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Peace Through Strength:
U.S. Deterrence Strategy and
the North Korea Nuclear Crisis

實力為和平之母：

以美國的嚇阻戰略與北韓核武危機為例

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Abstract

This research seeks to answer the following question: *What conditions are necessary for US deterrence strategies to be effective against North Korea?* The 2017-2018 North Korea nuclear crisis has revived the importance of deterrence within US national strategy. Given North Korea's nuclear and ballistic missile tests, and the escalating tensions between the Trump Administration and Kim Jong-un's regime, it appears that for the first time since the Cold War, nuclear war is a valid possibility. As North Korea's nuclear capabilities became increasingly viable, scholars have encouraged the Trump Administration to shift its focus away from compelling denuclearization to deterring nuclear attack. Therefore, this paper serves two purposes. First, this paper proposes a criterion for effective deterrence comprised of four factors that increase threat credibility: military capability, political will, perception, and legitimacy. Second, this criterion is used to evaluate US strategic deterrence under the Trump Administration, and its influence on US-North Korea relations.

這篇論文研究旨在尋求下列問題的答案：美國如何有效完成不與北韓互相攻擊的策略？從二零一七到二零一八年，北韓的核武危機喚起美國政府重新認識到核武對國家安全的重要性。北韓的核武及導彈試驗，提升了川普與金正恩之間的緊張局勢。也是首次再現自冷戰後，發生核子戰爭的可能性。當北韓的核武能力日益增強的同時，專家們建議川普當局應該改弦易轍，以嚇阻核武攻擊代替解除北韓的核武力量。

因此，本論文有兩個目的：

第一：文章中提出四個有效對北韓提高核武威脅的策略。它們是軍事能力，政府執行承諾的意願，認知能力，國際法令。

第二：用上述四項準則以分析川普當局對北韓的策略，同時如何印象到兩國之間的關係。

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Mahalo nui loa, and until we meet again.

Acronyms

ALCM	Air-Launched Cruise Missiles
CIA	Central Intelligence Agency (United States)
CPTPP	Comprehensive and Progressive Agreement for Trans-Pacific Partnership
CVID	Complete, Verifiable, Irreversible Denuclearization
DCA	Dual Capable Aircraft
DoD	Department of Defense (United States)
DPRK	Democratic People's Republic of Korea (North Korea)
FBI	Federal Bureau of Investigation (United States)
GBSD	Ground-Based Strategic Deterrence
GDP	Gross Domestic Product
IAEA	International Atomic Energy Agency
ICBM	Intercontinental Ballistic Missile
ISR	Intelligence, Surveillance, and Reconnaissance
KCNA	Korean Central News Agency (North Korea)
KMPR	Korea Massive Punishment and Retaliation (South Korea)
KPA	Korean People's Army (North Korea)
LRSO	Long-Range Stand-Off
MAD	Mutually Assured Destruction
MRBM	Medium-Range Ballistic Missile
NATO	North Atlantic Treaty Organization
NC3	Nuclear Command, Control, and Communications (United States)
NPR	Nuclear Posture Review (United States)
NPT	Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons
NSC	National Security Council (United States)
NSS	National Security Strategy (United States)
OCO	Offensive Cyber Operations
ROK	Republic of Korea (South Korea)
SLBM	Submarine-Launched Ballistic Missiles
SLCM	Sea-Launched Cruise Missiles
SOF	Special Operations Forces
SRBM	Short-Range Ballistic Missile
SSBN	Nuclear Ballistic Missile Submarines
THAAD	Terminal High Altitude Area Defense
UK	United Kingdom
UN	United Nations
UNSC	United Nations Security Council
US	United States
USSR	Soviet Union
USAID	United States Agency for International Development
WMD	Weapons of Mass Destruction

Chapter 1: Introduction

The year 2016 saw two unlikely men rise to an unprecedented level of influence within the international system. The first was US President Donald Trump, whose victory in the 2016 US presidential election was not only controversial, but also quite unexpected. The morning of the election, *The New York Times* predicted that Hillary Clinton, a seasoned veteran of American politics and the Democratic Party's nominee for president, had an 85% chance of winning the election.¹ It initially appeared that Donald Trump, a businessman and television personality without prior government experience, would have little chance of success. While his bellicose and brash approach to politics and international affairs drew sharp criticism among liberal groups, it strongly resonated with conservative audiences. In the end, his charismatic style of leadership mobilized the American public in a way Clinton could not, and ultimately won him the presidency.

What happened next proved to be even more disruptive to the international balance of power. During the final year of the Obama Administration, Kim Jong-un suddenly resumed nuclear testing, conducting North Korea's fourth and fifth nuclear tests on January 6, 2016 and September 9, 2016. North Korea then provoked international outrage by threatening to launch nuclear attacks against the US and South Korea as an act of self-defense.² Although experts were initially skeptical of North Korea's threats, its sixth nuclear test on September 3, 2017, quickly confirmed these fears. With the latest test, North Korea claimed to have successfully tested a miniaturized hydrogen bomb that could be affixed to a long-range missile capable of reaching the US. Furthermore, seismic readings indicate the test was an estimated ten times larger than the previous nuclear test.³ By doing so, Kim Jong-un, who was once considered a rogue, lone-wolf outsider to the international community, became the center of international attention, presenting the most significant nuclear threat to international security and US national security since the Cold War.

¹ Josh Katz, "Who Will Be President," *New York Times*, November 8, 2016, accessed May 10, 2018, <https://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2016/upshot/presidential-polls-forecast.html>.

² Kelsey Davenport, "Chronology of U.S.-North Korean Nuclear and Missile Diplomacy," *Arms Control Association*, May 24, 2018, accessed May 22, 2018, <https://www.armscontrol.org/factsheets/dprkchron>.

³ "North Korea nuclear tests: What did they achieve?" *BBC News*, September 3, 2017, <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-17823706>.

The ensuing North Korea nuclear crisis reveals the unique and unprecedented nature of international relations today, the circumstances of which defy conventional wisdom. As the de facto hegemonic power and perceived caretaker of the international system, the US plays a leading role in international conflict resolution. As follows, conventional wisdom assumes that the US could easily subdue any threat presented by North Korea, a rogue state and outcast of the international system. But despite overwhelming “hard-power” advantages, including economic power, military strength, and the support of international bodies, such as the United Nations (UN), the US has failed on numerous occasions to negotiate a lasting peace with North Korea that results in meaningful steps towards nuclear disarmament. This stark reality begs the question: How is it that North Korea, a state who appears so disadvantaged relative to the US, is able to wield such a strong influence over the international system, and more importantly, what can the US do to stop them? This paper seeks to address this question by analyzing US-North Korea relations within the context of deterrence theory.

