be any better than that of the United States. Charap and Colton observe that “The Kremlin’s idee fixe that Russia needs to be the leader of a pack of post-Soviet states in order to be taken seriously as a global power broker is more of a feel-good mantra than a fact-based strategy, and it irks even the closest of allies.” And they further suggest that

The towel should also be thrown in on the geo-ideational shadow-boxing over the Russian assertion of a sphere of influence in post-Soviet Eurasia and the Western opposition to it. Would either side be able to specify what precisely they mean by a regional sphere of influence? How would it differ from, say, US relations with the western-hemisphere states or from Germany’s with its EU neighbors?129

Applying the Gingrich gospel, then, it certainly seems that, although China, Russia, and Iran may present some “challenges” to US policy, there is little or nothing to suggest a need to maintain a large US military force-in-being to keep these countries in line. Indeed, all three monsters seem to be in some stage of self-destruction or descent into stagnation – not, perhaps, unlike the Communist “threat” during the Cold War. Complacency thus seems to be a viable policy.

However, it may be useful to look specifically at a couple of worst-case scenarios: an invasion of Taiwan by China (after it builds up its navy more) and an invasion of the Baltic states of Estonia, Lithuania, and Latvia by Russia. It is wildly unlikely that China or Russia would carry out such economically self-destructive acts: the economic lessons from Putin’s comparatively minor Ukraine gambit are clear, and these are unlikely to be lost on the Chinese. Moreover, the analyses of Michael Beckley certainly suggest that Taiwan has the conventional military capacity to concentrate the mind of, if not necessarily fully to deter, any Chinese attackers. It has “spent decades preparing for this exact contingency,” has an advanced early warning system, can call into action massed forces to defend “fortified positions on home soil with precision-guided munitions,” and has supply dumps, booby traps, an wide array of mobile missile launchers, artillery, and minelayers. In addition, there are only 14 locations that can support amphibious landing and these are, not surprisingly, well-fortified by the defenders.130

The United States may not necessarily be able to deter or stop military attacks on Taiwan or on the Baltics under its current force levels.131 And if it cannot credibly do so with military forces currently in being, it would not be able to do so, obviously, if its forces were much reduced. However, the most likely response in either eventuality would be for the United States to wage a campaign of economic and military (including naval) harassment and to support local – or partisan – resistance as it did in Afghanistan after the Soviet invasion there in 1979. 132 Such a response does not require the United States to have, and perpetually to maintain, huge forces in place and at the ready to deal with such improbable eventualities.

The current wariness about, and hostility toward, Russia and China is sometimes said to constitute “a new Cold War.”133 There are, of course, considerable differences. In particular, during the Cold War, the Soviet Union – indeed the whole international Communist movement – was under the sway of a Marxist theory that explicitly and determinedly advocated the destruction of capitalism and probably of democracy, and by violence to the degree required. Neither Russia nor China today sports such cosmic goals or is enamored of such destructive methods. However, as discussed in Chapters 1 and 2, the United States was strongly inclined during the Cold War massively to inflate the threat that it imagined the Communist adversary to present. The current “new Cold War” is thus in an important respect quite a bit like the old one: it is an expensive, substantially militarized, and often hysterical campaign to deal with threats that do not exist or are likely to selfdestruct.134

It may also be useful to evaluate terms that are often bandied about in considerations within foreign policy circles about the rise of China, the assertiveness of Russia, and the antics of Iran. High among these is “hegemony.” Sorting through various definitions, Simon Reich and Richard Ned Lebow array several that seem to capture the essence of the concept: domination, controlling leadership, or the ability to shape international rules according to the hegemon’s own interests. Hegemony, then, is an extreme word suggesting supremacy, mastery, preponderant influence, and full control. Hegemons force others to bend to their will whether they like it or not. Reich and Lebow also include a mellower designation applied by John Ikenberry and Charles Kupchan in which a hegemon is defined as an entity that has the ability to establish a set of norms that others willingly embrace.135 But this really seems to constitute an extreme watering-down of the word and suggests opinion leadership or entrepreneurship and success at persuasion, not hegemony.

Moreover, insofar as they carry meaning, the militarized application of American primacy and hegemony to order the world has often been a fiasco.136 Indeed, it is impressive that the hegemon, endowed by definition by what Reich and Lebow aptly call a grossly disproportionate military capacity, has had such a miserable record of military achievement since 1945 – an issue discussed frequently in this book.137 Reich and Lebow argue that it is incumbent on IR scholars to cut themselves loose from the concept of hegemony.138 It seems even more important for the foreign policy establishment to do so.

There is also absurdity in getting up tight over something as vacuous as the venerable “sphere of influence” concept (or conceit). The notion that world affairs are a process in which countries scamper around the world seeking to establish spheres of influence is at best decidedly unhelpful and at worst utterly misguided. But the concept continues to be embraced in some quarters as if it had some palpable meaning. For example, in early 2017, the august National Intelligence Council opined that “Geopolitical competition is on the rise as China and Russia seek to exert more sway over their neighboring regions and promote an order in which US influence does not dominate.”139 Setting aside the issue of the degree to which American “influence” could be said to “dominate” anywhere (we still wait, for example, for dominated Mexico supinely to pay for a wall to seal off its self-infatuated neighbor’s southern border), it doesn’t bloody well matter whether China or Russia has, or seems to have, a “sphere of influence” someplace or other.

More importantly, the whole notion is vapid and essentially meaningless. Except perhaps in Gilbert and Sullivan’s Iolanthe. When members of the House of Lords fail to pay sufficient respect to a group of women they take to be members of a ladies’ seminary who are actually fairies, their queen, outraged at the Lords’ collected effrontery, steps forward, proclaims that she happens to be an “influential fairy,” and then, with a few passes of her wand, brushes past the Lords’ pleas (“no!” “mercy!” “spare us!” and “horror!”), and summarily issues several edicts: a young man of her acquaintance shall be inducted into their House, every bill that gratifies his pleasure shall be passed, members shall be required to sit through the grouse and salmon season, and high office shall be obtainable by competitive examination. Now, that’s influence. In contrast, on December 21, 2017, when the United States sought to alter the status of Jerusalem, the United Nations General Assembly voted to repudiate the US stand in a nearly unanimous vote that included many US allies. Now, that’s not influence.

In fact, to push this point perhaps to an extreme, if we are entering an era in which economic motivations became paramount and in which military force is not deemed a sensible method for pursuing wealth, the idea of “influence” would become obsolete because, in principle, pure economic actors do not care much about influence. They care about getting rich. (As Japan and Germany have found, however, influence, status, and prestige tend to accompany the accumulation of wealth, but this is just an ancillary effect.) Suppose the president of a company could choose between two stories to tell the stockholders. One message would be, “We enjoy great influence in the industry. When we talk everybody listens. Our profits are nil.” The other would be, “No one in the industry pays the slightest attention to us or ever asks our advice. We are, in fact, the butt of jokes in the trade. We are making money hand over fist.” There is no doubt about which story would most thoroughly warm the stockholders’ hearts.