

North Korea's Place in the U.S. Presidency: Ethos and Moral Judgments

Mikyoung Kim

Abstract

Foreign policy behavior is a function of combined elements such as strategic calculations, institutionalized mechanisms, interactive constructed identity, and transaction/opportunity costs. The top leaders' connectivity serves as an intervening variable in the process. The personal connection, of course, cannot show the whole picture of behind-the-curtain dynamics, and yet it still is a piece of the puzzle in explaining "why it happened the way it happened." This article, an inductive analysis of narratives, explains why the current nuclear impasse emerged at the end of the Clinton administration and how the George W. Bush administration chose to dismiss the Kim Jong Il regime as a legitimate counterpart by focusing on cultural elements of the top leaders' ethos and worldviews.

Keywords: U.S. presidency, North Korea, foreign policy, ethos, cultural affinity

Introduction: A Relationship of Their Own

The U.S. and North Korea share a unique relationship, and it is loaded with mutual distrust and strategic imperatives. Mutual distrust would drive them to dismiss each other, and yet the regional security imperatives keep them entangled. Pyongyang's 2006 underground test qualifies North Korea as a nuclear power, and

*Hiroshima City University–Hiroshima Peace Institute, Otemachi Heiwa Bldg.
9-10F, 4-1-1 Otemachi, Naka-ku, 730-0051, Hiroshima, Japan; mkkim@peace.
hiroshima-cu.ac.jp; 81-82-544-7607, Fax: 81-82-544-7573*



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its subsequent missile launches make the two nations' relationship ever more tenuous. Nuclear Pyongyang is a sore reminder of Washington's failure in its nonproliferation policy, while the intricacies of bilateral relations go beyond the conventional security realms. Pyongyang's human rights records make it more complicated.¹ The U.S. is under mounting pressure from Japan on North Korean human security threats, and from the international community on the plight of refugees. In order to understand Washington's stance towards Pyongyang, this article situates the Korean Peninsula within the American presidency.

A perspective entails positionality, which, in turn, reflects upon identity, interests and priorities.² When observing Washington, D.C., from the sole focus on North-east Asia, the evolution of North Korean problem can be puzzling.³ If we, however, reverse the directionality from Washington to the global affairs, Pyongyang ceases to be the sole problem, even if still one of many problems. The reversed positionality from the White House to the Korean Peninsula helps us weigh the multitude of competing agendas in the global setting. Had North Korea not been equipped with deadly weapons of mass destruction, it would have earned contempt or, at best, dismissal from the American leadership for its totalitarianism. This article, an inductive analysis of narratives, explains why the current nuclear impasse has emerged at the end of the Clinton administration and how the Bush administration chose to dismiss the Kim Jong Il regime as a legitimate counterpart.

An Underexplored Terrain

Given the respective strengths of the four main international relations (IR) theories (e.g., realism, liberalism, institutionalism and constructivism), the human factor is often missing in foreign policy studies.⁴ This paper explores the probable causal association between the top leaders' belief systems and policy priorities by looking at the Clinton and Bush administrations' attitudes toward the Korean Peninsula. The rationality assumption in realist tradition does not permit the gray area where a top leader's worldviews interact with national agenda setting. Political leaders are assumed only to maximize national interests within the Hobbesian framework, and the murky reality entailing hard-to-quantify variables such as belief system is hardly factored in. The liberalist tradition, on the other hand, focuses on interests of actors leaving the room for ideological influence in the decision-making process. Institutionalism, however, falls short on considering individual human volition because actors are to play the already prescribed role within limited institutional framework. Noninstitutional considerations such as cultural affinity and shared worldviews are relegated to the periphery. Finally, constructivism vindicates the importance of identity politics, but the debates are mostly at the national (e.g., Muslim nation-state) and group level (e.g., ethnic politics). The top leaders' propensities are rarely an issue for its macro- and mezzo-units of analysis. This article looks into a less chartered IR territory by linking the top decision-makers' ethos to foreign policy behavior.⁵

This paper is *not* an attempt to reduce national interests to elites' personal

propensities. It instead tries to show an understudied dynamic in the foreign policy process. Students of diplomatic history often focus on the official records of national history by putting personal and unofficial narratives to their disadvantage. Doing it otherwise self-evidently risks trivializing the grandeur of national history making. Then how can we account for much existing evidence which supports the saliency of worldviews and personal relationships often projected in (auto-)biographical narratives and informal testimonies? Great Britain's Margaret Thatcher and America's Ronald Reagan succeeded in ending the Cold War hand-in-hand, and their ideological camaraderie is widely known. Two decades later, Tony Blair's Great Britain became the biggest supporter for George W. Bush's "Global War on Terrorism." The US and UK are "traditional" allies. Venezuela's Hugo Chavez is another effective example in this. With his widely publicized defiance against George W. Bush's unilateralism, Chavez's expressive affinity to Cuba's Castro is not a secret. Venezuelan populism shares ideological compatibility with Cuban socialism in their collaborative resistance against U.S. hegemony. The historical adversity between Israel and Palestine is not only strategic, but it also crisscrosses ethnic and religious boundaries. These examples support the saliency of ideological orientation and corresponding values among the nation-states. With cultural distance, a disadvantage to further consolidate alliance, the leaders deploy ingenious tools for personal bonding. Japan's Junichiro Koizumi played up his liking of Elvis Presley to better connect with George W. Bush. Bill Clinton argued for his theoretical appetite in Japanese sushi to ameliorate the trade tension with Japanese prime minister Keizo Obuchi. Had the personal affinity played no role in international relations, the top leaders would not have expended their energy playing up the mediocre commonality.