1.1. Research Motivation and Purpose

Although the international community has been aware of North Korea’s nuclear ambitions for some time, the most recent round of nuclear tests has triggered a renewed sense of alarm. As tensions rose between the US and North Korea, experts, scholars, and reporters have taken the opportunity to weigh in on the subject, analyzing the foreign policy decisions of both countries and discussing various policy options. One strongly advocated policy is strengthening deterrence. Simply put, the objective of deterrence “is to persuade an adversary not to take an action that it otherwise would take.”⁴ Though authors claim that deterrence is the best option to deal with North Korea’s nuclear threat, many of these authors fail to clearly define deterrence and articulate how effective deterrence can be achieved. Existing literature also applies “deterrence” to a range of contexts. Although these concepts share similar core ideas, the means and applications of deterrence tends to vary. Therefore, without a clear definition, it is difficult to know exactly what an author means by “deterrence” in relation to other works. An abundance of new terms, such as “strategic deterrence,” “active deterrence,” and “proactive deterrence” further complicates the issue. Finally, by flooding the media with vague and aggressive headlines, such

⁴ Bruce Bueno de Mesquita, “Perceptions, Deterrence, and Terrorism,” in *Principles of International Politics: People’s Power, Preferences, and Perceptions* (Washington, D.C.: CQ Press, 2000), 321.

as, “To Stop North Korea, Deterrence Will Beat War Every Time,” news sources obfuscate the relationship between deterrence and foreign policy.⁵ By doing so, the media not only makes it difficult to differentiate the ends and means at work, but also leads the public to incorrect conclusions about the role of deterrence in US-North Korea relations.

This research serves three functions. The first is to clarify the US approach towards the North Korea nuclear crisis by separating it into “compellent” and “deterrent” components. Compellent actions, which include diplomacy and sanctions, are applied with the purpose of halting North Korea’s nuclear development and denuclearizing the Korean peninsula. Deterrent actions, which rely primarily upon a comprehensive nuclear capability, aims to prevent nuclear war. Though recent developments involving the US, North Korea, and South Korea, suggest that diplomacy may have a chance of success, compellence has failed to halt North Korea’s nuclear program thus far. As North Korea’s behavior became more aggressive, and its nuclear weapons became more viable, the need to prevent nuclear war through effective deterrence was perceived to outweigh the call for denuclearization through compellence. It is important to note that the US does not intend to use its nuclear weapons in a compellent manner. Although it may successfully avert nuclear war and even prevent future acts of aggression, deterrence alone is not enough to force North Korea to denuclearize. Nevertheless, a deeper understanding of deterrence as a theory and adequate coordination of compellent and deterrent efforts may allow for more effective deterrence in the future.

This leads to the second function of this research: to build on existing theory to create a criterion for effective US deterrence of North Korea. The development of this criterion requires an analysis of deterrence theory and the synthesis of key arguments across security-based literature. This research attempts to articulate the theoretical expectations concerning the conditions necessary for effective deterrence. It also takes into consideration additional factors, such as the goals and interests of participating states, the means of conducting deterrence, and the role of perception. Due to various constraints, there are some outside factors that are less relevant to the US perspective and will not be discussed in this research. Even so, these factors may still exert some influence on the success of US deterrence strategies and might be explored

⁵ Doug Bandow, “To Stop North Korea, Deterrence Will Beat War Every Time,” *National Interest*, December 23, 2017, <http://nationalinterest.org/blog/the-skeptics/stop-north-korea-deterrence-will-beat-war-every-time-23777>.

in future works. Although this case is focused specifically on US-North Korea relations, this criterion should be generally applicable to other cases of deterrence.

Finally, the third function of this research is to use this criterion to evaluate current US applications of deterrence and make policy suggestions based on these findings. Most importantly, this research attempts to explore potential gaps between the ideal conditions specified by deterrence theory and the practical applications of US deterrence strategy. Policy options focus on addressing identified weaknesses and assessing future opportunities. This research shows that an understanding of theoretical deterrence principles exposes the factors that most directly influence the potential success of US deterrence strategies. Based on this understanding, the US can focus its applications of deterrence to be more consistent and effective in the future.

The US regards deterrence a means of “preserving peace through strength.”⁶ From this perspective, strong military capabilities coupled with effective deterrence can ensure national security while discouraging conflict. The North Korea nuclear crisis demonstrates that it has never been more necessary to guarantee deterrence is successful. With this in mind, this research proposes a criterion for effective deterrence comprised of four factors that increase threat credibility: military capability, political will, perception, and legitimacy. Although this research ultimately concludes that US deterrence will be successful towards North Korea, there are clear weaknesses that could influence its effectiveness in the future. Therefore, this research analyzes US applications of deterrence to locate potential weaknesses, improve the effectiveness of deterrence strategies, and ultimately maintain peace within the international system.

1.2. Research Question

This research seeks to answer the following question: *What conditions are necessary for US deterrence strategies to be effective against North Korea?*

1.3. Research Methods and Objects

This paper uses qualitative methods to analyze the foreign policy of US-North Korea relations throughout the 2017-2018 North Korea nuclear crisis and up to the Trump-Kim Summit

⁶ United States, and Donald Trump, *National Security Strategy of the United States of America* (Washington DC: The White House, 2017), 25.

on June 12, 2018. More specifically, it focuses on US applications of deterrence, government leadership, and foreign and domestic policy under the Trump Administration (2017 - Present). This includes President Trump's policy perspectives as expressed throughout his campaign and policies enacted since taking office on January 20, 2017. This paper also discusses North Korea's nuclear weapons program and foreign policy under Kim Jong-un's rule (2012 - Present), but focuses more specifically on North Korea's actions throughout the nuclear crisis. Therefore, this analysis will cover over a year of US-North Korea relations, from 2017 to June 12, 2018.

By employing case-study and process tracing methods, this research formulates a criterion for effective deterrence, and then evaluates US deterrence strategies towards North Korea according to this criterion. This case study analysis is primarily focused on the US perspective and its approach towards North Korea. North Korea's perspective is also considered, but to a lesser extent. This case study accounts for various factors which might influence decision-making processes and subsequently, the effectiveness of deterrence strategies, including leadership, personality, regime type, public opinion, and the international community. Process tracing is also used to understand the origins of foreign policy decisions. Moreover, this method will be used to gain a general sense of US-North Korea relations and identify recurring themes and trends in behavior. To do so, this paper draws information from White House publications, statements, and internet resources, as well as US-based academic publications, think-tanks, and news outlets. North Korea's state-controlled news sources are also used to understand North Korea's impressions of the US and how North Korea interprets US policy decisions.

This paper proposes a consolidated means of evaluating deterrence through the perspective of the North Korea nuclear crisis. Despite its short time frame, the unconventional and unpredictable nature of this situation poses clear research challenges. As an ongoing and volatile issue, there will inevitably be new developments and extraneous factors that will not be considered in this work. North Korea's seclusion from the international community also poses an obstacle to definitively determining its intentions or capabilities. Nevertheless, this analysis hopes to contribute to academic literature by providing an in-depth analysis of US-North Korea relations throughout the nuclear crisis and determine how US deterrence strategies can be more effectively applied towards North Korea in the future.

Chapter 2: Background

Due to North Korea's insular nature, it is difficult to gather information beyond what the regime chooses to reveal to the general public. Nevertheless, it is possible to see how history and ideology influences North Korea's perceptions. North Korea considers nuclear weapons to be essential to national security and foreign policy. Though North Korea has yet to achieve its foreign policy goals, nuclear weapons provide the bargaining power necessary to take deliberate steps towards achieving them. On the other hand, the US has made numerous diplomatic attempts to curb North Korea's nuclear program, but none have had any lasting success. Though the Trump Administration's "America First" foreign policy strategy prioritizes US interests, it does continue to support the international principle of nuclear nonproliferation. President Trump hopes to succeed where previous administrations have failed through his policy of "maximum power and maximum engagement." Though the US continues to practice both general and extended deterrence, North Korea's nuclear ambitions will test the US nuclear umbrella and its ability to fulfill its extended deterrence commitments, especially those to South Korea and Japan.

