

## Comparing North Korea Policies of The Obama and Trump Administrations

KIM Hyun \*

### Introduction

While the North Korean nuclear problem was one of the major issues of U.S. foreign policy throughout the Obama Administration, it could not find any substantial solution to the problem. The administration's policy of "strategic patience" toward North Korea failed to achieve its primary goal of making Pyongyang move toward denuclearization because of its adherence to the policy of becoming a nuclear weapons state with long-range missile capability, some U.S. miscalculations about the intention and circumstance of North Korea, and China's reluctance to pressure North Korea to give up its nuclear program. When the Trump Administration was launched, it put the top priority of its foreign policy on addressing the North Korean nuclear problem because its policy makers perceived the communist country's nuclear weapons development as an urgent national security threat. The administration adopted a policy of "strategic accountability" centered upon economic sanctions and diplomatic pressure to deal with the problem.

Regardless of these U.S. policies and international sanctions, North Korea has rejected demands of the U.S. and the international community to abandon its nuclear weapon program. Instead, the communist regime has adhered to its policy of becoming a nuclear-armed state with nuclear-warhead intercontinental ballistic missiles (ICBMs). Under this policy, Pyongyang conducted six nuclear tests, including a possible hydrogen-bomb test on September 3, 2017, and test-launched a number of ballistic missiles, including three tests of ICBMs in July and late November 2017. To date, the new U.S. policy of strategic accountability has been

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\* Professor, Department of Political Science and International Relations at Kyung Hee University, Seoul, the Republic of Korea. This paper is a revised and updated version of the manuscript for a lecture delivered at the Asian Researchers' Forum of American Studies held at Nanzan University on November 12, 2016. I would like to express my appreciation for the useful comments from Professor Fujimoto Hiroshi. I also would like to extend my thanks to Director Kawashima Masaki and the staff at the Center for American Studies of Nanzan University for their invitation and full support.

estimated to appear similar to the strategic patience policy in terms of some main elements. Given no change in North Korea's intention and policy, it is unclear how effective the policy of strategic accountability will be in addressing the North's nuclear problem. The purpose of this paper is to examine and compare North Korea policies of the Obama and Trump Administrations not only by interpreting them from the perspective of foreign policy schools of thought, but also by exploring their similarities and differences.

The direction and basic strategy of U.S. foreign policy have been affected by foreign policy schools of thought shared by each administration's policy makers. John Hulsman defines a foreign policy school of thought as "a sub-ideology that can be directly linked to concrete policy preferences" on major policy issues. It is directly related to political philosophy having policy implications which is shared by a group of policy makers.<sup>1</sup> Patrick Callahan calls the term foreign policy logic and defines it as a "stripped down ideology or worldview" comprised of ideas about the country's basic foreign policy strategy, its national interests, the interpretation of its power, and its moral duties.<sup>2</sup> In a general sense, a foreign policy school of thought or logic refers to as a belief system consisting of principles and basic ideas concerning a nation's foreign policy direction, goals and means, and prescriptions for key policy issues. According to David Skidmore and John Hulsman, the basic strategy and direction of U.S. foreign policy have been largely influenced by three foreign policy schools of thought since the advent of the post-Cold War era in the early 1990s: realism, neo-conservatism, and liberal internationalism.<sup>3</sup> This study aims to explore and compare the U.S. North Korea policies of strategic patience and accountability mainly by interpreting them from the perspective of the three foreign policy schools of thought.

## I: U.S. Foreign Policy Schools of Thought

### 1. Realism

From the realist point of view, an important priority of U.S. national interests in the post-Cold War era is to retain its preponderance in power and security, while preventing the emergence of any challenging competitor or its allies.<sup>4</sup> However, realists do not give priority to moral or humanitarian values and goals

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1. John Hulsman, *A Paradigm for the New World Order: A Schools-of-Thought Analysis of American Foreign Policy in the Post-Cold War Era* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1997), 12.

2. Patrick Callahan, *Logics of American Foreign Policy: Theories of America's World Role* (New York: Pearson/Longman, 2004), 4.

3. See David Skidmore, ed., *Paradoxes of Power: U.S. Foreign Policy in a Changing World* (New York: Routledge, 2016), 1-12; and Hulsman, *Paradigm*, 21-77.

4. Skidmore, *Paradoxes*, 5.

of foreign policy. While respecting the sovereignty of any other countries in foreign relations, they do not attach importance to the nature of their regimes or human rights situation. Hence realists oppose a policy of regime change for democratization through military intervention, as in the case of the Iraq War, not only because it causes enormous human and material damage, but also because it undermines American prestige considerably.<sup>5</sup> Realists define U.S. national interests narrowly. They thus argue that the priority of American foreign policy should be given to achieving its selfish interests of enhancing national security, the preponderance of power, economic prosperity, and the stability of the international system.<sup>6</sup>

Realists emphasize military power as an ultimate means of ensuring national security. However, they oppose the use of military force for any other purpose than national security. In particular, they disapprove of military intervention to change the politics and society of other countries.<sup>7</sup> Even if there is a serious security threat, realism prescribes diplomatic solutions first, rather than the use of armed forces.<sup>8</sup> Realists favor an engagement policy based on carrot-and-stick diplomacy toward foreign regimes hostile to the U.S. In other words, in order to induce their policy changes and cooperation, obvious incentives, such as economic aid, regime security, and diplomatic recognition, should be accompanied by punitive measures of imposing pressure and sanctions in case of their rejecting cooperation.<sup>9</sup>

Realists advocate multilateral foreign policy, rather than unilateral one, because they perceive limitations of U.S. military power. Therefore, mutual cooperation with relevant countries, especially American allies, is needed to initiate and implement a security policy to effectively cope with uncooperative or hostile nations. Realists prefer the U.S. to work with its allies mainly because of reducing the security burden on it.<sup>10</sup> However, they have a skeptical view of the power and role of international law and institutions in addressing major security issues facing the U.S.<sup>11</sup>

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5. Stephen Walt, "The Shattered Kristol Ball," *The National Interest* (September-October 2008): 27.

6. Callahan, *Logics*, 41-42.

7. Walt, "Shattered," 26.

8. Kurt Campbell and Drek Chollet, "The New Tribalism: Cliques and the Making of U.S. Foreign Policy," *The Washington Quarterly*, vol. 30, no. 1 (Winter 2006/07): 196-97.

9. Richard Haass, "Regime Change and Its Limits," *Foreign Affairs*, vol. 84, no. 4 (July/Aug. 2005): 73-74; and Walt, "Shattered," 26.

10. Hulsman, *Paradigm*, 45-46; and Robert Ellsworth and Dimitri Simes, "Realism's Shining Morality," *The National Interest* (Winter 2004/05): 7-9.

11. Francis Fukuyama, *America at the Crossroads: Democracy, Power, and the Neoconservative Legacy* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2006); 64.

## 2. Neo-conservatism

Neo-conservatives recognize that core national interests of the U.S. are to maintain its hegemonic status and to spread the values of democracy, individual liberty, and a free-market economy enjoyed by the U.S. to the outside world.<sup>12</sup> In order to realize these interests, neo-conservatism offers the following policy prescriptions. First, the U.S. needs to strengthen its military power to sustain its primacy and global leadership and to prevent the emergence of rival great powers challenging American hegemony. Second, the U.S. must pursue policies that spread its values internationally, if necessary by using military means. Third, policies need to be set up to replace or overthrow regimes or organizations that threaten American values and security. Neo-conservatives prescribe a U.S. policy of conducting a pre-emptive war against them when necessary.<sup>13</sup>

Neo-conservatives prefer unilateralism to multilateralism because they regard international law and institutions as constraining American power.<sup>14</sup> They are skeptical about roles of international institutions since international treaties and multilateral agreements are not very helpful in achieving U.S. foreign policy goals, and, at worst, they severely limit its sovereignty and freedom of action. Neo-conservatives also have a unilateralist view about the utility of an alliance. In other words, they take a view of utilizing an alliance only if it conforms to American leadership and is useful in solving problems facing the U.S.<sup>15</sup>

## 3. Liberal Internationalism

Liberal internationalists conceive of American core national interest as creating a more peaceful and collaborative world order founded on strong international institutions and the spread of democracy under U.S. leadership. This conception was influenced by former President Woodrow Wilson's thought that the spread of democracy is essential to global stability.<sup>16</sup> Liberal institutionalists have a positive view about the role and capacity of international institutions, particularly the

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12. Skidmore, *Paradoxes*, 5–6.