Foreign policy behavior is a function of combined elements such as strategic calculations, institutionalized mechanisms, interactive constructed identity, and transaction/opportunity costs. The top leaders' connectivity serves as an intervening variable in the process. The personal connection, of course, cannot show the whole picture of behind-the-curtain dynamics, and yet it still is a piece of the puzzle in explaining "why it happened the way it happened." Put in plain words, cooperative bilateral relations are easier to achieve when negotiation partners share more similarities than dissimilarities.

Furthermore, foreign policy is a specialized field which often evades the watchful eyes of the citizens. The division of power in a democratic system grants the elected leaders, the executive branch, considerable authority in the decision making process, while other branches, judicial and administrative, serve to check and balance the executive power. Ample evidence points out that the foreign policy domain lies outside of such mechanism. The American public feels comfortable in delegating more power to the White House in foreign affairs than to domestic agendas because of the presumed expertise requirements.⁶ The top leader's belief system carries saliency in foreign policy agenda setting.⁷

This paper uses personal (e.g., autobiographies, biographies, and confidential interviews) as well as official (e.g., recently unclassified U.S. government documents under the Freedom of Information Act, briefing materials and other U.S. govern-

ment official reports for public consumption) data sources for investigative analysis. The primary research method is content analysis.⁸ In lieu of presenting a theory-driven hypothesis drawing on deductive reasoning, this research lets the data speak for themselves. The comparisons of the Clinton and Bush administrations' North Korea policies provide instructive evidence on the impact of top leaders' belief systems on foreign policy behavior.

Clinton's "Ambivalent Engagement" and Bush's "Malign Neglect"

One irony in Clinton's last days at the White House was the incoming George W. Bush administration's "ABC (All but Clinton)" policy, which rejected his predecessor's engagement strategy in its entirety. The Bush government went on to broaden its Pyongyang agenda to include, not only the nuclear issue, missiles and the terrorism list, but also conventional arms, human rights and illegal activities. Pyongyang's new counterpart at the White House was more judgmental and determined than before. Ever since it became clear that the Bush administration was going to discard Clinton's policy of engagement, some speculated on Bush's apparent need to augment his political legitimacy by differentiating himself from Clinton, while others attributed it to the radically transformed political milieu in the post-9/11 world.

Clinton's "Ambivalent Engagement"

The beginning of the North Korean nuclear impasse started with the end of the Cold War.⁹ Upon the demise of the Soviet Union, the U.S. and Russia aimed to reduce the size of their nuclear arsenals, affecting 100 nuclear warheads based in the southern part of the Korean Peninsula.¹⁰ The two Korean governments accordingly agreed on the Declaration on the Denuclearization of the Korean Peninsula in 1991.

The promising developments did not meet the optimistic expectations. After North Korea's ratification of its safeguards agreement with the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA), the agency discovered "discrepancies" in North Korea's initial report on its nuclear programs in September 1992. The discovery caused an alert in the international community. With the nascent Clinton administration still in disarray,¹¹ the Pyongyang regime played the nuclear card by bluffing that it would withdraw from the Nuclear Nonproliferation Treaty (NPT) in March 1993. After Washington's assurances that it would not use force against the Pyongyang regime or interfere with its internal affairs, North Korea agreed to consult with the IAEA in July 1993.

More ominous news followed the small concessions made by the Kim Il Sung regime.¹² In late 1993 and early 1994, the U.S. Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) and Defense Intelligence Agency (DIA) concluded that the Pyongyang regime was already in possession of a couple of nuclear warheads. They estimated that about 12 kilograms of plutonium had been separated from the fuel rods in previous years. Between

January 1994, when the allegations were made, and June 1994, when Pyongyang effectively ceased to be an IAEA member, Clinton's foreign policy team engaged in intense negotiations with North Korea. The negotiations were stalemated, however, due to Pyongyang's demand for compensation amid Washington's partisan politics.¹³

Amid increasing tensions, an inflammatory remark made by a member of the North Korean delegation fueled the sense of crisis.¹⁴ The chilling image of the prosperous South Korean capital turning into "a sea of fire" was interpreted to be more than the usual bluff. With Pyongyang growing increasingly defiant and belligerent, Washington and Seoul began preparing for a worst-case scenario. President Clinton seriously considered attacking the North,¹⁵ but was soon persuaded not to take the military option.¹⁶ President Clinton was in a situation he could not just "walk away from."¹⁷ From the time of the "sea of fire" remark in March 1994, North Korea lived up to its reputation for brinkmanship. In May, Pyongyang was confirmed to have begun removing spent fuel from its 5-megawatt nuclear research reactor. In less than a month, the regime took another drastic measure: withdrawal from IAEA.

An unexpected breakthrough was made amid the rapidly deteriorating situation. Jimmy Carter, the 39th U.S. president, self-initiated a visit to Pyongyang in June and produced very crucial momentum. He took along a CNN news crew from Atlanta, and negotiated on his own with Kim Il Sung. He tried to create a *fait accompli* by announcing to the world through CNN in real time the result of his talks with the North Koreans. He single-handedly succeeded in persuading North Korea to freeze its nuclear weapons program.¹⁸ The sudden death of Kim Il Sung, however, almost immediately after Carter's visit, made the situation precarious.¹⁹

Despite the concerns about the possible consequences of the elder Kim's sudden death, the new leader of North Korea stayed committed to bilateral negotiations with the U.S. Kim Jong Il turned out to be a shrewd pragmatist.²⁰ Only one month after his father's death, intense negotiations with the U.S. bore fruit in the form of an "agreed statement," which in turn led to the Agreed Framework in October 1994. The framework was as close as the U.S. has ever come in its negotiations with North Korea to achieving a path toward normalization of relations.