2.1. North Korea's Foreign Policy: Principles, Ideology, and Goals

In a broad sense, North Korea's foreign policy and ideology is shaped by its historical ties to Communism and its animosity towards Western democratic countries. Since the formal division of North and South Korea, anti-Western and anti-American sentiment have become synonymous with North Korean identity. After its founding in 1948, the Democratic People's Republic of Korea (DPRK) received diplomatic recognition only from Communist Eastern bloc countries, including the Soviet Union (USSR), China, and Vietnam. Throughout the 1960s and 1970s, North Korea competed with South Korea for diplomatic recognition and legitimacy.⁷ However, with the collapse of the Soviet Union, North Korea not only lost its Communist role model, but also its primary benefactor. Out of necessity, the DPRK gradually increased its diplomatic contact with capitalist countries, including the US, Japan, and the European states, to further economic development.⁸ The DPRK also gained admission to a number of international

⁷ The National Committee on North Korea, *Issue Brief: DPRK Diplomatic Relations*, by Daniel Wertz, JJ Oh, and Kim Insung, August 2016, 1.

⁸ *Ibid*, 3-4.

organizations, including the World Health Organization. The Republic of Korea (ROK) and the DPRK were simultaneously admitted to the United Nations in 1991. Despite its perceived isolation, as of August 2016, 164 countries have established formal diplomatic relations with North Korea.⁹ Due to acts of terrorism, human rights abuses, and nuclear proliferation, North Korea has since become increasingly isolated in foreign policy arenas. Nevertheless, North Korea's approach to foreign policy remains consistent with the values articulated within the Constitution and the DPRK's state ideology.

The Constitution of the DPRK formally establishes North Korea's overall approach to foreign policy. Article 17 outlines the DPRK's foreign policy principles, including, "independence, peace, and solidarity." According to these principles, "the State shall establish diplomatic, as well as political, economic, and cultural relations with all friendly countries," but only under conditions of equality and respect for state sovereignty.¹⁰ The DPRK will also "promote unity with the world public defending peoples who oppose...interference and fight for their countries' independence."¹¹ Finally, Article 9 establishes Korean unification as a top priority, stating that "the DPRK shall strive to achieve the complete victory of socialism...and reunify the country on the principle of independence, peaceful reunification and great national unity."¹² Thus, North Korea's desire to engage with "friendly countries" demonstrates its openness to increased international relations, but also reveals the limited scope of individuals who support the Kim regime and share similar ideologies. Moreover, the Constitution directly alludes to the DPRK's opposition to the US for its perceived infringement on state sovereignty, and reaffirms the DPRK's enduring commitment to reunification with South Korea.

North Korea's foreign policy decisions are driven by the DPRK's state ideology of *Juche*, which means "self-reliance," and is also enshrined in the Constitution of the DPRK. Article 3 proclaims, "The DPRK is guided in its activities by the Juche idea, a world outlook centered on people, a revolutionary ideology for achieving the independence of the masses."¹³ *Juche* was introduced to the DPRK by Kim Il-sung in a speech on December 28, 1955, describing it as "the sole guiding idea of the Government of the Republic." In that speech, Kim Il-sung stated that

⁹ Ibid, 1.

¹⁰ *Korea (Democratic People's Republic of)'s Constitution of 1972*, ch. 1, art. 17.

¹¹ Ibid.

¹² Ibid, ch. 1, art. 9.

¹³ Ibid, ch. 1, art. 3.

“independence, self-reliance and self-defense are the guiding principles of our revolution.”¹⁴ There does not appear to be a clear, singular definition of *Juche*. As such, its flexible application has been criticized as a propaganda tool used to justify the existing totalitarian regime and validate the struggles of North Korean people.¹⁵ By emphasizing economic, political, and military “independence,” it makes sense that *Juche* would lead North Korea to develop nuclear weapons. The Kim regime would naturally be attracted to the guaranteed security and independence a nuclear weapons program could provide. Thus, *Juche* is a realist approach to foreign policy, forcing North Korea to develop nuclear weapons out of a desire for “independence” from powerful allies and the international community.

The DPRK’s foreign policy agenda ultimately aims to protect and maintain regime stability under Kim Jong-un. Therefore, any foreign policy objectives must not be pursued at the expense of Kim Jong-un’s power. Under this assumption, DPRK leadership has focused its efforts on the policy areas it considers necessary to maintaining power and stability, namely economic development and national security. Not only does economic development improve standards of living and hedge against domestic instability, but it also defrays the effects of sanctions and creates opportunities for international engagement through foreign investment. Despite heavy sanctions and being cut off from international trade, North Korea has sustained some economic growth via trade with China and domestic economic reforms.¹⁶ Nevertheless, condemnation of North Korea’s human rights abuses and nuclear proliferation, coupled with international sanctions, has deterred foreign investment. In this way, it appears that North Korea will not be able to achieve the economic prosperity it desires until its security issues are resolved.

North Korea’s highest priority is survival and regime preservation. To support this goal, North Korea has three national security objectives: The reunification of North and South Korea, the removal of US forces from the Korean Peninsula, and the international recognition of North Korea as a nuclear weapon state.¹⁷ Despite international condemnation, North Korea believes that nuclear weapons are “essential for its national identity and security, and for achieving power

¹⁴ Tom Dixon, “Assessing the Success of Self-Reliance: North Korea’s *Juche* Ideology,” (PhD Diss., Newcastle University, 2010).

¹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶ Christine Kim and Jane Chung, “North Korea 2016 economic growth at 17-year high despite sanctions: South Korea,” *Reuters*, July 21, 2017, <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-northkorea-economy-gdp/north-korea-2016-economic-growth-at-17-year-high-despite-sanctions-south-korea-idUSKBN1A607Z>.

¹⁷ Sue Mi Terry, “North Korea’s Strategic Goals and Policy towards the United States and South Korea,” *International Journal of Korean Studies* 17, no. 2 (Fall 2013): 63.

and prestige on the international stage.”¹⁸ By referring to nuclear weapons as a “deterrent force,” North Korea implies that its nuclear weapons program is only meant for defensive purposes, allegedly against the US. Therefore, US-South Korea joint military operations, the deployment of the Terminal High Altitude Area Defense (THAAD) system to South Korea, and the Trump Administration’s threats against North Korea only serve to validate the Kim regime’s logic. At this point in time, it seems that the complete removal of US forces from the Korean peninsula is not a feasible goal. Despite perceived tensions between US President Trump and South Korean President Moon Jae-in, the US has continued to demonstrate its commitment to South Korea’s defense through its enduring military presence on the Korean peninsula.¹⁹ Amid multilateral UN sanctions against North Korea for its nuclear weapons programs and ballistic missile testing, it also seems unlikely that the UN will recognize North Korea as a nuclear weapon state. On the other hand, the historic summit between North and South Korea, which culminated in the signing of the “Panmunjom Declaration for Peace, Prosperity, and Unification of the Korean Peninsula” on April 27, 2018, shows that denuclearization and Korean reunification could be a future possibility.²⁰ Though the Trump-Kim summit demonstrated North Korea’s willingness to discuss denuclearization with the US, scholars are now concerned that President Trump’s pledge to suspend US military exercises with South Korea would not only erode the US-South Korea alliance structure, but also lead to the withdrawal of nuclear protection from South Korea and possibly Japan.²¹ The US cannot expect North Korea to sacrifice one of its national security goals without making progress on another. Even though North Korea has yet to definitively achieve its national security goals for the time being, without an effective response from the US and its allies, this may not be the case for long.