13. Mohammed Nuruzzaman, "Beyond the Realist Theories: 'Neo-Conservative Realism' and the American Invasion of Iraq," *International Studies Perspectives*, vol. 7, issue 3 (August 2006): 250–51; and Yuen Foong Khong, "Neo-conservatism and the Domestic Source of American Foreign Policy: The Role of Ideas in Operation and Iraqi Freedom," in *Foreign Policy: Theories · Actors · Cases*, Steve Smith et al., eds. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), 256–58.

14. Fukuyama, *Crossroads*, 64–65.

15. John Ikenberry and Charles Kupchan, "Liberal Realism: The Foundations of a Democratic Foreign Policy," *The National Interest*, issue 77 (2004): 44.

16. Skidmore, *Paradoxes*, 7.

United Nations, in promoting international cooperation and peace in the post-Cold War world. Since effective international institutions are needed to enhance capabilities of the international society to address global problems arising from deepening international interdependence, developing such institutions is considered to be a vital U.S. interest.<sup>17</sup> Liberal institutionalists urge Washington's policy makers to pursue a multilateral foreign policy. Such a policy consists of making efforts to create and sustain international institutions, which will facilitate the coordination of U.S. relations with other cooperative states, and of complying with rules, norms, and principles provided by the institutions.<sup>18</sup>

Unlike neo-conservatives or realists, liberal internationalists argue that the U.S. should pursue a policy of engagement, rather than one of containment or confrontation, through multilateral mechanisms towards non-democratic countries. In other words, the engagement policy aims to induce them to gradual internal reform by promoting their openness and exposing their people to democratic practices through cooperation within the framework of international institutions. In order to entice non-cooperative or hostile states into cooperation, liberal institutionalists also favor an engagement policy centered upon incentives, such as multilateral aid, economic cooperative agreements, and international regimes, rather than a pressure policy based on sanctions and other coercive measures.<sup>19</sup> Although U.S. military power is overwhelmingly dominant, military means are considered to be very ineffective in exercising influence in non-military issue areas. Liberal institutionalists also estimate that economic sanctions tend to be ineffective in coercing other countries into changing their policies and behavior. But they expect that multilateral sanctions will be more effective than unilateral ones when they are inevitably used.<sup>20</sup>

## **II: The Obama Administration's North Korea Policy: Strategic Patience**

During the two terms of the Obama Administration, it pursued a policy of so-called "strategic patience" in the face of North Korea's persistent pursuit of its nuclear program and cycles of provocations. As soon as former President Obama took office in January 2009, Pyongyang committed a series of provocations, including a test of long-range ballistic missile on April 5 and a second nuclear test on May 14. In reaction to the tests, the UN Security Council unanimously adopted Resolution 1874 in June 2009 to impose further economic sanctions on North Korea, such as authorizing UN member states to inspect its cargo and

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17. Callahan, *Logics*, 94–99.

18. David Skidmore, "Understanding the Unilateralist Turn in U.S. Foreign Policy," *Foreign Policy Analysis* 2 (2005): 208–20.

19. Skidmore, *Paradoxes*, 7.

20. Callahan, *Logics*, 100–102.

destroy any goods suspected of being connected to its nuclear program, and extending the arms embargo on it.<sup>21</sup>

Coping with North Korea's provocations, the Obama Administration formulated and mostly held to a North Korea policy that then-Secretary of State Hillary Clinton described as "strategic patience in close coordination with our six-party allies."<sup>22</sup> The key stance of the strategic patience policy was that the U.S. would not engage in negotiations with North Korea until the latter first shows the concrete evidence of committing to denuclearization. Based on such a policy, Washington demanded that Pyongyang should first "take concrete, irreversible denuclearization steps toward fulfillment of the 2005 Joint Statement of the Six-Party Talks," as a precondition for direct talks.<sup>23</sup> The policy included closely cooperating with the U.S. allies, the Republic of Korea (ROK) and Japan, in deterring and taking actions against North Korea's provocations, and pressuring Pyongyang through multilateral U.N. and unilateral sanctions to halt and abandon its nuclear program. The policy also involved persuading China, North Korea's long-standing ally and largest trading partner, to put necessary pressure more on the country to stop its nuclear program and military provocations.<sup>24</sup>

The U.S. policy of strategic patience is interpreted as deriving from the blending of realist and liberal internationalist schools of thought. The policy goal was to achieve the verifiable denuclearization of North Korea through multilateral diplomacy based on the Six-Party Talks. For this goal, the bulk of the administration's first term fruitlessly devoted its diplomatic efforts to persuade Pyongyang to return to its commitment to abandoning its nuclear program, as previously promised in a Joint Statement of the Six-Party Talks agreed on September 19, 2005. According to the Statement, if North Korea dismantled its nuclear programs and returned to the Treaty on the Nonproliferation of Nuclear Weapons and to IAEA (International Atomic Energy Agency) safeguards, the five parties would agree to provide North Korea with U.S. assurance against an attack on the North; the eventual normalization of relations with the U.S. and Japan; economic aid and cooperation; and the negotiation for a permanent peace regime on the Korean Peninsula.<sup>25</sup>

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21. The UN Security Council, "Security Council, Acting Unanimously, Condemns in Strongest Terms Democratic People's Republic of Korea Nuclear Test, Toughens Sanctions," June 12, 2009, <https://www.un.org/press/en/2009/sc9679.doc.htm>.

22. "Clinton Calls 'Exploratory' Meeting with North Korea 'Quite Positive'," *Voice of America News*, December 10, 2009, <https://www.voanews.com/a/clinton-calls-exploratory-meeting-with-north-korea-quite-positive-78980687/416329.html>.

23. U.S. Department of State Bureau of East Asian and Pacific Affairs, "U.S. Relations with North Korea," October 18, 2016, <https://www.state.gov/r/pa/ei/bgn/2792.htm>.

24. Emma Chanlett-Avery et al., *North Korea: U.S. Relations, Nuclear Diplomacy, and Internal Situation*. CRS Report, Congressional Research Service. January 15, 2016, 6–7.

25. See "Joint Statement of the Fourth Round of the Six-Party Talks," September 19, 2005,

As North Korea refused to commit denuclearization and continued to develop nuclear weapons, however, the U.S. embarked on imposing punishing sanctions against it. This U.S. policy was consistent with the realists' policy prescriptions in dealing with hostile non-democratic states which develop weapons of mass destruction, that is, a policy of engagement based on carrot-and-stick diplomacy using both reward and punishment to induce their cooperation.

In the face of recurring North Korea's provocations during the first term of the Obama Administration, Washington sought to urge Pyongyang to stop them and return to the six-party talks, not only by holding high-level meetings between them, but also by applying multilateral economic sanctions on North Korea. The U.S. special representatives for North Korea policy held high-level talks three times, as part of efforts to restart denuclearization negotiations, in December 2009, July 2011, and October 2011. In an additional effort to revive the talks, former U.S. President Jimmy Carter, accompanied by the former leaders of Finland, Norway, and Ireland, visited Pyongyang, on April 25-27, 2011, to have meetings with its foreign minister and the president of its parliament.<sup>26</sup>

Finally, the U.S. held a round of bilateral talks with North Korea on February 23-24, 2012, and they reached the so-called "Leap Day Agreement" on February 29. Under this agreement, North Korea would impose a moratorium on its nuclear weapons and long-range missile tests, and suspend its uranium enrichment activities at the Yongbyon nuclear facility, and allow the IAEA inspectors to monitor the suspension. In return for these steps, the U.S. would provide the country with 240,000 metric tons of food aid under the intensive monitoring.<sup>27</sup> This agreement, if fully implemented, was expected to lead to the resumption of the six-party talks for denuclearization. The agreement failed to be carried out, however, as Pyongyang launched a satellite using a three-stage rocket, on April 13, 2012, in an attempt to develop ballistic missile technology, and Washington responded by cancelling its plan of food aid to North Koreans.

Since then, during the second term of the Obama Administration, Washington focused on applying escalating economic sanctions on the communist regime to press it to return to the negotiating table, while its previous policy of engagement through direct diplomacy was renounced. This policy was largely because the newly established Kim Jong-un regime recalcitrantly continued to augment its nuclear and ballistic-missile capabilities through their testing. The U.S. policy of pressure based on sanctions was still to follow the realist prescription of taking punishing measures against hostile regimes, as a part of carrot-and-stick

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<https://www.state.gov/p/eap/regional/c15455.htm>.

26. "Jimmy Carter leaves North Korea after peace mission," *The Guardian*, April 28, 2011, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2011/apr/28/jimmy-carter-north-korea-peace-mission>.