The agreement, however, did not stop North Korea from continuing with its nuclear weapons program. Partisan U.S. politics hindered the administration from faithfully implementing some aspects of the agreement, and Pyongyang soon began cheating. The Republican gains in the House from the 1994 congressional elections were so substantial that it became much more difficult for the Clinton administration to carry through with aspects of the Agreed Framework.²¹ The administration did deliver heavy fuel oil to North Korea, albeit belatedly,²² but eased sanctions only a very little. The North Koreans could have taken that as a very bad sign and at some point thereafter secretly restarted their nuclear programs.²³

Critics often argue that Clinton was naïve about North Korea and did not understand that it would not keep its promises. Such criticism is not entirely fact-based. The North did, in fact, keep the specific promises made in the Agreed Framework about the Yongbyon nuclear project. IAEA monitors verified the freeze on the site. On the other hand, the North did apparently begin cheating in regard to at least the

spirit of the Agreed Framework by pursuing uranium enrichment technology from some point during the Clinton years.²⁴

One valid criticism would be the lack of clear policy focus on the part of the Clinton administration after the Agreed Framework. Clinton administration officials believed the nuclear situation had been in check since 1994, and thought primarily that they now had to restrain North Korea's missile program. The unexpected Taepodong launch over Japan in the fall of 1998, and the close alliance with Tokyo, blinded the administration to other possibilities.

In the aftermath of June 2000 inter-Korean summit talks in Pyongyang, North Korean Vice Marshall Jo Myong Rok, Kim Jong Il's second in command, visited Washington, D.C., in October and delivered Kim's personal letter to President Clinton. The summit talks were assessed by many to be a potent opportunity to bring peace to the region. Clinton's secretary of state, Madeleine Albright, went to North Korea to lay the groundwork for a possible visit by President Clinton.²⁵ She brought back very positive reports on North Korea's sincerity about ending its missile programs.²⁶ The momentum quickly slowed, however, because Clinton, in his second term, was running out of time. In his final weeks in office, the American president chose to work on the Middle East instead of cutting a deal with North Korea. With North Korea, the Clinton administration tried, but did not try hard enough.

Bush's "Malign Neglect"

Unlike his predecessor, President Bush was never eager to engage directly with the North bilaterally. The Bush administration, however, restrained itself from publicly condemning the North Korean regime until the 2002 "axis of evil" remarks. The CIA report linking the terms of the Agreed Framework to the freeze of North Korea's nuclear reactor program triggered the hostile posture on the part of the U.S. in the post-9/11 context.²⁷ Washington also became adamant about Pyongyang's complete, verifiable and irreversible disarmament (CVID) at around this time. With the invasion of Afghanistan and Iraq, a need for multilateral framework became ever more pressing.²⁸ Nuclear North Korea demanded Washington's attention, and yet the U.S. could not engage in multiple contingencies simultaneously.

The six-party talks, Washington's multilateral invention, have been almost non-functional to Pyongyang's advantage. Amid the rising rivalry between China and Japan, the multilateral parties are deeply divided. While America's allies share an interest in neutralizing Pyongyang, there were signs of two divergent camps emerging within the six-party framework. The first group, consisting of Beijing and Moscow, sees no strategic advantage in cornering Pyongyang for neither of the two countries perceives Pyongyang to be an immediate military threat.²⁹ They argue for working with the North so as to deter any destructive behavior. Moscow stressed the importance of making "compromise solutions," in order to appease North Korea with Beijing's eminence as the key mediator and leader within the six-party framework adds more legitimacy to this line of strategy.

The second group consists of Washington and Tokyo. Unlike the Beijing-Mos-

cow dyad, they believe that North Korea poses a clear and imminent threat to regional security. They also judge Pyongyang to be morally repugnant, in light of its human rights record and the abduction incidents of Japanese citizens. These concerns and sentiments propel the Washington-Tokyo camp toward more punitive attitudes for North Korea. The passages of the North Korea Human Rights Laws in Washington and Tokyo were (mis-)construed as a device to induce popular subversion within North Korea with the hope they would lead to regime collapse. Pyongyang's nukes have given Japanese hawks a golden opportunity to reassert their remilitarization position. It is in Japan's best interests to endorse Washington's North Korean policy and remain its staunch ally. As South Korea's relations with Washington have been a bumpy ride, Tokyo's alliance with the United States has risen to be of supreme importance.³⁰ The division within the six-party talks and the very installation of the multilateral framework provoked further hostile reactions from North Korea.

Insistent on holding bilateral talks with the U.S., Pyongyang expelled the IAEA inspectors in 2002 and restarted its Yongbyon nuclear reactor in 2003. North Korea made it very clear that it was not going to give up its nuclear capabilities unless the United States made concessions first. Pyongyang's list of demands included lifting the economic embargo, removing North Korea from the list of state sponsors of terrorism, and annulling the North Korea Human Rights Law. Washington, on the other hand, told Pyongyang that it had to give up its nukes before any concessions could be made.³¹ Making it worse, Pyongyang allegedly sold 1.8 tons of uranium hexafluoride (UF₆) to Libya through a Pakistani illegal arms trafficking organization. Thus, the Kim regime added one more illegal activity to its long criminal record of drug trafficking, counterfeit circulation, and human rights violations. Nevertheless, North Korea's neighboring countries did not have much leverage in sanctioning Pyongyang's illicit activities. Instead, the six-party talks have stalled since June 2004, and North Korea's announcement to withdraw again from the multilateral talks on April 14, 2009, shows history repeating itself. Pyongyang, through its insistence on bilateral talks with the United States, was negating the effectiveness of the multilateral approach. Pyongyang's stance was that Washington had to be the sole negotiating partner in overcoming the impasse. The Bush administration, on the other hand, argued that a nuclear North Korea poses a security threat to the entire region of Northeast Asia and thus requires a multilateral resolution.