When Kim Jong-un succeeded his father as supreme leader in 2011, there were hopes that his international exposure would provide a more benign influence on the totalitarian state. Instead, Kim Jong-un’s regime saw the rapid acceleration of North Korea’s nuclear program.²²

¹⁸ Ibid, 68.

¹⁹ Scott Neuman, “U.S., South Korea Begin Massive Military Exercises,” *National Public Radio*, December 4, 2017, <https://www.npr.org/sections/thetwo-way/2017/12/04/568263780/u-s-south-korea-begin-massive-military-exercises>.

²⁰ Choe Sang-Hun, “North and South Korea Set Bold Goals: A Final Peace and No Nuclear Arms,” *New York Times*, April 27, 2018, <https://www.nytimes.com/2018/04/27/world/asia/north-korea-south-kim-jong-un.html>.

²¹ Anna Fifield, “North Korea’s definition of ‘denuclearization’ is very different from Trump’s,” *Washington Post*, April 9, 2018, https://wapo.st/2qjao97?tid=ss_mail&utm_term=.8f8fbb52fc5a.

²² Eleanor Albert, “North Korea’s Military Capabilities,” *Council on Foreign Relations*, April 20, 2018, accessed May 20, 2018, <https://www.cfr.org/background/north-koreas-military-capabilities>.

Characterized as “overconfident and unpredictable,” scholars agree that Kim Jong-un perceives the nuclear program as necessary to sustaining his regime.²³ As such, “[the] DPRK has demonstrated a willingness to use military provocation” to protect its nuclear program.²⁴ This is because North Korea’s foreign policy approach is characterized by its perceptions of the DPRK and its role in the international system. From this perspective, the DPRK is the victim of US aggression and requires nuclear weapons to protect its sovereignty and national security. The DPRK hopes to eventually reunify with North Korea and become an internationally-recognized nuclear weapon state, but sees the United States as the primary barrier to realizing these goals. Driven by *Juche* ideology and the desire to maintain power, Kim Jong-un is willing to use any means necessary, including military force, to sustain and protect his regime.

2.2. The Trump Administration’s Foreign Policy

Within the United States government, the Department of State is primarily responsible for overseeing the development and implementation of foreign policy. As administrations change, the general thrust of US foreign policy has remained the same. Most recently, foreign policy under the “Obama Doctrine” was characterized by multilateralism, emphasizing negotiation and collaboration over confrontation and unilateralism.²⁵ Since taking office, President Trump has profoundly diverged from previous administrations through his “America First” approach, promising to prioritize the US in all areas of foreign policy. On May 30, 2017, former National Security Advisor H.R. McMaster characterized this strategy as “the restoration of American leadership... to enhance American security, promote American prosperity, and extend American influence around the world.”²⁶ This statement also confirms that the “America First” strategy is a highly unilateral approach, one that believes “the world is not a ‘global community’ but an arena where nations...engage and compete.”²⁷ Such a characterization not only reveals a strongly realist perspective, but also an inward shift in foreign affairs. By

²³ Claudia Rosett, “Our Nagging North Korea Problem,” *The Journal of International Security Affairs* no. 27 (Fall/Winter 2014): 47.

²⁴ U.S. Department of Defense, Office of the Secretary of Defense, *Military and Security Developments Involving the Democratic People’s Republic of Korea 2015: A Report to Congress Pursuant to the National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2012*, 2015.

²⁵ Alan Philips, “The Obama doctrine,” *Chatham House* (April & May 2016), accessed November 1, 2017, <https://www.chathamhouse.org/publications/twt/obama-doctrine>.

²⁶ H.R. McMaster and Gary D. Cohn, “America First Doesn’t Mean America Alone,” *The Wall Street Journal*, May 30, 2017, <https://www.wsj.com/articles/america-first-doesnt-mean-america-alone-1496187426>.

²⁷ *Ibid.*

withdrawing US participation from the Trans-Pacific Partnership (renamed the Comprehensive and Progressive Agreement for Trans-Pacific Partnership, or CPTPP, after the withdrawal of the US), the Paris Climate Accords, and most recently, the Iran Nuclear Deal, President Trump has demonstrated that the US will no longer participate in “bad deals” that fail to sufficiently benefit the US.²⁸ These policy decisions indicate that the US may be stepping away from its long-time role as the steward of the international system, and will instead focus exclusively on prioritizing and protecting US interests.²⁹

2.3. The Battle Over North Korea’s Nuclear Weapons Program

Since the Korean War, US-North Korea relations have been debilitated by North Korea’s illicit development of nuclear weapons. US commitment to international security has regularly clashed with North Korea’s desire to flout the international system. As a result, the United States considers North Korea to be a hostile power, diplomatically recognizing South Korea as the de jure government of all of Korea.³⁰ There are no formal diplomatic relations between the DPRK and the US. Even though there is no formal embassy of North Korea, there are North Korean representatives serving the United Nations within the US.³¹ On the other hand, the US State Department has reaffirmed its support for the “peaceful reunification of Korea on terms acceptable to the Korean people,” claiming that it is “primarily a matter for [the Korean people] to decide.”³² Although it is not explicitly stated, it would be within US interests to facilitate unification under the democratic governance of South Korea, a longtime US ally. Beyond strictly humanitarian assistance, the US does not participate in any economic exchange with North Korea. After imposing a near total economic embargo on North Korea during the Korean War, the US has levied several rounds of sanctions on North Korea, usually in response to its nuclear weapons development or human rights abuses. As a result, the majority of US engagements with North Korea were in response to the DPRK’s illicit development of nuclear weapons.

²⁸ Donald Trump, “President Donald J. Trump is Ending United States Participation in an Unacceptable Iran Deal,” *The White House*, May 8, 2018, accessed May 24, 2018, <https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefings-statements/president-donald-j-trump-ending-united-states-participation-unacceptable-iran-deal/>.

²⁹ Constanze Stelzenmuller, “At last: The Trump Doctrine, revealed,” *Brookings Institute*, June 5, 2017, <https://www.brookings.edu/blog/order-from-chaos/2017/06/05/at-last-the-trump-doctrine-revealed/>.

³⁰ Gregory Henderson, “Korea,” in *Divided Nations in a Divided World*, ed. Gregory Henderson, Richard Ned Lebow, and John G. Stoessinger (New York: David McKay Co., 1974), 52-54.

³¹ U.S. Department of State, Bureau of East Asian and Pacific Affairs, *U.S. Relations with North Korea: Fact Sheet*, October 18, 2016.