27. Victoria Nuland, "U.S.-DPRK Bilateral Discussions," Press Statement, U.S. Department of State, February 29, 2012, <https://2009-2017.state.gov/r/pa/prs/ps/2012/02/184869.htm>.

diplomacy, in case of their recurrent non-cooperation and provocations. As a result, the pattern of North Korean nuclear or ballistic missile tests and reacting stepped-up sanctions following U.S.-led U.N. Security Council Resolutions in mutual recrimination was repeated throughout the remainder of the Obama Administration.

As Table 1 below shows, the U.S. policy of pressure based on punitive sanctions was largely centered on multilateral economic sanctions under U.N. Security Council resolutions. Such a policy is interpreted as deriving from the liberal internationalism which prescribes multilateral sanctions, rather than unilateral ones, through international institutions, such as the U.N., in order to induce recalcitrant states to cooperate.

〈Table 1〉 U.N. Sanctions on North Korea during the Obama Administration

North Korean Provocation	UNSC Resolution & Principle Sanctions
2nd Nuclear Test (May 25, 2009)	Resolution 1874 (June 12, 2009) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Inspecting NK cargo on land, air, and sea</li> <li>• Expanding the arms embargo by banning all imports and exports of weapons, except for small arms and light weapons</li> <li>• Preventing financial services relating to the nuclear or missile programs</li> <li>• Not providing financial assistance to the NK nuclear program, except for humanitarian or developmental purposes</li> </ul>
Satellite Launch (Dec. 12, 2012)	Resolution 2087 (Jan. 22, 2013) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Expanding measures to seize and destroy material suspected of being connected to NK's weapons development or research</li> <li>• Expanding measures imposed on persons suspected of involvement with NK's nuclear program</li> <li>• Listing individuals and entities for asset freezes and the travel ban, for violations under Resolution 1718<sup>28</sup> and 1874</li> </ul>
3rd Nuclear Test (Feb. 12, 2013)	Resolution 2094 (March 7, 2013) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Adding nuclear and missile dual-use technologies and luxury goods to the list of banned imports</li> <li>• Designating additional individuals and entities for asset freezes and the travel ban</li> <li>• Blocking the NK regime from bulk cash transfers</li> <li>• Restricting NK's ties to international banking systems</li> </ul>

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28. Resolution 1718 was adopted by the U.N. Security Council on October 14, 2006, in response to North Korea's first nuclear test on October 9. The resolution banned imports and exports of heavy weaponry to North Korea, imposed an asset freeze of entities providing support for the country's nuclear and missile programs, and prohibited exports of luxury goods to the country. The full text of the resolution is available at [http://www.un.org/ga/search/view\\_doc.asp?symbol=S/RES/1718\(2006\)](http://www.un.org/ga/search/view_doc.asp?symbol=S/RES/1718(2006)).



4th Nuclear Test (Jan. 6, 2016) Satellite launch (Feb. 7, 2016)	Resolution 2270 (March 2, 2016) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Expanding the arms embargo to include small arms and light arms</li> <li>• Banning NK’s exports of coal, iron, iron ore, gold, titanium ore, vanadium ore, and rare earth minerals, except for livelihood purposes and for transactions unrelated to its nuclear or missile programs</li> <li>• Mandatory inspections on cargo to/from NK</li> <li>• Prohibiting countries from opening new financial institutions or bank branches in NK</li> </ul>
5th Nuclear Test (Sept. 9, 2016)	Resolution 2321 (Nov. 30, 2016) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Banning NK’s exports of monuments, copper, nickel, silver, and zinc</li> <li>• Imposing a binding cap cutting NK’s largest export, coal, by \$700 million per year (more than 60%)</li> <li>• Prohibiting the sale of new vessels and helicopters to NK</li> <li>• Requiring the closure of foreign bank offices, accounts, and subsidiaries in NK within 90 days</li> <li>• Expanding the list of prohibited dual-use items related to WMD</li> </ul>

Source: “UN Security Council Resolutions on North Korea,” Arms Control Association, August 2017, <https://www.armscontrol.org/print/5653>.

Under the policy of strategic patience, the U.S. moved to tighten security cooperation with South Korea by strengthening their joint deterrence and defense posture in the face of North Korea’s recurrent military provocations. In June 2015, the U.S. and ROK militaries established a new war plan, “Operations Plan (OPLAN) 5015” to include preemptive strikes on North Korea’s nuclear and missile facilities as well as its top leaders in a Korean Peninsula contingency. The new plan reportedly focused on carrying out the new operational concept of the “4Ds” to detect, disrupt, destroy, and defend against North Korean ballistic missile threats. Since 2016, the two allies have begun to conduct joint military exercises to practice the new plan, while they expanded existing ones, including rehearsals of surgical strikes on North Korea’s nuclear and missile facilities and raids for removing its leadership.<sup>29</sup> And they jointly developed and carried out the “tailored deterrence strategy” designed to provide the ROK with a “nuclear umbrella” against North Korea’s nuclear and missile threats. In order to effectively implement the strategy, they established the Deterrence Strategy Committee (DSC) in April 2015, a new deputy minister-level consultative body, to integrate the existing Extended Deterrence Policy Committee and Counter-Missile Capability Committee. The DSC has conducted annual joint exercises involving

29. “OPLAN 5015 (Operation Plans)” March 7, 2016, <https://www.globalsecurity.org/military/ops/oplan-5015.htm>; Anna Fifield, “In drills, U.S., South Korea practice striking North’s nuclear plants, leaders,” *The Washington Post*, March 7, 2016; and Michael Peck, “OPLAN 5015: The Secret Plan for Destroying North Korea (and Start World War III?)” *The National Interest*, March 11, 2017, <http://nationalinterest.org/blog/the-buzz/oplan-5015-the-secret-plan-destroying-north-korea-start-19747>.

the use of extended deterrence measures.<sup>30</sup>

In response to North Korea's fourth and fifth nuclear tests and test-launching of ballistic missiles in 2016, the U.S. military deployed its strategic assets, such as B-52 and B-1B bombers, F-22 stealth fighter jets, and the USS nuclear submarine, over South Korea to deter further North Korea's provocations.<sup>31</sup> Furthermore, the U.S. and the ROK in July 2016 decided to deploy the Terminal High-Altitude Area Defense (THAAD) system, an advanced missile defense system, to the U.S. forces in Korea in order to reinforce defense capabilities of the alliance against North Korea's ballistic missile threats.<sup>32</sup> These U.S. measures are consistent with a realist prescription of undertaking mutual security cooperation with its allies in order to effectively cope with hostile nations.

Despite its attempts through direct diplomacy and/or a series of punitive U.N. sanctions to persuade Pyongyang to stop provocations and return to the Six-Party talks, however, the Obama Administration's policy of strategic patience finally failed to achieve its main goal of halting North Korea's illicit nuclear and missile programs leading to the denuclearization of the Korean Peninsula. Since President Obama entered office, North Korea conducted four underground nuclear tests, including two in 2016, and about 50 ballistic missile and rocket launches. In addition, the country's nuclear threat expanded as a result of steady progress in developing nuclear weapons and missiles to deliver them through such tests. By late 2016, North Korea was assessed to have enough plutonium for about 10 nuclear warheads. In addition, it was known to have a facility to produce highly-enriched uranium for weapons. Experts estimated that if it was operating properly, the facility could produce the material for 6-8 uranium based warheads, bringing the total to 16-18 warheads by late 2016. Military analysts expected that by 2020 North Korea could have a nuclear arsenal ranging from 20 to 100 warheads.<sup>33</sup> Eventually, the strategic policy turned out a failure in dissuading Pyongyang from advancing its nuclear and missile programs.

The U.S. policy of strategic patience also failed to convince China to put diplomatic pressure and strictly implement U.N. sanctions against North Korea to the extent that the country could suspend its nuclear program and return to the negotiation table. Beijing had been passive and even reluctant in formulating and enforcing U.N. Security Council resolutions involving more punitive sanctions on Pyongyang. Rather, China tended to be supportive, rather than critical, of North

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30. ROK Ministry of Defense, *2016 Defense White Paper* (December 2016): 67–68, [http://www.mnd.go.kr/user/mnd/upload/pblicitn/PBLICTNEBOOK\\_201705180311469090.pdf](http://www.mnd.go.kr/user/mnd/upload/pblicitn/PBLICTNEBOOK_201705180311469090.pdf).