It is widely known that Pyongyang is a very difficult negotiation partner. The Kim Jong Il regime was making unrealistic demands as preconditions for the resumption of talks. For instance, North Korea demanded an apology from the Bush administration for having been labeled as one of the six "outposts of tyranny." It also asked the United States and Japan to resign from the talks. In addition, it expressed resentment towards Washington's attempts to put human rights on the negotiation table as an agenda.

A nuclear North Korea occupies a unique geostrategic position in Northeast Asia. Its three bordering countries (China, Russia and South Korea) and its neighbor (Japan), share a mutual interest in neutralizing North Korea. China does not welcome the massive influx of North Korean refugees taxing its infrastructure. More

fundamentally, Beijing fears an abrupt collapse of Kim Jong Il's regime that would lead to regional instability that in turn would hamper Chinese economic growth. South Korea fears that Washington might provoke paranoid Pyongyang by initiating a military confrontation, which might lead to Kim's fall, but would have horrific implications for the entire peninsula.³² Tokyo reacts to its armed and dangerous neighbor with particular anxiety; Japan went into panic after North Korea's Taepodong 2 missile flew over the island country on April 5, 2009, and it is still angry over Pyongyang's admission that North Korea abducted Japanese civilians during the 1960s and 1970s.

The Bush administration's securitization of nontraditional security issues was a crucial departure from that of the Clinton administration. Despite the existence of a plethora of critical policy assessments, the Bush White House did not demonstrate genuine concerns for the North Korean situation.³³ Pyongyang's nuclear test on October 9, 2006, further toughened Washington's stern approach.³⁴ The UN Security Council's unanimous resolution sanctioning North Korea on October 14, 2006, suggested room for temporary unity within the multiparty framework, but North Korea, as expected, was defiant against the U.S.-led sanction measures. The same story repeats itself in the aftermath of April 5, 2009, missile launch.

The Bush administration inherited the nuclear North Korea from President Clinton, and yet its efforts were not much more than "multilateral make-over." The Obama administration has inherited the self-inflicted wound of Bush's "malign neglect" tactics. North Korea, the ever-defiant underdog of the hegemonic world order, is a reminder of a series of U.S. policy failures in Northeast Asia. The following section addresses the "why" and "how" questions by focusing on the top leaders' ethos and diplomatic contingencies.

Ethos and Worldviews: Foreign Policy and Cultural Affinity

Ethos is an abstract concept. The most authoritative definition comes from anthropologist Clifford Geertz: "[Ethos] is ... the tone, character, and quality of their life, its moral and aesthetic style and mood; it is the underlying attitude toward themselves and their world that life reflects."³⁵ Following up on the explication made by Schwartz and Kim, this paper uses "ethos" and "worldview" interchangeably: "Worldview rationalizes ethos; ethos instills worldview with affect. Worldview and ethos are inseparable and converge in every cultural realm, including philosophy, religion, ideology, political values, mythology, art, and collective memory."³⁶ The foreign policy domain cannot be an exception for the affect of ethos and worldviews. As Huntington's "clash of civilizations" argument powerfully alludes to, religious and cultural considerations deserve more serious attention to better understand foreign policy behaviors.³⁷ The following section addresses the questions of how the American presidents' religious and moral ethos translated into their stance towards North Korea.

Clinton: Christian Ethos and the Middle East Peace Process

Despite what some assessed as a southerner's parochialism, President Clinton turned out to have a keen interest in international affairs. Having been taught to "look up to people others looked down on,"³⁸ Bill Clinton paid attention to world problems such as global poverty and AIDS. He was a sympathetic internationalist. As he tried to introduce progressive domestic policies such as welfare and medical reform, he also utilized foreign aid as an effective policy tool.³⁹ North Korea, however, failed to bring out the sympathetic internationalist in Bill Clinton. The Clinton administration's approach, derived from rational strategic calculations, was shaped by little vision or emotional investment. While avoiding public name-calling, Clinton did not show much compassion for the people of North Korea until he decided to provide large-scale food aid in the late 1990s.

Had it been without its nuclear capability and severe famine, North Korea would not have drawn much attention from the Clinton administration. The administration saw the strategic importance in the North Korean problems and negotiated with the Pyongyang regime with patience. The eight-year saga of Clinton's engaging with Pyongyang, however, ended without disarming the country. A deal with North Korea was "tantalizingly close" at the end of the Clinton administration, but he let the opportunity slip through his fingers.⁴⁰ How did Bill Clinton's ethos get played out in his foreign policy priorities?

As his term was nearing the end, President Clinton had to choose between the Middle East peace process and cutting a missile deal with North Korea. As previously noted, he had received a personal letter of invitation from Kim Jong Il to visit North Korea, and Secretary of State Madeleine Albright brought back very positive reports from her visit to the country. Around the same time, Yasir Arafat had given him hope for reaching an agreement with Israeli prime minister Ehud Barak, Yitzhak Rabin's successor. Clinton put priority on trying to reach an Israel-Palestine deal. His memoir does not give evidence that Clinton agonized about letting North Korea go. He was driven to close a deal with Israel and Palestine before his time expired.⁴¹

As for the reasons behind his choice, Clinton was not only aware of the powerful influence of the Jewish population in domestic U.S. politics, but the Middle East was also culturally closer to him than North Korea. His commitment to the Middle East goes back to his early days in Little Rock, Arkansas.⁴² After having lost the gubernatorial reelection campaign in 1980, he joined a pilgrimage to Jerusalem. The trip had a deep impact on Clinton.