³² *Ibid.*

The United States, acting in coordination with the UN, has engaged in negotiations with North Korea since the 1980s. Thus far, these negotiations have yet to achieve any lasting success, as most agreements end with North Korea extracting all potential benefits before reneging on its part of the agreement.³³ This cycle began during the First Nuclear Crisis, when US spy satellites first detected construction projects related to nuclear weapons development in the 1980s. Facing pressure from the Soviet Union, North Korea signed the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons (NPT) in 1985. In 1992, North and South Korea signed a Joint Declaration on the Denuclearization of the Korean Peninsula. In doing so, North and South Korea also agreed to inspections from the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA). IAEA inspectors noticed discrepancies in North Korea's nuclear activities in February 1993, calling for "special inspections" of suspected facilities. In response, North Korea announced its withdrawal from the NPT, but "suspended" this decision after beginning bilateral negotiations with the US. These talks stalled until President Jimmy Carter visited Pyongyang in October 1994, and concluded with the signing of an Agreed Framework. Under this agreement, North Korea agreed to freeze nuclear operations and comply with IAEA obligations, and in exchange, the US agreed to supply heavy fuel oil shipments and construct two proliferation-resistant light-water nuclear reactors.³⁴

As its missile development program grew, North Korea began exporting missiles abroad and covertly acquiring technology for uranium enrichment. Amid fears of North Korea's missile program and suspicions of nuclear development, the Clinton administration ordered a comprehensive review of US policy towards North Korea, resulting in the "Perry Report." Despite some progress, missile talks remained generally inconclusive by the end of the Clinton administration. It was not until the Bush administration that the US directly confronted North Korea about its nuclear capabilities, forcing North Korea to admit to its nuclear development and enrichment programs. The US then declared that North Korea had violated the Agreed Framework and stopped heavy fuel oil shipments. In response, North Korea declared the Agreed Framework was nullified and formally withdrew from the NPT in January 2003. On September 19, 2015, after two years of negotiations, the Six Party Talks between the US, North Korea,

³³ Terry, "North Korea's Strategic Goals and Policy towards the United States and South Korea," 63-64.

³⁴ The National Committee on North Korea, *A History of U.S.-DPRK Relations*, by Daniel Wertz and Chelsea Gannon, November 2015.

China, Japan, Russia, and South Korea, produced a “Joint Statement,” which declares that North Korea will abandon its nuclear program and return to the NPT in exchange for food and energy assistance. When North Korea violated this statement by testing an array of ballistic missiles in July 2006, the United Nations Security Council (UNSC) condemned the action and called for the resumption of the Six Party Talks. In October 2006, North Korea conducted its first nuclear test. Negotiations continued off and on until 2008 when the Six Party Talks collapsed.

Amidst the failure of the Six Party Talks, the Obama Administration adopted a policy of “strategic patience,” towards North Korea. This policy is “centered on the continued application of economic and diplomatic pressure on North Korea while articulating a conditional willingness to return to dialogue.”³⁵ In July and October 2011, the Obama Administration conducted bilateral talks with North Korea in the hopes of restarting negotiations towards denuclearization. By February 29, 2012, the US and the DPRK debuted the “Leap Day Agreement.” Under this agreement, the US would provide North Korea with 240,000 metric tons of nutritional assistance in exchange for a moratorium on long-range missile launches, nuclear tests, and uranium enrichment. In addition, North Korea must allow IAEA inspections of nuclear sites. Within a few months, the launch attempts of North Korean satellites, followed by additional nuclear and missile tests, signaled the failure of the deal. President Obama did not return to negotiations for the remainder of his presidency.

This ongoing behavior demonstrates North Korea’s strategy of brinkmanship. Its interactions with the international community tend to follow the same predictable formula:

Provoke when Washington or Seoul seem distracted, up the ante in the face of international condemnation, and pivot back to some sort of peace offensive, which usually ends with dialogue and negotiation, culminating finally, in concessions for the North.³⁶

Terry observes that the US and South Korea have both been willing to make concessions to North Korea in pursuit of peaceful conflict resolution, essentially rewarding North Korea’s bad behavior. South Korea also seldom retaliates against North Korean acts of aggression. This way, North Korea makes serious threats and provocations in the hopes that the US or South

³⁵ Ibid.

³⁶ Terry, “North Korea’s Strategic Goals and Policy towards the United States and South Korea,” 63.

Korea will make some concessions to stop them.³⁷ By attempting to appease North Korea, the Obama Administration fell victim to this trap. Since the US could not count on North Korea to keep its promises, previous administrations have hesitated to act, facing criticism for choosing to “settle for half measures that do little or nothing to end North Korea’s nuclear program” and “create only the appearance of progress.”³⁸ Hence, the United States’ longtime pursuit of the “complete, verifiable, and irreversible denuclearization (CVID)” of North Korea has failed to achieve any lasting success thus far.³⁹

The Trump Administration hopes to succeed where previous administrations have failed. President Trump’s policy towards North Korea has evolved from an aggressive military approach to a more balanced strategy. Although the initial “military-centric approach” was meant to intimidate North Korean leadership, it only gave the impression that Washington was preparing for war.⁴⁰ This not only unnerved friends and allies, but also failed to intimidate Kim Jong-un’s regime. After weighing various options, the Trump Administration announced a new policy of “maximum pressure and engagement” in April 2017. This policy combines “tough rhetoric, increased sanctions, and a willingness to talk.”⁴¹ It also emphasizes the multilateral application of “powerful and comprehensive measures” to pressure the DPRK into sacrificing its nuclear program and engaging in “meaningful” negotiations. Such measures include diplomatic and financial isolation and the threat of military force.

Following North Korea’s sixth nuclear test in September 2017, the Trump Administration proposed a UN resolution for increased multilateral sanctions on North Korea. These sanctions seek to limit North Korea’s oil imports, ban textile exports, end additional overseas labor contracts, suppress smuggling, stop joint ventures with other nations, and sanction North Korean government entities.⁴² The resolution won the support of all fifteen members of the UNSC, but

³⁷ Ibid.

³⁸ Evans J.R. Revere, “The Trump administration’s North Korea policy: Headed for success or failure?” *Brookings Institute*, July 10, 2017, <https://www.brookings.edu/blog/order-from-chaos/2017/07/10/the-trump-administrations-north-korea-policy-headed-for-success-or-failure/>.

³⁹ Nicholas D. Anderson, “Explaining North Korea’s Nuclear Ambitions: Power and Position on the Korean Peninsula,” *Australian Journal of International Affairs* 71, no. 6 (2017): 621.

⁴⁰ Revere, “The Trump administration’s North Korea policy: Headed for success or failure?”

⁴¹ Ibid.

⁴² Zachary Cohen and Richard Roth, “UN passes fresh sanctions on North Korea,” *CNN Politics*, September 12, 2017, <http://edition.cnn.com/2017/09/11/politics/north-korea-un-security-council-vote/index.html>.

only after significant reductions at the hands of China and Russia.⁴³ Dissatisfied with the weakened language of the resolution, the Trump Administration has since widened US sanctions, targeting international banks and blacklisting specific North Korean individuals and enterprises.⁴⁴ The strongest of these measures came in the form of an executive order, which penalized “any country or person doing business with North Korea by either cutting off their access to the U.S. financial system or freezing their assets – or potentially both.”⁴⁵ Even though the Trump Administration claims that the “maximum pressure” policy has worked, as evidenced by the Trump-Kim summit, it is difficult to know for sure. Though North Korea has recently expressed its willingness to denuclearize, it is unclear who or what motivated North Korea to change its stance, and if the Trump Administration can rightfully take credit for doing so.