31. ROK Ministry of Defense, *2016 Defense White Paper*, 150.

32. For timelines and effectiveness of the THAAD, see ROK Ministry of Defense, *2016 Defense White Paper*, 251–54.

33. Daryl Kimball and Kelsey Davenport, "Recalibrating U.S. Policy toward North Korea," *Issue Briefs*, vol. 9, issue 1, February 2017, Arms Control Association, <https://www.armscontrol.org/Issue-Briefs/2017-02-01/Recalibrating-US-Policy-Toward-North-Korea>.

Korea, as a main trading partner and longstanding ally. Bruce Klingner, a senior researcher of the Heritage Foundation, described China as “enabler of North Korean misbehavior.” From his viewpoint, China acted as “North Korea’s defense lawyer” in the U.N. by “resisting stronger sanctions; watering down resolution texts; insisting on expansive loopholes; and minimally enforcing resolutions.”<sup>34</sup>

A primary reason for the failure of the strategic patience policy was because North Korea remained determined to become a nuclear weapons state which has enough nuclear warheads and ballistic missiles to assure regime security, while the country seemed to have no intention of giving up its nuclear program in return for incentives, such as economic aid and diplomatic recognition.<sup>35</sup> North Korea’s constitution was amended in April 2012 to describe the country as a “nuclear-armed nation.” In March 2013, the Kim Jong-un regime adopted a new “Byungjin Line,” that is, a policy of simultaneously pursuing the development of its economy and nuclear weapons. At that time, Pyongyang reiterated that its nuclear program was not “a bargaining chip” and announced that “nuclear weapons serve as an all-powerful treasured sword for protecting the sovereignty and security of the country.”<sup>36</sup> In light of this policy stance, North Korea has considered its nuclear armament as essential to its regime security against perceived external threats. According to the U.S. Intelligence Community’s views, Pyongyang’s nuclear program has been multipurpose for “deterrence, international prestige, and coercive diplomacy.”<sup>37</sup> It was also estimated that the Kim Jong-un regime has sought to become a nuclear weapons state as a way to secure its domestic legitimacy.<sup>38</sup> Hence it has had little interest in the resumption of the aborted negotiations toward denuclearization.

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34. Bruce Klingner, “Creating a Comprehensive Policy Response to North Korean Threats and Provocations,” Testimony before the Subcommittee on Asia and the Pacific Committee on Foreign Affairs, U.S. House of Representatives, September 14, 2016, 5. <http://www.heritage.org/testimony/creating-comprehensive-policy-response-north-korean-threats-and-provocations>.

35. Chanlett-Avery et al., *North Korea*, 8; Robert S. Litwak, *Preventing North Korea’s Nuclear Breakout*, Wilson Center, February 2017, 65–66, [https://www.wilsoncenter.org/sites/default/files/preventing\\_north\\_koreas\\_nuclear\\_breakout.pdf](https://www.wilsoncenter.org/sites/default/files/preventing_north_koreas_nuclear_breakout.pdf).

36. Greg Botelho, “North Korea: Nuclear program not a bargaining chip,” *CNN News*, March 16, 2013, <http://edition.cnn.com/2013/03/16/world/asia/north-korea-us-nuclear/index.html>.

37. Daniel R. Coats, Director of National Intelligence, “Statement for the Record Worldwide Threat Assessment of the U.S. Intelligence Community,” Senate Select Committee on Intelligence, May 11, 2017, <https://www.dni.gov/files/documents/Newsroom/Testimonies/SSCI%20Unclassified%20SFR%20-%20Final.pdf>

38. Scott Snyder, “Confronting the North Korean Threat: Reassessing Policy Options,” Statement before U.S. Senate Committee on Foreign Relations, 1st Session, 115th Congress, January 31, 2017, 1-3, [https://www.foreign.senate.gov/imo/media/doc/013117\\_Snyder\\_Testimony.pdf](https://www.foreign.senate.gov/imo/media/doc/013117_Snyder_Testimony.pdf)

Another reason for the policy failure was because the U.S. government made some miscalculations about North Korea. According to an analysis by Joel Wit, a senior fellow at the U.S.-Korea Institute at SAIS, the Obama Administration's policy makers were based on the following flawed assumptions about North Korea's intentions and circumstances: (1) weaken North Korea needs to improve its relations with the U.S. for help; (2) since the Kim Jong-un regime remains isolated, it would go broke; (3) in case of the North's continued provocations, China would change its reluctant position and strictly implement U.N. sanctions against the country; and (4) Pyongyang wouldn't comply with any settlements it would reach with other concerned nations.<sup>39</sup> Some other experts also point out that a faulty assumption about North Korea's collapse at some point among part of U.S. policy makers led them to persist in the strategic patience policy, which was called a policy of "wait and see," and thus respond so passively to Pyongyang's advancing the nuclear and missile programs as to fail to stop them.<sup>40</sup>

However, these assumptions turned out to be largely inconsistent with reality by the end of the Obama Administration. Above all, the North Korean regime showed considerable resilience in the face of tightening sanctions, diplomatic isolation, and economic hardship. In particular, North Korea's economy reportedly grew in 2016 at the fastest pace since 1999, in spite of step-up U.N. economic sanctions, according to South Korea's central bank data. The country's GDP in 2016 expanded by 3.9% over the year, which was the highest rate of growth since a 6.1% rise in 1999. The growth was largely driven by its mining, manufacturing, and energy sectors, along with military spending.<sup>41</sup> North Korea's foreign trade also steadily increased over the past decade. In 2016, it grew 4.7% year-on-year to reach \$6.55 billion which was a 123% increase compared to the 2007 trade value.<sup>42</sup>

China was passive and ambivalent responses to the North Korean nuclear problem and provocations, while it publicly declared that the denuclearization of

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39. Joel S. Wit, "Trapped in No-Man's-Land: The Future of US Policy Toward North Korea," North Korea's Nuclear Futures Series, US-Korea Institute at SAIS, (June 2016), 10–11, [http://38north.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/06/NKNF\\_Wit-2016-06.pdf](http://38north.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/06/NKNF_Wit-2016-06.pdf); and "The Way Ahead: North Korea Policy Recommendations for the Trump Administration," US-Korea Institute at SAIS, (December 2016), 11, [http://www.38north.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/12/2016-12-Policy\\_Wit.pdf](http://www.38north.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/12/2016-12-Policy_Wit.pdf)

40. See Jong Kun Choi, "The Perils of Strategic Patience with North Korea," *The Washington Quarterly*, vol. 38, no. 4 (Winter 2016): 57–72; Michael Hirsh, "Hillary's North Korean Problem," *Politico*, January 6, 2016; and Maria R. Coduti, "The Limits of 'Strategic Patience': How Obama failed on North Korea," *NK News*, November 2, 2016.

41. "North Korea 2016 Economic Growth at 17-Year High Despite Sanctions," *Reuters*, July 21, 2017.

42. Korea Trade-Investment Promotion Agency (KOTRA), *North Korea's Foreign Trade Trends in 2016* (July 2017): 3. <http://dl.kotra.or.kr/search/DetailView.ax?cid=314639>.

North Korea was one of its foreign policy goals. China has been reluctant to exercise enough diplomatic and financial pressure upon the DPRK to halt its nuclear program and return to the negotiations for denuclearization because the Chinese government has been concerned that such pressure might threaten the survival of the North Korean regime. U.S. experts assessed that Beijing has been putting its top policy priority on preventing the collapse of the regime in Pyongyang, rather than achieving its denuclearization. Beijing appeared to fear that its instability or collapse might cause a refugee crisis and the potential military intervention of the other foreign countries, especially the U.S., at the border between China and North Korea in case of power vacuum in Pyongyang.<sup>43</sup>

Because of its top priority on stability, Beijing was estimated to provide Pyongyang with most of its energy and food supplies through trade and aid in spite of increasing the latter's recurrent nuclear and missile tests.<sup>44</sup> In addition, the data shows that foreign trade between the two nations increased steadily during the Obama Administration. China was the largest trading partner of North Korea, accounting for 92.5% of the latter's total trade volume in 2016, the highest figure ever. Pyongyang's dependence on Beijing in foreign trade has deepened since 2005 when it exceeded 50% of North Korea's total trade volume for the first time. It exceeded 90% for the first time in 2014 and for three consecutive years until 2016. It is noteworthy that, despite economic sanctions imposed by U.N. Security Council Resolutions 2270 and 2321, the bilateral trade volume in 2016 increased by about 6% over the previous year to reach about \$6.06 billion which was a 207% rise over the last decade.<sup>45</sup> The data indicate that Beijing didn't seem to fully implement the U.N. sanctions of trade restrictions against Pyongyang.