Although North Korea posed as grave a security threat to the administration, there was no evidence of Bill Clinton's emotional attachment to the region. This was in stark contrast to his direct personal involvement with the Middle East peace process. Half-baked success and lost momentum define the Clinton administration's North Korea policy. It would be illogical to assert that Clinton's choosing of the Middle East peace process over North Korea at the crucial juncture came simply from his Christian faith and close personal ties with the Israeli leaders. Other variables, such as the Jewish influence on the U.S. domestic politics and the Middle East oil,

should not be excluded. And yet, the cultural elements discussed in this paper shed light on the murky gray area in the Clinton administration's North Korea policy.

North Korea was marginal in the American president's full plate of global issues. The issues that prevailed among the competing agendas meet certain qualifications such as crucial strategic importance, domestic political advantage, and emotional commitment, such as the president's own ethos. North Korea met only one category, whereas the Middle East peace process satisfied all three.

Bush: Moral Judgments and Global War on Terrorism

Americans are some of the most religious people in the world, and the Bush administration's Christian ambience received favorable approval ratings from the largely religious public.⁴³ As a born-again Christian, President Bush's religiosity lacked self-reflexivity and fluidity in viewing the world,⁴⁴ and this ethos was reflected in his foreign policy orientation. A clear-cut division between good and evil constituted the perceptual dichotomy in the Bush Doctrine.⁴⁵

Considering the centrality of moral clarity and tactics of preemption in the Bush Doctrine, the question was "Why Iraq, not North Korea?" After all, it was his father, George Herbert Walker Bush, the 41st American president, who installed Saddam Hussein in power, and yet George W. Bush tried to remove Hussein. The Persian Gulf War was an impressive accomplishment, and "U.S. support for Iraq in the Iran-Iraq conflict in the 1980s contributed to Hussein's power in the first place."⁴⁶ Despite the White House's 2002 national security strategy paper on mutual assured destruction (MAD), it was Iraq, not North Korea, which was targeted first.⁴⁷

The choice of invading Iraq, not North Korea, was an enigma in the U.S. intelligence community even though the community was an accomplice in falsifying documents in the circumstantial support of Hussein's possession of weapons of mass destruction (WMD). Then why did the Bush administration continue to morally denounce the Kim Jong Il regime? As Hersh points out, the ideological nature of attacking Iraq was deeply embedded in post-9/11.⁴⁸ Its security paradigm changed: the U.S. was at war with a faceless enemy, and Saddam Hussein put a face to the invisible adversary. The American government reshuffled its structure, including the creation of the Department of Homeland Security and Office of Homeland Security at the White House.⁴⁹ The doctrine justified taking a revenge on an enemy (any enemy, for that matter) for the attacks, and Iraq was the most convenient target. Furthermore, the oil-rich Middle East was more attractive to an American president who had his first big business break from the Texas oil industry.⁵⁰ His first choice of retaliation, Saddam's Iraq, did not mean other enemies were off the hook. On the contrary, his condemnation of the Kim Jong Il regime remained personal and harsh.

The Bush doctrine's "moral clarity" was manifested in the personalized condemnation of Pyongyang's leader. President Bush's disgust for North Korea's human rights record was one of the driving forces behind the vilification of Kim Jong Il. President Bush called Kim Jong Il a "tyrant," Vice President Dick Cheney denounced him "one of the world's most irresponsible leaders," National Security Adviser Con-

doleezza Rice labeled his regime “outpost of tyranny,”⁵¹ and Undersecretary of State John Bolton referred to North Korea as “a hellish nightmare.”⁵² There exist ample accounts of President Bush’s personal hatred of Kim Jong Il.⁵³ The Bush administration’s public denouncement of its North Korean adversary is another demonstration of its moral crusade.⁵⁴ Washington’s moral clarity was translated into a direct and clear setback for its handling of the North Korean situation. The distinction was blurred between strategic rationality and personal denunciation in its execution of the North Korean policy.⁵⁵

Amid harsh moral judgment, the Bush administration’s half-hearted approach led to several years of brinkmanship, missed opportunities, and the disastrous results of North Korea as a nuclear power.⁵⁶ The post-9/11 threats helped the Bush administration to consolidate strong internal cohesion. The resulting absence of internal diversity and healthy dissent led to hegemonization of the American power in the world. As Gramsci’s discussion on hegemony directs much attention to the way public consensus is elicited, nonstrategic apparatuses (e.g., framing of North Korean moral degeneration) exerted significant influence on the U.S. approach to Pyongyang.⁵⁷

Conclusion: North Korea and American Presidency

For the Clinton and Bush administrations, the gray area in their North Korea policies was salient in explaining why the current situation has reached the point it has today. The North Korean problem is an amalgam of historical, cultural, moral and strategic residues. As Clinton’s domestic reform efforts have a checkered record, his foreign policy behaviors have left mixed appraisals. The Clinton administration’s deployment of a skillful negotiating team resulted in last-minute breakdown, paving the road for nuclear Pyongyang. Bill Clinton’s political ambitions and religious devotion led him to work on the Middle East instead of the culturally alien Korean Peninsula: the Middle East won to lose, and North Korea lost to stick around.