2.4. Conceptualizations and US Applications of Deterrence

Since the advent of the nuclear age, deterrence has played an ever-present role in security policy. Nuclear weapons provide a foundation for national security from which states can readily engage in foreign policy. Within security policy, terms such as “deterrence,” “nuclear deterrence,” and “strategic deterrence,” are often used interchangeably. Although this connection is not unwarranted, it is important to differentiate between these concepts. At a fundamental level, the primary objective of deterrence “is to persuade an adversary not to take an action that it otherwise would take.”⁴⁶ Deterrence is meant to show the punishment an aggressor may expect to receive if they proceed in a certain behavior. A state may threaten to use a wide variety of “hard power” deterrents, such as military force or sanctions, to bring about the desired behavior. As such, deterrence is not necessarily limited to the nuclear variety. States regularly negotiate and engage in minor deterrent behaviors without resorting to military force. Nevertheless, as the most powerful weapon known to mankind at this time, nuclear weapons are still considered the strongest deterrent a state may possess. The impact of sanctions and other deterrents seem insignificant when compared to the potential damage of a nuclear war. Though nuclear weapons

⁴³ Somini Sengupta, “After U.S. Compromise, Security Council Strengthens North Korea Sanctions,” *New York Times*, September 11, 2017, <https://www.nytimes.com/2017/09/11/world/asia/us-security-council-north-korea.html?mcubz=1>.

⁴⁴ Peter Baker and Somini Sengupta, “Trump Moves to Widen U.S. Sanctions on North Korea,” *New York Times*, September 21, 2017, <https://www.nytimes.com/2017/09/21/world/asia/trump-korea-japan.html>.

⁴⁵ Donna Borak, “North Korea sanctions: Here’s what Trump did,” *CNN Money*, September 21, 2017, <http://money.cnn.com/2017/09/21/news/economy/us-north-korea-sanctions-explainer/index.html>.

⁴⁶ Bruce Bueno de Mesquita, “Perceptions, Deterrence, and Terrorism,” 321.

may be considered the strongest deterrent, the broader view of US strategic deterrence seeks to integrate “all capabilities in all domains across all the combatant commands, government organizations, and alongside U.S. allies.”⁴⁷ Hence, US strategic deterrence is an all-encompassing concept that is not limited to nuclear capabilities alone.

Deterrence comes in two forms: deterrence by punishment and deterrence by denial. Deterrence by punishment is when “potential aggressors are deterred by the prospect of having to endure unacceptable punishment in response to an aggressive act.”⁴⁸ This kind of deterrence depends on fear that the costs inflicted by the initiating state will outweigh the gains the target state hopes to achieve through aggression.⁴⁹ According to McDevitt, deterrence by punishment is only effective when the threat is credible, which requires political will and sufficient military capabilities.⁵⁰ Deterrence by denial is when “the potential aggressor is deterred because the defenses are so good that the aggressor concludes that it could not achieve its political and military objectives through the use of force.”⁵¹ This makes it physically difficult for a target state to achieve its objective, while also raising the costs of aggression by making the target’s objective “harder to take, harder to keep, or both.”⁵² Both kinds of deterrence seek to convince the target state that undertaking a certain action would not be worth the incurred costs and the action itself would be unlikely to succeed.

Throughout history, the US has applied nuclear deterrence to its foreign policy in two key ways. The first is through general deterrence, which is practiced between two nations.⁵³ The US maintains its nuclear capabilities to deter potential adversaries and reduce the possibility of “strategic nuclear exchange” with another nuclear-armed state.⁵⁴ General deterrence characterized the end of World War II and the beginning of the Cold War. World War II triggered an international race for nuclear capabilities. The US enjoyed a “nuclear monopoly”

⁴⁷ Terri Moon Cronk, “Strategic Deterrence More than Nuclear, Stratcom Commander Says,” *DoD News, Defense Media Activity*, April 4, 2017, <https://www.defense.gov/News/Article/Article/1140561/strategic-deterrence-more-than-nuclear-stratcom-commander-says/>.

⁴⁸ Michael McDevitt, “Deterring North Korean Provocations,” *Brookings Institute*, February 7, 2011, <https://www.brookings.edu/research/deterring-north-korean-provocations/>.

⁴⁹ A. Wess Mitchell, “The Case for Deterrence by Denial,” *American Interest*, August 12, 2015, <https://www.the-american-interest.com/2015/08/12/the-case-for-deterrence-by-denial/>.

⁵⁰ McDevitt, “Deterring North Korean Provocations.”

⁵¹ *Ibid.*

⁵² Mitchell, “The Case for Deterrence by Denial.”

⁵³ Bueno de Mesquita, “Perceptions, Deterrence, and Terrorism,” 321.

⁵⁴ Office of the Deputy Assistant Secretary of Defense for Nuclear Matters, “Chapter 1: Nuclear Deterrence – U.S. Policy and Strategy,” in *Nuclear Matters Handbook 2016*, 1.

until the Soviet Union conducted its first nuclear test in 1949. As the Soviet Union emerged as the primary threat to national security, the US conducted general deterrence against the Soviet Union based on deterrence by punishment. Once the US and the Soviet Union possessed enough nuclear weapons for second-strike capabilities, “meaning both sides would be capable of massive retaliation even after absorbing an all-out first strike,” both assumed a posture of “mutually assured destruction” (MAD).⁵⁵ MAD doctrine assumes that if one state launches a nuclear attack against the other, both sides would incur unacceptable losses. Assuming both states are rational, neither state would willingly launch a nuclear attack. The US and the USSR relied upon MAD doctrine to preserve an unsteady peace while fighting proxy wars around the world (including Korea) to maintain their spheres of influence. However, crises, such as the Cuban Missile Crisis and the Berlin Crisis, brought the US and USSR extremely close to nuclear war, reminding international audiences that deterrence does have the ability to fail.⁵⁶ Thus, general deterrence was prevalent during the Cold War as the US and the USSR both relied on MAD doctrine to deter by punishment.

The second US application of nuclear deterrence is through extended deterrence, or when one nation convinces another not to threaten a third party.⁵⁷ In this case, US nuclear forces provide a nuclear “umbrella” of protection for allied nations. This kind of defense commitment not only reassures smaller non-weapons states, but also hedges against nuclear proliferation.⁵⁸ With the end of the Cold War and the collapse of the Soviet Union, the US, in collaboration with the UN, aimed to use its overwhelming power to maintain peace and manage the international system. As a result, the NPT was created to prevent the spread of nuclear weapons and decrease the likelihood of nuclear war. The US seeks to maintain the status quo and support nuclear non-proliferation by extending the US nuclear umbrella and providing the means to protect allies. In doing so, the US uses deterrence by punishment and deterrence by denial to threaten potential aggressors and protect allies.

US extended deterrence has focused on defending allies in NATO Europe, the Middle East, and East Asia. The North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) was created in 1949 as a

⁵⁵ Ibid.

⁵⁶ Steven Pifer et al., “U.S. Nuclear and Extended Deterrence: Considerations and Challenges,” *Brookings Institute* no. 3 (May 2010): 1, https://www.brookings.edu/wp-content/uploads/2016/06/06_nuclear_deterrence.pdf.