In short, the policy of strategic patience during the Obama Administration is interpreted as reflecting the blending of realist and liberal internationalist prescriptions. The first-term administration pursued a policy of engagement and pressure in line with a realist prescription for a carrot-and-stick diplomacy not only by attempting to persuade Pyongyang to halt its nuclear and missile programs through high-level meetings and the deal-making of the "Leap Day Agreement" with Pyongyang, but also by applying multilateral economic sanctions. The second-term administration adopted a pressure-focused policy based on applying increasing economic sanctions on North Korea to coerce it to return to the negotiating table. The policy of strengthening joint deterrence and defense

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43. See Bates Gill, "China's North Korea Policy: Assessing Interests and Influences," Special Report, United States Institute of Peace (July 2011): 4–8, [https://www.usip.org/sites/default/files/China%27s\\_North\\_Korea\\_Policy.pdf](https://www.usip.org/sites/default/files/China%27s_North_Korea_Policy.pdf); Rinehart et al. (2016), 8–9; and Eleanor Albert, "The China-North Korea Relationship," Background, The Council on Foreign Relations, July 2017, <https://www.cfr.org/background/china-north-korea-relationship>.

44. Eleanor Albert, "The China-North Korea Relationship," Council on Foreign Relations, September 27, 2017, <https://www.cfr.org/background/china-north-korea-relationship>.

45. KOTRA, 2017, 14–15, <http://dl.kotra.or.kr/search/DetailView.ax?cid=314639>.

posture with the ROK was to follow the realist prescription for close mutual cooperation with allies in order to effectively deal with hostile nations. On the other hand, the strategic patience policy depended on a multilateral approach in which to seek the expansion of economic sanctions on North Korea which were adopted through diplomatic negotiations in the U.N. Security Council. This policy was consistent with the liberal internationalist prescription. However, its pressure-focused policy was out of accord with the liberal internationalist stance favoring an incentive-focused engagement policy. Ultimately, the policy of strategic patience failed to achieve its goal of pushing Pyongyang toward denuclearization mainly because of its holding on to the policy of becoming a nuclear-armed state, U.S. miscalculations about North Korea, and China's reluctance in pressuring the communist regime to abandon its nuclear and missile programs.

### **III: The Trump Administration's North Korea Policy: Strategic Accountability**

Since President Donald Trump took office on January 20, 2017, North Korea has continued its provocations by conducting the sixth nuclear test on September 3 and carrying out multiple ballistic missile tests until September, including launching two Hwasong-14 intercontinental ballistic missiles (ICBMs), for the first time, capable of reaching the U.S. mainland in July and two intermediate-range ballistic missile tests in May and August. In the face of such provocations, the Trump Administration has settled on a new North Korea policy, while it has taken defensive measures to strengthen its deterrence against them.

After completing a two-month review, in mid-April the administration adopted a new North Korea policy, called "strategic accountability," which would center on "maximum pressure and engagement" toward the denuclearization of the communist regime.<sup>46</sup> In this new policy, U.S. policy makers have considered North Korea's development of nuclear weapons as an "urgent national security threat and top foreign policy priority." They make it clear that the ultimate goal of the U.S. North Korea policy is to accomplish the "complete, verifiable and irreversible denuclearization of the Korean Peninsula and a dismantling of the

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46. For official statements about the new North Korea policy, see U.S. Department of State, Joint Statement by Secretary of State Rex Tillerson, Secretary of Defense James Mattis, Director of National Intelligence Dan Coats, April 26, 2017, <https://www.state.gov/r/pa/prs/ps/2017/04/270464.htm>; Secretary of State Rex Tillerson and Secretary of Defense James Mattis, "We are Holding Pyongyang to Account," *The Wall Street Journal*, August 13, 2017, <http://www.state.gov/secretary/remarks/2017/08/273409.htm>; and Susan Thornton, Acting Assistant Secretary for East Asian and Pacific Affairs, "North Korea Policy," Statement at a Testimony before the House of Foreign Affairs Committee, September 12, 2017, <https://www.state.gov/p/eap/rls/rm/2017/09/274003.htm>.

regime's ballistic-missile program."<sup>47</sup> This policy statement is intended to wipe out the possibility or concern that Washington's policy goal could change into simply one of halting or freezing North Korea's nuclear and missile programs. The components of the strategic accountability policy include (1) tightening pressure on North Korea through unilateral and multilateral economic sanctions; (2) not pursuing a policy of regime change through military means; (3) actively engaging with China to exert enough pressure on North Korea to change its behavior; (4) strengthening defense posture and military readiness, through close cooperation with South Korea and Japan, against North Korea's provocations; and (5) seeking conditional engagement with the communist regime.

First, the policy of strategic accountability calls for "maximum pressure" mainly through economic sanctions on Pyongyang to stop its provocative actions and to coerce the country into the negotiation table. Its focus on "maximum pressure" mainly based on increasing unilateral and multilateral sanctions is consistent with the realist prescription of taking punitive measures against hostile regimes, as a part of carrot-and-stick diplomacy, in the face of their recurrent non-cooperation and provocations. Under this policy, President Trump on August 3 signed into law a bill to strengthen sanctions against North Korea, as well as Russia and Iran. The sanctions on North Korea target those providing the country with crude oil and other products that help its nuclear and missile programs. They were first unilateral measures in response to Pyongyang's two tests of ICBMs in July. The new law also prohibits ships owned by the North Korean government or any country not complying with U.N. Security Council resolutions from docking in the U.S. and bans goods produced by North Korean workers overseas from entering the U.S.<sup>48</sup>

On the other hand, the Trump Administration has put the focus of its pressure policy on imposing multilateral sanctions through the U.N. Security Council resolutions against North Korea. Its officials made it clear that the U.S. would continue "to consolidate international unity on the North Korean issue through increased engagement at the U.N., at regional diplomatic forums, and in capitals around the world."<sup>49</sup> The case for multilateral approach through the U.N. is consistent with the liberal internationalist logic. Under this policy, Washington led the U.N. Security Council to unanimously adopt Resolution 2371 on August 5 to impose more punitive sanctions on the communist regime in response to its two tests of ICBMs in July. The resolution's provisions included a complete ban on exports of coal, iron, iron ore, lead, lead ore, and seafood which would reduce its annual export revenue of about \$3 billion by a third. The resolution also

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47. Tillerson and Mattis, "Pyongyang."

48. "Trump endorses new sanctions on North Korea," *The Korea Times*, August 3, 2017, [http://www.koreatimes.co.kr/www/nation/2017/08/103\\_234105.html](http://www.koreatimes.co.kr/www/nation/2017/08/103_234105.html).

49. Tillerson and Mattis, "Pyongyang."

prohibited countries from increasing the number of North Korean workers hired by them and from opening new joint ventures with the communist nation or expanding existing joint ventures through any new investment. Furthermore, it called for the resumption of the Six-Party Talks for denuclearization negotiations.<sup>50</sup> However, the new sanctions did not include any reduction or ban on exports of crude oil to North Korea mainly from China, which reportedly seemed to be a compromise resulting from U.S.-Chinese negotiations about the scope of the sanctions.<sup>51</sup>

Moreover, promptly reacting to North Korea's sixth and most powerful nuclear test of a possible hydrogen bomb on September 3, the Trump Administration took the initiative in adopting Resolution 2375 by the U.N. Security Council on September 11 which contains the most stringent sanctions ever imposed on the communist regime. The new resolution bans the export of all natural gas liquids and condensates to North Korea and prevents other countries from exporting crude oil to the country in excess of the current amount of 4 million barrels per year. And it limits the import of refined petroleum products to 2 million barrels per year which is equivalent to 45% of the current annual import volume. As a result, the sanctions would reduce about 30% of overall oil supplies to North Korea, if fully implemented. In addition, the resolution bans the export of all North Korean textile products, which are the second largest export category, and prohibits countries from providing new work authorization to North Koreans. It also bans new joint ventures with North Korea and requires existing joint ventures to be closed within 120 days.<sup>52</sup>

The sanctions of the new resolution fell short of those of the U.S.-led draft resolution. The U.S. government sought a full-scale oil embargo on North Korea and an international asset freeze on its leader Kim Jong-un and his sister Yo-jong, as part of the new sanctions. However, such measures were excluded from the final adopted resolution in order to win the support of China and Russia opposing them. In the process of multilateral negotiations at the U.N., the U.S. seemed to finally compromise with its two counterparts on the watered-down resolution to

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50. See the United Nations, "Security Council Toughens Sanctions Against Democratic People's Republic of Korea, Unanimously Adopting Resolution 2371," August 5, 2017, Meeting Coverage and Press Releases, <https://www.un.org/press/en/2017/sc12945.doc.htm>.