The Bush administration’s subsequent multilateral installation of six-party talks has been ineffective in improving the situation. Making it more challenging, the Kim Jong Il regime remained as defiant against the U.S. as ever until the Bush administration signaled a willingness for a compromise in the aftermath of October 9, 2006, nuclear test. The Bush administration’s delisting of Pyongyang as a terrorism-sponsoring state came too late, as its term was ending with the Iraq and Afghanistan failures. Diplomacy is a complicated process which often lies outside of the rationality assumption of *realpolitik*. This historical-cultural analysis of the two U.S. administrations’ North Korea policy suggests little room for optimism in the future of U.S.–DPRK relations. The Obama administration has reconfirmed its commitment to nuclear nonproliferation, and that obviously includes nuclear North Korea, but Pyongyang’s April 5 missile launch was a bold tester of Obama’s determination to reactivate the dialogical mode of diplomacy, a clear demarcation from the Bush Doc-

trine. The U.S. is concerned with North Korean nuclear development for two primary reasons: 1) Japan, equipped with high levels of dual technology and economic strength, may decide to arm itself to deter the North Korean threat, emerging as a U.S. military rival; and 2) the North Korean proliferation of nuclear technology to the Middle East might add fuel to the hard-to-put-out fire.⁵⁸

Making predictions is beyond the realm of this research. And yet, my analysis leaves us with more reasons to be pessimistic than hopeful. Had the pending issues been purely strategic in military and economic terms, making predictions would be a less challenging task. The differences in moral judgment and aesthetic values can undermine relations among theoretical allies.

Notes

1. Since the end of the Cold War, the issues that had not been considered traditional security agendas—such as human rights, illegal migration, piracy, energy and environmental degradation—have increasingly become security issues. The process and practice of transforming these nontraditional security issues into core security concerns is generally called “securitization.” See Ole Weaver, “Securitization and Desecuritization,” in Ronnie D. Lipschutz (ed.), *On Security* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1995), pp. 46–86.

2. See Peter J. Katzenstein, “Introduction: Alternative Perspective on National Security,” in Peter J. Katzenstein (ed.), *Culture of National Security: Norms and Identity in World Politics* (Ithaca and New York: Cornell University Press, 1996), pp. 1–32; Wendt, Alexander, “Anarchy Is What States Make of It: The Social Construction of Power Politics,” *International Organization*, Vol. 46, No. 2, 1992, pp. 391–425.

3. Seymour M. Hersh, “The Cold Text: What the Administration Knew about Pakistan and North Korea’s Nuclear Program,” *The New Yorker*, January 27, 2003 (http://www.newyorker.com/printables/fact/030127fa_fact, accessed on September 19, 2006); Kaplan, Fred. May, 2004. “Rolling Blunder: How the Bush Administration Let North Korea Get Nukes,” *Washington Monthly* (www.washingtonmonthly.com/features/2004/0405.kaplan.html, accessed on September 7, 2006).

4. Hoyeol Yu, “Pukhan Munjae’rul Utoke Darul’gut’inga? [How to Address the North Korean Problem,” a paper presented at International Conference on North Korean Nuclear Problem and ROK–U.S. Relations, Organized by Ilmin International Relations Institute, May 15, 2009.

5. John Feffer notes, with a caveat, the importance of personal relationships in foreign policy as in the following: “What ultimately determines the trajectory of U.S.–ROK relations: the personal relationship of the leaders, the respective economic and political philosophies of the Administrations, the overlap in military planning and goal-setting, or the overall geostrategic visions of the two countries? ... Personal relationships are important, but ultimately they are transitional, subject to whims and elections.” It is true that personal relationships between political leaders are temporal in nature. However, close personal bonding synchronized in fortuitous timing can make the implementation of a certain policy easier. See John Feffer, February 15, 2005, “Caught in the Muddle: Round Two of Bush vs. North Korea” (<http://antiwar.printthis.clickabilty.com/pt/cpt?action=cpt&title>, accessed on October 7, 2006).

6. Daniel Yankelovich, “Poll Positions,” *Foreign Affairs*, Fall 2005, pp. 13–33.

7. On the limited effectiveness of dissent to stop the top leader from exercising personal discretion, see Richard Haas, “The Dilemma of Dissent,” *Newsweek*, May 11–18, 2009, p. 27–28.

8. Qualitative research methods of this paper can come across as being anecdotal. However, I argue for the importance of delineating analytical themes emerging from the expressed words and behaviors rather in numbers.

9. On September 27, 1991, President George H. W. Bush announced a unilateral plan to withdraw all naval and land-based tactical nuclear warheads deployed overseas. Meanwhile, the North Korean regime is known to have begun developing its nuclear programs in the early 1980s. Joel S. Wit, Daniel B. Poneman and Robert L. Gallucci, *Going Critical: The First North Korean Nuclear Crisis* (Washington, D.C.: The Brookings Institution, 2004), p. 409.

10. In the mood of post–Cold War détente, the two Koreas also signed the South–North Joint

Declaration on the Denuclearization of the Korean Peninsula on the last day of 1991. In the previous month, South Korean President Roh Tae Woo took the initiative by announcing the Declaration on the Denuclearization of the Korean Peninsula.

11. Interview, August 8, 2004.

12. Following Korean convention, Korean family names precede given names.

13. Washington's North Korean debates were split between "dismantlement-firsters" and "safeguards-firsters." See Wit, et al, pp. 139–143.

14. According to Wit, et al (p. 149), Pak Yong Su of the North told Song Young Dae of the South, "Mr. Song, your side has to deeply consider the dear price of war. Seoul is not far from here. If war breaks out, it will be a sea of fire. Mr. Song, it will be difficult for you to survive."