⁵⁷ Bueno de Mesquita, “Perceptions, Deterrence, and Terrorism,” 321.

⁵⁸ Office of the Deputy Assistant Secretary of Defense for Nuclear Matters, “Chapter 1: Nuclear Deterrence,” 2.

collective security measure against the Soviet Union. NATO's twenty-nine members, including the United States, are committed to collective defense, democratic values, and peaceful conflict resolution.⁵⁹ The most salient aspect of the North Atlantic Treaty itself is Article 5, which states that "an armed attack against one or more... shall be considered an attack against them all."⁶⁰ Hence, this arrangement placed the whole of Western Europe under the United States' "nuclear umbrella."⁶¹ Although the collapse of the USSR dissolved NATO's primary threat, NATO is still in effect today, and its members continue to receive protection from the US and other member nuclear weapons states.

In the Middle East, the US has extended its nuclear umbrella to "major non-NATO allies," including Israel, Egypt, and Saudi Arabia. During the Cold War, the US sought to secure access to the Middle East's oil supplies, which risked falling under control of the USSR. After the Iranian Revolution and the Soviet Union's invasion of Afghanistan in 1979, the "Carter Doctrine" was announced, stating the US "would use force to prevent any power from conquering the oil fields of the Persian Gulf."⁶² With this gesture, the US extended deterrence capabilities to US allies in the region.

In East Asia, the US also applies extended deterrence towards Japan, South Korea, Australia, and Taiwan. Although each of these states have once considered nuclear weapons acquisition or development, the US has attempted to counter such tendencies and hedge against nuclear proliferation by offering extended deterrence as a viable alternative. However, there are no US nuclear weapons based in East Asia. Beyond nuclear protection, the US has committed to the defense of its East Asian allies by maintaining a military presence in the region and providing defensive measures through arms sales.⁶³ At this time, China's growing power and North Korea's nuclear threat are the most salient threat to US allies in the region.

Since there are no multilateral alliance structures binding US commitments to East Asia, extended deterrence is based on bilateral relationships and agreements. On October 1, 1953, the US and South Korea signed a mutual defense treaty, stating that "the Parties will maintain and

⁵⁹ North Atlantic Treaty Organization, *The North Atlantic Treaty*, April 4, 1949, Washington, D.C.

⁶⁰ "A Political and Military Alliance," North Atlantic Treaty Organization, accessed May 21, 2018, <https://www.nato.int/nato-welcome/index.html#basic>.

⁶¹ Steven Pifer et al., "U.S. Nuclear and Extended Deterrence," 6.

⁶² *Ibid*, 37.

⁶³ *Ibid*, 29.

develop appropriate means to deter armed attack.”⁶⁴ Hence, South Korea now falls under the US nuclear umbrella. US arms sales and military bases in South Korea also contribute to South Korea’s military defense. As of September 2017, President Trump agreed to sell South Korea “billions of dollars” in US arms.⁶⁵ By November 2017, the two powers also agreed to lift warhead limits on South Korea’s ballistic missiles, as dictated in a bilateral agreement signed in 1979. This concession is meant to allow South Korea to develop its “deep precision-strike capable missiles” as part of South Korea’s deterrence strategy of “Korea Massive Punishment & Retaliation (KMPR).” This strategy “foresees precision strikes with ballistic missiles, cruise missiles, air-launched missiles, and special operation forces against North Korean leader Kim Jong-un and the country’s military leadership in the event of a nuclear attack.”⁶⁶ In this way, the US practices deterrence by punishment and deterrence by denial by extending its nuclear umbrella to South Korea while simultaneously reinforcing its domestic defensive capabilities.

Since the end of the Cold War, the US perspective has gradually shifted from a domestic focus to an international focus, as evidenced by its general and extended deterrence strategies. The post-war era has been characterized by the growing scope of US extended deterrence commitments. The US has expanded its nuclear umbrella throughout NATO Europe, the Middle East, and East Asia, in the hopes of preventing non-proliferation and nuclear war. However, North Korea’s patterns of aggression and intimidation towards US allies in the region, namely South Korea and Japan, will test the United States’ ability to effectively deploy extended deterrence and challenge the US to fulfill its widespread commitments.

⁶⁴ U.S. Department of State, “Mutual Defense Treaty Between the United States and the Republic of Korea,” October 1, 1953.

⁶⁵ Jack Kim, “Trump agrees to sell South Korea arms worth billions of dollars as treat from North grows,” *The Independent*, September 2, 2017, <http://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/americas/america-agrees-sale-arms-military-billions-dollars-south-korea-seoul-donald-trump-president-moon-jae-a7925591.html>.

⁶⁶ Franz-Stefan Gady, “Trump, Moon Reach Final Agreement to Scrap Warhead Limits for Ballistic Missiles,” *The Diplomat*, November 8, 2017, <https://thediplomat.com/2017/11/trump-moon-reach-final-agreement-to-scrap-warhead-limits-for-ballistic-missiles/>.

Chapter 3: Literature Review

This chapter discusses two areas of literature that are relevant to this research. The first concerns US policy options for addressing the national security threat posed by North Korea's nuclear program. The second body of work discusses the perspectives of various scholars who believe that deterrence is the best policy option for addressing North Korea's nuclear threat. These pieces of literature just skim the surface of some highly complex issues. But when considered together, these works shed some light on the US perspective and the necessary steps for deterrence to be successful.

3.1. US Policy Options

Since the end of the Cold War, the threat of global nuclear war has decreased, but the risk of a nuclear attack has only continued to rise.⁶⁷ As of 2014, US actions, ranging from “bribes and sanctions, diplomacy and threats, [and] soft and hard approaches” have all failed to yield any lasting results.⁶⁸ Morgan claims that neither deterrence nor compellence by the US has prevented North Korea from furthering its nuclear weapons program, but interestingly enough, nuclear proliferation has not significantly improved North Korea's national security thus far.⁶⁹ Despite its bleak past performance, American scholars and experts continue to consider various policy approaches for dealing with North Korea's nuclear threat, ranging from passive acceptance to full-scale military intervention.

Given North Korea's commitment to its nuclear weapons program, some experts suggest that the US adjust its current policy. Since CVID does not appear to be a feasible goal, the US should instead pursue a freeze or reductions in North Korea's nuclear weapons program.⁷⁰ Though the suspension of US-ROK joint exercises or a drawdown of US troops in South Korea would send peace-making signals to North Korea, it would also weaken the US-ROK alliance and call into question US commitment to mutual defense. Moreover, such actions would legitimize the claim that the DPRK's nuclear weapons program is necessary to respond to

⁶⁷ William Tobey, “Squaring the Nonproliferation Circle,” *The Journal of International Security Affairs* no. 26 (Spring/Summer 2014): 47.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, 49.

⁶⁹ Patrick M. Morgan, “Deterrence and System Management: The Case of North Korea,” *Conflict Management and Peace Science* 23, no 2 (2006): 121.

⁷⁰ Anderson, “Explaining North Korea's Nuclear Ambitions,” 621.