51. Michelle Nichols, "U.N. Vote Saturday on U.S. bid to slash North Korea exports over missile tests," *Reuters*, August 5, 2017, <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-northkorea-missiles-un-vote/u-n-vote-saturday-on-u-s-bid-to-slash-north-korea-exports-over-missile-tests-idUSKBN1AK1WX>.

52. See the United Nations, "Security Council Imposes Fresh Sanctions on Democratic People's Republic of Korea, Including Bans on Natural Gas Sales, Work Authorization for Its Nationals, Meetings Coverage," September 11, 2017, <https://www.un.org/press/en/2017/sc12983.doc.htm>.



ensure its adoption.<sup>53</sup> The effectiveness of the new sanctions largely depends on how fully and strictly China will enforce them.

On the other hand, President Trump on September 21 announced a new executive order authorizing the U.S. Department of Treasury to impose sanctions on individuals and entities that do business with North Korea. The new order contains provisions for (1) imposing sanctions on any foreign financial institution which conducts or facilitates significant transactions in connection with trade with North Korea; (2) expanding sanctions to individuals involved in the construction, energy, financial services, fishing, information technology, manufacturing, medical, mining, textiles, or transportation industries in North Korea; and (3) prohibiting vessels and aircraft visiting North Korea from entering the U.S. for 180 days.<sup>54</sup> This executive order was regarded as the most powerful unilateral sanctions ever against the communist regime, aiming to further contain and strangle its economic sectors, which supported its nuclear and missile programs. As the first action to implement the order, the Treasury Department on September 26 designated eight North Korean banks and twenty-six North Koreans working in China, Russia, Libya and the United Arab Emirates as additional targets of sanctions.<sup>55</sup> This measure was taken as a preliminary step to prevent any foreign financial institution from transacting with the North Korean banks so as to isolate them from the international financial system.

Moreover, President Trump on November 20 put North Korea back on a list of state sponsors of terrorism in a move aimed at stepping up pressure on the country. As designated on the list, the Kim regime will face four sets of U.S. sanctions: a ban on arms-related exports and sales; controls over exports of dual-use items; prohibitions on economic assistance; and imposition of miscellaneous financial and other restrictions, including blocking loans by international financial institutions.<sup>56</sup> In view of the fact that North Korea has been already taken under comprehensive U.N. and U.S. sanctions, its designation will have a symbolic effect of being branded as a “rouge state,” rather than an effect of imposing additional sanctions, so as to dissuade other countries from transacting with it.

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53. Somini Sengupta, “After U.S. Compromise, Security Council Strengthens North Korea Sanctions,” *The New York Times*, September 11, 2017, <https://www.nytimes.com/2017/09/11/world/asia/us-security-council-north-korea.html>.

54. For a summary of the new executive order, see the Office of Press Secretary at the White House, “Fact Sheet: President Donald J. Trump Increases Pressure to Cut off Funding for North Korea,” September 21, 2017, <https://www.whitehouse.gov/the-press-office/2017/09/21/fact-sheet-president-donald-j-trump-increases-pressure-cut-funding-north>.

55. Rick Gladstone, “North Korean Banks and Citizens Added to U.S. Sanctions List,” *The New York Times*, September 26, 2017, <https://www.nytimes.com/2017/09/26/world/asia/north-korea-sanctions.html>.

56. The U.S. Department of State, “Overview of State-Sponsored Terrorism,” <https://www.state.gov/documents/organization/31944.pdf>.

Next day the U.S. government continued to ratchet up economic pressure on North Korea by imposing new sanctions on 13 North Korean and Chinese entities, including 3 Chinese trading companies, a Chinese national, and 20 North Korean vessels. Given that North Korea's Maritime Administration, its transport ministry, shipping companies, and their vessels were included in targets of the new sanctions, they were primarily intended to block its maritime trade.<sup>57</sup>

Second, U.S. officials made it clear that Washington would not pursue a policy of regime change or collapse through coercive measures. In his first address to State Department officials on May 2, Secretary of State Rex Tillerson already issued the so-called "Four Nos" principle of North Korea policy in which the U.S. would not seek a policy of regime change or collapse, an accelerated reunification of the Korean Peninsula, or an excuse to deploy U.S. forces north of the Demilitarized Zone.<sup>58</sup> Tillerson and Secretary of Defense James Mattis in their policy statement reiterated this principle and add another "no" principle to it by saying that "we have no desire to inflict harm on the long-suffering North Korean people, who are distinct from the hostile regime in Pyongyang."<sup>59</sup> The principle gained support and consensus from the newly launched South Korean government, when President Moon Jae-in pointed out it as a basic direction shared between the two allies in his address on July 3 during his official visit to Washington D.C.<sup>60</sup> Since the principle was in line with the Chinese position of addressing the nuclear problem through dialogue and diplomacy, Beijing also officially welcomed it and reportedly urged Pyongyang to respond to it.<sup>61</sup> The principle is also consistent with the realist logic opposing a neo-conservative policy of regime change.

Third, the policy of strategic accountability places emphasis on China's role in exercising its "decisive diplomatic and economic leverage over North Korea" so as to stop the nuclear and missile programs and make the country return to the negotiation table.<sup>62</sup> Following this policy, Washington has urged Beijing to fully enforce multilateral U.N. sanctions against the Kim Jong-un regime. As a result, Beijing appeared to change some of its sanctions policy toward Pyongyang and thus became somewhat willing to implement U.N. sanctions. As evidence, China

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57. Matthew Pennington, "U.S. slaps new sanctions on North Korean, Chinese companies," *The Washington Times*, November 21, 2017, <https://www.washingtontimes.com/news/2017/nov/21/us-announcing-new-nkorea-sanctions-after-terror-de/>

58. Secretary of State Rex Tillerson, "Remarks to U.S. Department of State Employees," May 3, 2017, <https://www.state.gov/secretary/remarks/2017/05/270620.htm>.

59. Tillerson and Mattis, "Pyongyang."

60. "In US, Pres. Moon stresses North Korea policy based on 'four nos'," *The Hankyoreh*, July 3, 2017, [http://english.hani.co.kr/arti/english\\_edition/e\\_international/801214.html](http://english.hani.co.kr/arti/english_edition/e_international/801214.html).

61. Michael Martina, "China welcomes U.S. seeking dialogue with North Korea," *Reuters*, August 3, 2017, <https://uk.reuters.com/article/uk-northkorea-missiles-china/china-welcomes-u-s-seeking-dialogue-with-north-korea-idUKKBN1AJ0JS>.

62. Tillerson and Mattis, "Pyongyang"

has continued to suspend all imports of coal from North Korea since late February 2017 in order to implement the sanctions imposed by Resolution 2321. Consequently, China's coal imports from North Korea in the first half of 2017 declined 74.5% from 2016. However, the bilateral trade value was estimated to increase by 10.5% year-on-year to \$2.55 billion due to a rise in China's non-sanctioned exports.<sup>63</sup> The data shows that despite the enforcement of U.N. sanctions by China, the North Korean economy has not been adversely affected and thus that they have not been effective.

In the face of Pyongyang's two tests of ICBMs in July, Beijing also played an active role in adopting Resolution 2371. The new resolution was worked out as a result of several weeks of painstaking negotiations between Washington and Beijing. Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi mentioned that his government would be committed to enforcing the new sanctions, even though "it will mainly be China paying the price for implementing the resolution" due to its close economic relationship with North Korea.<sup>64</sup> Beijing started to implement the new sanctions under Resolution 2371 on August 15 when China's Ministry of Commerce issued import bans imposed on coal, iron, iron ore, lead, and seafood from the North.<sup>65</sup>

Engagement with China on which the new policy puts emphasis coincides with the realist stance favoring an engagement policy based on carrot-and-stick diplomacy. To induce Beijing to play a more active role in resolving the North Korean nuclear problem, President Trump reportedly offered Chinese President Xi Jinping more favorable trade terms in return for Beijing's assertive role in addressing it at their summit meeting in April 2017.<sup>66</sup> In addition, as mentioned above, U.S. policy makers have reaffirmed that their administration will not seek regime change, the collapse of the regime, an accelerated reunification, and an excuse to send the U.S. military north of the 38th parallel.<sup>67</sup> This "Four Nos" policy is considered as an incentive to induce Beijing, which has been worried about the instability and consequential collapse of the communist regime, to rein in North Korea.