15. Interview, August 8, 2005; "Clinton Had Plans to Attack N. Korea Reactor" (www.CNN.com), accessed on Dec. 16, 2002.

16. Estimates of casualties and property damage were far too grave to initiate preemptive strikes. The Clinton defense team estimated that for the first ninety days of military confrontation, about 52,000 and 490,000 would be killed or wounded in the U.S. military and the South Korean military, respectively. Financial costs were projected to be \$61 billion. Don Oberdorfer, *The Two Koreas: A Contemporary History* (New York: Basic Books, 2001), p. 315.

17. Oberdorfer, *Ibid.*, p. 316.

18. Many in the White House were appalled by the former president's willful behavior. After some days of debate, they decided that there would be great risk in repudiating him and they might as well take the risk of accepting what he had done and seeing if Ambassador Robert Gallucci, the chief U.S. negotiator with Pyongyang, could use it as a basis for reaching a detailed, workable agreement with the North Koreans. But thereafter, Clinton administration officials were always very nervous that Carter would again insert himself and visit Pyongyang. Very few U.S. officials wanted that, because he was regarded as "uncontrollable." Ironically, by the end of the Clinton's second term, Clinton's approach toward North Korea was very much along the lines of Carter's general approach. It is probable that President Clinton himself tendered support to Jimmy Carter's approach to North Korea given their close association, which started during very early in Clinton's political career (interview, August 8, 2005).

19. Despite widespread international doubts about Kim Jong Il's governing ability, he remained in control after his father's death (see State Department FOIA release, State Department Talking Points [in re: North Korean economic situation and food aid], ca. May 1996 (www.gwu.edu/~nsarchiv/NSAEBB/NSAEBB164), accessed on August 15, 2005).

20. Stapleton Roy argues in a State Department briefing document, "The North Koreans have survived, independent and prickly, among their larger neighbors precisely because they have not had an ideologically rigid foreign policy. On the contrary, the policy has reacted to changing circumstances in and around the peninsula." State Department FOIA release, Memorandum, Roy to Secretary of State Albright, Subject: Pyongyang at the Summit, June 16, 2000 (www.gwu.edu/~nsarchiv/NSAEBB/NSAEBB164), accessed on August 15, 2005).

21. The Senate was already under Republican control.

22. The delivery was often late because of congressional resistance to funding the purchases and to a lack of international donors.

23. Interestingly enough, the Clinton administration's post-Agreed Framework negotiations were centered mostly on North Korea's missile development programs. The alert level went way up when Pyongyang launched a Taepodong 1 missile over the Sea of Japan in August 1998. The U.S. intelligence community was reportedly surprised by the advanced level of North Korea's missile technology (Interview, July 7, 2005). The CIA director confirmed during his 1999 testimony before the Senate Armed Services Committee that the continental U.S. was within the reach of North Korean missiles (www.armscontrol.org/factsheets/dprkchron.asp, accessed on August 11, 2006). The U.S. and North Korea continued bilateral talks regarding Pyongyang's missile development programs as well as terrorism and proliferation activities. In addition to the bilateral format, the U.S., South Korea and Japan formed the Trilateral Coordination and Oversight Group (TCOG) aiming to closely consult and coordinate their policies and dealings with North Korea.

24. State Department FOIA release, Department of State INR Paper, Subject: DPRK Nuclear Status, December 20, 1996. The INR memorandum notes the possibility of Pyongyang's possession of enough plutonium to build one or two nuclear weapons. It also warns that the failure to implement the Agreed Framework will "undermine the IAEA's ability to provide an historical audit of

the North's nuclear activity in the past or prevent the production of more plutonium in the future." (www.gwu.edu/~nsarchiv/NSAEBB/NSAEBB164, accessed on July 7, 2006).

25. State Department FOIA release, Memorandum, Stanley Roth to Secretary of State Albright, Subject: Your Visit to Pyongyang, DPRK, October 19, 2000. (www.gwu.edu/~nsarchiv/NSAEBB/NSAEBB164, accessed on March 11, 2005)

26. Albright left the country with a rather positive impression of its leader. She wrote, "My conclusion was that we should approach Kim in a businesslike way, not hesitant to engage in direct talks, and take advantage of North Korea's economic plight to drive a bargain that would make the region and world safer." Madeline Albright, *Madam Secretary* (New York: Miramax Books, 2005), pp. 467–468.

27. David Kerr, "The Sino-Russian Partnership and U.S. Policy toward North Korea: From Hegemony to Concert in Northeast Asia," *International Studies Quarterly* 49 (3), September, 2005, pp. 411–437.

28. James Kelly in March 2003 stated: "[T]o achieve a lasting resolution, this time, the international community, particularly North Korea's neighbors, must be involved. While the Agreed Framework succeeded in freezing the North's declared nuclear weapons program for eight years, it was only a partial solution of limited duration. That is no longer an option. That is why we are insisting on a multilateral approach, to ensure that the consequences to North Korea of violating its commitments will deny them any benefits to their non-compliance. It was easier for North Korea to abrogate its commitments to the United States under the Agreed Framework, thinking it would risk the condemnation of a single country." U.S. Department of State, 2003.

29. Alexander Zhebin, "The Bush Doctrine, Russia and Korea," in Mel Gurtov and Peter Van Ness (eds.), *Confronting the Bush Doctrine: Critical views from the Asia-Pacific* (London and New York: RoutledgeCurzon, 2005), pp. 130–152.

30. The rift among America's allies in Northeast Asia is becoming more conspicuous, as evidenced by South Korea and China's refusal to join Japan and the United States in the first multinational Proliferation Security Initiative (PSI) exercise aimed at interdicting weapons of mass destruction in Japanese waters in 2004. The target audience for the drill was clearly Pyongyang.