On the other hand, Washington used sticks to pressure Beijing to rein in

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63. KOTRA, "A Surge in Chinese Trade with North Korea? A Strong Refutation by the Chinese Government," (in Korean), Global Market News, <http://news.kotra.or.kr/user/globalBbs/kotranews/10/globalBbsDataView.do?setIdx=247&dataIdx=160557>.

64. "China says willing to pay the price for new N. Korea sanctions," *Reuters*, August 8, 2017, <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-northkorea-missiles-china-idUSKBN1A0011>.

65. "China to ban North Korean coal and iron imports from August 15th," *The Hankyoreh*, August 15, 2017, [http://english.hani.co.kr/arti/english\\_edition/e\\_northkorea/806876.html](http://english.hani.co.kr/arti/english_edition/e_northkorea/806876.html).

66. "Trump Says He Offered China Better Trade Terms in Exchange for Help on North Korea," *The Wall Street Journal*, April 12, 2017, <https://www.wsj.com/articles/trump-says-he-offered-china-better-trade-terms-in-exchange-for-help-on-north-korea-1492027556>.

67. Secretary of State Rex Tillerson, "Remarks at a Press Availability," U.S. Department of State, August 1, 2017, <https://www.state.gov/secretary/remarks/2017/08/272979.htm>.

Pyongyang. As a stick, late in June, the U.S. Treasury Department took a punitive measure toward China by imposing secondary sanctions on a shipping company, a bank, and two individuals from China because of their financial ties to North Korea's nuclear program.<sup>68</sup> On August 22, it also imposed new secondary sanctions against ten companies and six individuals from China and Russia for their aiding North Korea's nuclear and missile programs through their trading. Dandong Zhicheng Metallic Material, one of the largest importers of North Korean coal, was among the Chinese companies subject to sanctions.<sup>69</sup> After the U.N. Security Council decided to impose the strongest sanctions against the communist regime on September 11 in response to its sixth nuclear test, the U.S. House Foreign Affairs Committee Chairman Rep. Ed Royce has reportedly asked the U.S. government to impose secondary sanctions on 12 large Chinese banks as part of stringent measures to cut off North Korea's access to the international financial system. And U.S. Treasury Secretary Steven Mnuchin threatened to impose additional sanctions on China if it fails to implement the new U.N. sanctions.<sup>70</sup> Moreover, President Trump's new administrative order on September 21, whose main purpose was to apply sanctions against foreign financial institutions related to significant trade deals with North Korea, is interpreted as aiming to pressure China to restrict its banks from conducting transactions with North Korea. The measure taken by the U.S. Treasury Department on September 26 to designate eight North Korean banks and twenty-six North Koreans in their overseas branches on its sanction blacklist is also believed to be intended mainly to curb Chinese financial transactions with North Korea.

Fourth, the policy of strategic accountability calls for strengthening defense measures and military readiness through the close cooperation with South Korea and Japan in order to deter and respond to North Korean provocations, such as the deployment of the THAAD in South Korea, the deployment of U.S. strategic assets to the Korean Peninsula, and the enhancement of joint military exercises.<sup>71</sup> This policy is also consistent with a realist prescription of promoting mutual security cooperation with allies in order to effectively cope with hostile nations. In particular, in July 2016, the U.S. and South Korea had agreed to deploy the

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68. "U.S. Sanctions Chinese Entities With Financial Ties to North Korea," *The Atlantic*, June 29, 2017, <https://www.theatlantic.com/news/archive/2017/06/us-sanctions-chinese-entities-over-ties-to-north-korea/532317/>.

69. "China demands U.S. immediately withdraw N. Korea sanctions, warns they will damage ties," *The Washington Post*, August 23, 2017, [https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/china-bristles-at-us-imposed-sanctions-on-north-korea-trade/2017/08/23/32bfba3c-87ba-11e7-9ce7-9e175d8953fa\\_story.html?utm\\_term=.935ab63da557](https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/china-bristles-at-us-imposed-sanctions-on-north-korea-trade/2017/08/23/32bfba3c-87ba-11e7-9ce7-9e175d8953fa_story.html?utm_term=.935ab63da557).

70. "Ranking U.S. lawmaker seeks sanctions on 12 Chinese banks over N. Korea," *Yonhap News*, September 13, 2017, <http://english.yonhapnews.co.kr/national/2017/09/13/0301000000 AEN 20170913008800315.html>.

71. Thornton, "North Korea Policy."

THAAD system at the earliest possible date in order to intercept North Korea's ballistic missiles. In response to North Korea's test-launching four ballistic missiles on March 6, 2017, the next day the U.S. military began deploying the THAAD system in its new missile defense base in Seongju, some 300 kilometers south of Seoul in South Korea. Furthermore, in the face of increasing security threats from North Korea which were caused by its two tests of ICBMs in July and its sixth nuclear test of detonating a hydrogen bomb on September 3, the U.S. military completed the temporal deployment of a THAAD battery consisting six rocket launchers and a powerful X-band radar on September 7.<sup>72</sup>

In the meantime, the THAAD deployment has faced strong opposition from Beijing. Chinese officials have conceived of it as undermining the security interests of China because they are worried about the possibility that the U.S. may utilize THAAD's radar in South Korea to detect and track China's own missile systems so as to weaken the nuclear defense posture of the Chinese military. In addition, they doubt whether the U.S. intends to bring South Korea through the THAAD deployment into its missile defense system in Northeast Asia to contain China in the future.<sup>73</sup> In response to Beijing's opposition, U.S. officials stress that installing the THAAD system in South Korea is "defensive preparations against the acute threat of military actions directed against the U.S., our allies and other nations," and thus they criticize China's demand not to deploy THAAD as "unrealistic."<sup>74</sup> The THAAD issue has been one of the obstacles that the U.S. and South Korea have to overcome through diplomacy in engaging with China to pressure North Korea to change its provocative behavior. As a reprisal move against the THAAD deployment in South Korea, Beijing unofficially imposed sanctions on South Korean firms operating in China and restricted Chinese tourists to South Korea, which has led to tensions in the bilateral relations.

At the end of September, South Korea and China unexpectedly reached an agreement to restore their relations through high-level talks.

At that time, in return for Beijing's concession on the already deployed THAAD system, Seoul gave it the assurance of the following "three no's": no additional THAAD deployment; no participation in the U.S. missile defense system and no formation of a trilateral alliance with the U.S. and Japan.<sup>75</sup>

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72. "4 more THAAD launchers to be deployed Thursday," *The Korea Times*, September 6, 2017, [http://www.koreatimes.co.kr/www/nation/2017/09/205\\_236100.html](http://www.koreatimes.co.kr/www/nation/2017/09/205_236100.html).

73. Adam Taylor, "Why China is so mad about THAAD, a missile defense system aimed at deterring North Korea," *The Washington Post*, March 7, 2017; and Michael D. Swaine, "Chinese Views on South Korea's Deployment of Terminal High Altitude Area Defense (THAAD)," *China Leadership Monitor*, Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, February 2, 2017, 2-5, <http://carnegieendowment.org/files/CLM52MS.pdf>.

74. Tillerson and Mattis, "Pyongyang."

75. "South Korea's "three no's" announcement key to restoring relations with China," *The Hankyoreh*, November 2, 2017, [http://english.hani.co.kr/arti/english\\_edition/e\\_](http://english.hani.co.kr/arti/english_edition/e_)

Nevertheless, the issue has not yet been fully resolved. This is because Beijing has demanded a guarantee that the THAAD system won't technically infringe upon its security interests, while Seoul has asked for lifting sanctions and restrictions. Further bilateral talks are expected to be held to address the issue. Moreover, the U.S. military has regularly staged a massive show of force against North Korea by deploying its strategic assets, such as aircraft carriers, nuclear-power submarines, strategic bombers, fighter jets, and troops, to the Korean Peninsula for joint military exercises with South Korean forces in order to bolster the combined defense posture and military readiness to cope with North Korean provocations.

Finally, the policy of strategic accountability seeks engagement with North Korea on condition that it ceases provocative actions, such as nuclear tests and missile test-launches. Following this policy stance, Secretary of State Tillerson and other U.S. high-level officials have reiterated that Washington is willing to start negotiations with Pyongyang and that North Korea needs to stop its missile launches and nuclear weapons tests for negotiations to begin. When the U.N. Security Council decided to impose the strongest sanctions ever against North Korea's sixth nuclear test in September, U.S. Ambassador Nikki Haley stated that the U.S. is not looking for war and that Pyongyang has "not yet passed the point of no return."<sup>76</sup> State Department officials also reiterated Washington's intention to "solve this issue through diplomacy" if the communist regime shows "an interest in serious engagement," such as the cessation of its provocative actions.<sup>77</sup> These remarks indicate the U.S. government's willingness to conditionally engage with North Korea. While it did not indicate any specific agenda of the negotiations, the Trump Administration suggested that they would deal with economic aid and security assurance for the North Korean regime.<sup>78</sup> This policy stance is also consistent with the realist prescription of engagement based on carrot-and-stick diplomacy. Nevertheless, Washington has largely depended on the pressure strategy because of Pyongyang's recurrent provocative actions without any hint of change.