31. Delisting of North Korea from the list of terrorist states was met by the Bush administration in 2008, provoking vocal protests from Japan this time.

32. John Feffer, August 17, 2006, "American Apples, Korean Oranges." *FPIF (Foreign Policy in Focus) Policy Report*.

33. Hersh 2003, pp. 2–3; Kaplan 2004, pp. 4–7.

34. *Washington File*, October 11, 2006; October 13, 2006.

35. Clifford Geertz, *The Interpretation of Cultures*. New York: Basic Books, 1973), p. 127.

36. Barry Schwartz and Mikyong Kim, "Judging the Past: A Comparative Study of People's Historical Perceptions in the U.S. and Korea," in *Culture in Mind: Toward a Sociology of Culture and Cognition*, edited by Karen A. Cerulo (New York: Routledge, 2002), pp. 209–226.

37. It is my hypothesis that the fundamental source of conflict in this new world will not be primarily ideological or primarily economic. The great divisions among humankind and the dominating source of conflict will be cultural. Nation-states will remain the most powerful actors in world affairs, but the principal conflicts of global politics will occur between nations and groups of different civilizations. The clash of civilizations will dominate global politics. The fault lines between civilizations will be the battle lines of the future. Samuel P. Huntington, "The Clash of Civilizations," *Foreign Affairs*, 1993 (3), pp. 22–49.

38. In the dedication of his memoir *My Life*, as well as in the main text of the book, Clinton often refers to his maternal grandfather's teaching, which he internalized growing up in Hope, Arkansas.

39. His narratives in the memoir also reveal that he found working on global issues easier and more gratifying than domestic politics, given the bitter partisan divisions and the Whitewater lawsuits. For example, he helped Mexico with generous foreign aid in 1997.

40. Arms Control Association: Fact Sheets: Chronology of U.S.–Korea Nuclear and Missile Diplomacy, p. 8, (www.armscontrol.org/factsheets/dprkchron.asp, accessed on July 13, 2006).

41. Albright, pp. 473–498.

42. Even though President Clinton does not mention it specifically, the Middle East also would have been a politically safer choice than North Korea. He wrote, "The Jewish Americans have been good to me." The political influence of Korean Americans is relatively insignificant com-

pared to that of Jewish Americans. The decision would have been a reflection of election votes as well as emotional commitment.

43. See Yankelovich 2006; cf. Mead, Walter Russell. 2006. "God's Country?," *Foreign Affairs*, September/October, Vol. 85, No. 5, pp. 24–43.

44. Kirtley 2004, p. 26.

45. The doctrine divided the world between those who are "with us" or "with the terrorists." Cameron Thies, "The Bush Doctrine: Redefining the U.S. Role in World Politics for the Twenty-first Century," in Bryan Hillard, Tom Lansford and Robert P. Watson (eds.), *George W. Bush: Evaluating the President at Midterm* (Albany: State University of New York, 2004), pp. 123–138.

46. Bryan Hillard, Tom Lansford and Robert P. Watson (eds.), *George W. Bush: Evaluating the President at Midterm* (Albany: State University of New York, 2004), p. 7.

47. Thies 2004, p. 132; Hersh 2003, p. 4.

48. Hersh 2003, p. 5.

49. "Even with the creation of the new Department, there will remain a strong need for a White House Office of Homeland Security. Protecting America from terrorism will remain a multidepartmental issue and will continue to require interagency coordination. Presidents will continue to require the confidential advice of a Homeland Security Advisor, and I intend for the White House Office of Homeland Security and the Homeland Security Council to maintain a strong role in coordinating our government-wide efforts to secure the homeland." George W. Bush, June 18, 2002. "Message to the Congress Transmitting the Proposed Legislation to Create the Department of Homeland Security," *Weekly Compilation of Presidential Documents* 38, No. 25, pp. 1034–1038.

50. Thies 2004, p. 134.

51. *The Seattle Times*, July 14, 2006.

52. Fred Kaplan, May, 2004. "Rolling Blunder: How the Bush Administration Let North Korea Get Nukes," *Washington Monthly* (www.washingtonmonthly.com/features/2004/0405.kaplan.html, accessed on September 7, 2006).

53. A Washington, D.C., insider testifies that one American intelligence official who has attended recent White House meetings cautioned against relying on the day-to-day administration statements that emphasize a quick settlement of the dispute. The public talk of compromise is being matched by much private talk of high-level vindication. "Bush and Cheney want that guy's [Kim Jong Il's] head on a platter. Don't be distracted by all this talk about negotiations. There will be negotiations, but they have a plan, and they are going to get this guy after Iraq. He's their version of Hitler." Hersh 2003, p. 6.

54. Kaplan 2004, p. 7.

55. Bob Woodward, *State of Denial: Bush at War, Part III* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 2006), p. 12.

56. Mark Clifford, *Time*, September 15, 2008, "Under a Mushroom Cloud," p. 49.

57. Karel Arnaut, "Comments," *Current Anthropology*, 48 (6), 2007, p. 795.

58. Shunji Taoka, "North Korean Threats Do Not Diminish with the Report," *Asahi Shimbun Aera*, July 7, No. 31, 2008, p. 82.

Biographical Statement

Mikyong Kim is an associate professor at Hiroshima City University–Hiroshima Peace Institute in Japan. Before assuming his current position in 2005, she taught at Portland State University, in Oregon, as Fulbright Visiting Professor. Her book *Securitization of Human Rights: North Korean Refugees in Northeast Asia* is forthcoming (2010, Praeger and Sage). And her coedited volume with Barry Schwartz, *East Asia's Difficult Past: Essays in Collective Memory*, is also forthcoming (2010, Palgrave-Macmillan).

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