To sum up, the Trump Administration's policy of strategic accountability is considered as largely deriving from the realist school of thought. Its emphasis on

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76. "U.S. Ambassador Nikki Haley's Remarks Following the Adoption of UN Security Resolution 2375 on North Korea Sanctions," September 11, 2017, <https://usun.state.gov/remarks/7970>.

77. Thornton, "North Korea Policy."

78. David Sanger, "U.S. Opens Door to Talks with North Korea, While Flexing Military Muscle," *The New York Times*, August 2, 2017, <https://www.nytimes.com/2017/08/02/us/politics/tillerson-north-korea-negotiations-missile-test.html?mcubz=3>; "U.S. can talk to North Korea if it stops missile tests: Tillerson," *Reuters*, August 7, 2017, <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-northkorea-missiles/u-s-can-talk-to-north-korea-if-it-stops-missile-tests-tillerson-idUSKBN1AN054>.

pressure and sanctions is in line with the realist prescription of taking punitive measures against hostile regimes, as a part of carrot-and-stick diplomacy, in the face of their recurrent non-cooperation and provocations. The policy of strengthening deterrence and military readiness in cooperation with South Korea is also consistent with the realist logic favoring close mutual cooperation with allies in order to effectively cope with hostile nations. On the other hand, the administration has sought multilateral diplomacy and sanctions conducted through the U.N. Security Council. Its focus on multilateral approach utilizing the U.N. is in accord with the liberal internationalist prescription.

### Conclusion

Top officials of the Trump Administration reiterated that the Obama Administration's policy of strategic patience failed to stop North Korea's nuclear weapons program and thus that they decided to end the policy. Nevertheless, the Trump Administration's new policy of strategic accountability has been similar to the previous policy of strategic patience in some aspects. First of all, as examined above, both policies are similar in that they were derived from the blending of realism and liberal internationalism. Their focus on the pressure strategy of imposing diplomatic pressure and sanctions is consistent with the realist prescription of taking punitive measures as a part of carrot-and-stick diplomacy in case of recalcitrant non-cooperation and provocations. Their emphasis on strengthening security cooperation with the ROK is also in accordance with the realist logic favoring cooperation with U.S. allies to effectively deal with hostile nations. At the same time, their focus on multilateral economic sanctions against North Korea through the U.N. was to follow the liberal internationalist prescription.

In their some specific components, both policies are similar. First, they are the same for the reason that they all set "complete, verifiable and irreversible denuclearization of the Korean Peninsula" as an ultimate policy goal. Recently some U.S. policy experts suggested a policy option that the U.S. would accept a nuclear North Korea and pursues a policy of containing it by means of nuclear deterrence because they considered its denuclearization as unrealistic in view of recent advances in its nuclear and ballistic missile programs.<sup>79</sup> Nevertheless, high-level officials in the Trump Administration, like those in the Obama Administration, have rejected that option and stressed that they would "never recognize North Korea as a nuclear state."<sup>80</sup>

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79. See Bryan Bender, "Should the U.S. give up on nuke-free North Korea?," *Politico*, August 14, 2017, <http://www.politico.com/story/2017/08/14/north-korea-nuclear-weapons-241634>.

80. Thornton, "North Korea Policy."

Second, both policies are similar in that they focused primarily on a strategy of pressure and sanctions, rather than one of engagement and negotiations, mainly because the communist regime continued to take provocative actions to conduct nuclear and missile tests, while refusing to return to the negotiation table. The policy of strategic accountability has followed the same pattern as the policy of strategic patience during the second term of the Obama Administration demonstrated: applying multilateral step-up sanctions against North Korea through the U.N. Both policies have in common that Washington did not actively attempt to engage with Pyongyang without offering any concrete terms and incentives for denuclearization because of the communist regime's persistent refusal to change its nuclear-armed policy and get back to the negotiation table. Both policies only set forth conditional engagement that the U.S. would negotiate with North Korea only if it indicates an intention to give up its nuclear program by stopping nuclear and ballistic missile tests.

Third, both policies are alike because they were opposed of such a policy of regime change through military means as favored by neo-conservatives. Officials and experts in both administrations seemed to conceive of it as infeasible because of the expected risks of military options aiming at regime change, such as North Korea's large-scale retaliation, the possibility of triggering a full-scale war, massive civilian casualties, and China's backlash and possible intervention.<sup>81</sup> For the same reasons, the South Korean governments have consistently opposed taking such military actions. Fourth, both policies are similar in that they emphasized and demanded China's role in pressuring North Korea to halt its nuclear program and return to denuclearization negotiations. Finally, the policy of strategic accountability has in common with the policy of strategic policy that both of them included such measures as strengthening deterrence capabilities and military readiness in cooperation with South Korea and Japan to cope with North Korean threats and provocations.

Meanwhile, the policy of strategic accountability is different from the policy of strategic patience in other aspects. First, they had different priorities in dealing with nuclear challenges the U.S. faced. The Trump Administration has given a top priority of its foreign and national security policy to the problem of North Korean nuclear and missile programs and tried to tackle it "with more energy and urgency." In contrast, the Obama Administration reportedly placed its first priority on resolving the Iranian nuclear problem because it needed to exert too much effort and energy to dismantle North Korea's nuclear program which had already

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81. See Richard Sokolsky and Aaron Miller, "Regime Change in North Korea: Be Careful What You Wish For," *38 North*, August 2, 2017, <http://www.38north.org/2017/08/rsokolskyamiller080217>; and Robert Litwak, "Preventing North Korea's Nuclear Breakout," Wilson Center, February 2017, 78–82, [https://www.wilsoncenter.org/sites/default/files/book\\_downloads/preventing\\_north\\_koreas\\_nuclear\\_breakout\\_0.pdf](https://www.wilsoncenter.org/sites/default/files/book_downloads/preventing_north_koreas_nuclear_breakout_0.pdf).



advanced enough to produce small nuclear weapons.<sup>82</sup> Second, The Trump Administration has been more assertive than the Obama Administration in pushing China to fully implement U.N. sanctions and exercising pressure on North Korea in that the former has pursued an engagement policy based on incentives as well as secondary sanctions on China. In particular, the Trump Administration has stepped up substantial pressure on China by launching secondary sanctions designed to contain or cut off its companies and banks' transactions with North Korea.

Third, the North Korea policy of the Trump Administration is different from that of the previous administration in that the former has seriously taken into consideration military options, such as the rotational deployment of U.S. strategic assets near the Korean Peninsula, the redeployment of U.S. tactical nuclear weapons onto the Korean Peninsula, and a limited military strike on North Korea's nuclear and missile facilities.<sup>83</sup>

The main reason why the Trump Administration has considered military options earnestly is because the communist regime is estimated to be approaching the final stage of developing ICBMs with nuclear warheads targeted at the U.S. mainland. Since North Korea conducted the sixth nuclear test on September 3, high-level officials in Washington have reiterated the warning that the U.S. will resort to military options if diplomatic pressure and economic sanctions fail to curb North Korean nuclear and missile tests.

Finally, the Trump Administration's pressure policy has been more comprehensive and intensive than that of the Obama Administration. As the former's name, a policy of "maximum" pressure, indicates, the Trump Administration has more actively expanded and increased multilateral and unilateral sanctions on the Kim Jong-un regime with an explicit goal of isolating its economy. In particular, the Trump Administration has stepped up pressure through a series of unilateral economic sanctions in less than a year. To date, nevertheless, it is uncertain how effective such a pressure policy of the Trump Administration will be in compelling North Korea to change its provocative behavior and return to the negotiation table because it still takes more time for the policy to take effect.

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82. David Sanger, "North Korea Blast Revives Question: How Do You Contain Pyongyang?," *The New York Times*, January 6, 2016, <https://www.nytimes.com/2016/01/07/world/asia/north-korea-nuclear-test.html?mcubz=3>.

83. For a detailed review of possible U.S. military options, see Kathleen McInnis et al., *The North Korea Nuclear Challenge: Military Options and Issues for Congress*, Congressional Research Service (CRS) Report, November 6, 2017, <https://fas.org/sgp/crs/nuke/R44994.pdf>