“hostile” actions from across the border. On the other hand, others claim that the denuclearization of North Korea is a “Western fantasy,” and that it is simply easier to accept North Korea as a nuclear weapon state.⁷¹ This would not only jeopardize US national security, but also undermine the faith of regional allies, such as Japan and South Korea, and embolden rising powers, such as China and Russia, to challenge US security efforts in the Asia Pacific region.⁷² Although experts have considered the use of military force to remove Kim Jong-un from power and facilitate reunification under South Korean leadership, such an outright military attack would inevitably risk nuclear war. Nevertheless, US leadership must recall that the DPRK claims that its nuclear arsenal has already deterred the US. Should the US give way to any major concessions, it will legitimize North Korea’s claims and make it that much more difficult to influence North Korea in the future.

The most preferable option is a multilateral approach, under which the US cooperates with allies and adversaries to pressure North Korea into a “near-term verifiable freeze” on its nuclear and missile programs. Even though Kim Jong-un has already announced the suspension of nuclear and missile tests, the state of these programs has yet to be verified by the IAEA.⁷³ Though this is the best policy option in theory, it is far more difficult in practice, requiring complex negotiations, as well as “unprecedented policymaking capacity and coordination across the US government.”⁷⁴ For this policy to succeed, it would require an overwhelming level of pressure in political, economic, and military spheres, as well as the cooperation of all involved states.⁷⁵ However, realism predicts that states cooperate with the international community as long as it serves their best interests. But when forced to choose, states will prioritize their wellbeing above everything else. Thus, multilateral approaches risk being undermined by those who choose not to cooperate. This is especially true for sanctions, which may be undercut by third parties

⁷¹ Clifton B. Parker, “Why nuclear deterrence can work on North Korea,” *Center for International Security and Cooperation*, November 14, 2017, <https://cisac.fsi.stanford.edu/news/why-nuclear-deterrence-can-work-north-korea>.

⁷² Anderson, “Explaining North Korea’s Nuclear Ambitions,” 621.

⁷³ Anna Fifield, “North Korea says it will suspend nuclear and missile tests, shut down test site,” *Washington Post*, April 20, 2018, https://wapo.st/2HjsSSj?tid=ss_mail&utm_term=.61e5ea53e451.

⁷⁴ John Allen et al., “Averting Catastrophe: US Policy Options for North Korea,” *Brookings Institute* (2017): 3-21. https://www.brookings.edu/wp-content/uploads/2017/04/fp_201704_north_korea_avoiding_catastrophe.pdf

⁷⁵ Revere, “The Trump administration’s North Korea policy: Headed for success or failure?”

who engage with the sanctioned state and temper the negative effects.⁷⁶ Powerful third party states are also incentivized to protect their weaker allies. In this way, third parties who have interests at stake will be motivated to intervene or even undermine multilateral efforts on behalf of an allied state.

In this case, the strongest third party influences on US-North Korea relations are China and Russia. For multilateral efforts against North Korea to be successful, China and Russia must both cooperate. To the frustration of the UN, their questionable record of compliance has weakened the effects of sanctions. This is simply because it is within China and Russia's interests to preserve Kim Jong-un's regime. Although sanctions can pressure North Korea into entering negotiations, it also risks collapsing Kim Jong-un's regime, which could lead to a refugee crisis, reunification under the democratic South Korean government, or possibly bring China into war. As the "chilled" relationship between China and North Korea continues to thaw, the US must consider the influence of third party actors on the overall success of policies. Though sanctions have long been considered preferable to war, the US must be conscious of how effective sanctions will be as long as third parties persist.

Even though individual states and international institutions often use economic sanctions to influence state behavior without resorting to force, scholars doubt whether economic sanctions weaken a state's economy to the point of changing its behavior.⁷⁷ Economic sanctions theory argues that the mere threat of sanctions is more likely to change a state's behavior than the implementation of sanctions. Sanctions that are likely to succeed in achieving the desired objective will do so before sanctions are levied, whereas sanctions that are unlikely to succeed are those that are imposed.⁷⁸ Sanctions are often used as a mechanism for deterrence, but prove ineffective when deterrence fails. Since economic sanctions theory predicts that the imposition of sanctions will ultimately have a negligible effect on state behavior, the US should not count on sanctions alone to change North Korea's behavior.

The policy option that is most relevant to deterrence is one that forces North Korea "to choose between nuclear weapons and survival," an approach that Revere claims "has never been

⁷⁶ Nikolay A. Kozhanov, "U.S. Economic Sanctions against Iran: Undermined by External Factors," *Middle East Policy Council* 18, no. 3 (Fall 2011): 144

⁷⁷ William H. Kaempfer and Anton D. Lowenberg, "The Theory of International Economic Sanctions: A Public Choice Approach," *The American Economic Review* 78, no. 4 (September 1988): 786.

⁷⁸ Dean Lacy and Emerson M.S. Niou, "A Theory of Economic Sanctions and Issue Linkage: The Roles of Preferences, Information, and Threats," *The Journal of Politics* 66, no. 1 (February 2004): 25.

tried.”⁷⁹ Revere explains, “to change North Korea’s course, the United States must convince Kim Jong-un the stability of his regime may be at risk if he does not denuclearize.”⁸⁰ By doing so, this approach threatens the primary objective of North Korea’s nuclear program: regime survival. If Kim Jong-un is a rational actor, he would naturally choose the path that preserves his regime over the prospect of “national suicide.” Therefore, US foreign policy needs to send a new message to the Kim regime: “If regime survival is your goal, nuclear weapons will prevent you from reaching your goal.”⁸¹ To convey this message, Revere calls for improved US and allied military capabilities on or around the Korean Peninsula and enhanced extended deterrence. Furthermore, the US should also strengthen economic, financial, and trade measures to deprive North Korea of money and resources.⁸² Though this approach is not necessarily new, it is the only approach that considers North Korea’s perceptions of the US, and does not exclusively focus on military power or access to resources. Thus, the US needs to coordinate policy efforts to convey a specific message to the Kim regime. By considering the strengths and weaknesses of various policy options, it is clear that there is no easy solution to the North Korea nuclear crisis.

3.2. Is Deterrence the Answer to the North Korea Problem?

Recent literature suggests that deterrence is the best option for addressing the North Korea nuclear problem. Deterrence has been prevalent in national security and defense literature since its emergence in the Cold War. Various sources concur that a Cold War posture could be enough to prevent a North Korean nuclear attack against the United States. This is evident simply by the titles of these works. Despite the emerging consensus that deterrence is the most preferable policy option, various scholars have different ideas as to what makes deterrence effective and what makes it “the best.” In the article, “Why nuclear deterrence can work on North Korea,” Scott D. Sagan, a professor of political science and a senior fellow at Stanford’s Center for International Security and Cooperation, advocates for “a revised nuclear chain of command,” which would check the power of the President by requiring the approval of the US Secretary of Defense and US Attorney General for the launch of a nuclear strike.⁸³ In an

⁷⁹ Revere, “The Trump administration’s North Korea policy: Headed for success or failure?”

⁸⁰ Ibid.

⁸¹ Evans J.R. Revere, “Dealing with a nuclear-armed North Korea,” *Brookings Institute*, October 4, 2016, <https://www.brookings.edu/research/dealing-with-a-nuclear-armed-north-korea/>.

⁸² Ibid.

⁸³ Parker, “Why nuclear deterrence can work on North Korea.”

additional article, “The Korean Missile Crisis: Why Deterrence Is Still the Best Option,” Sagan explains that military leaders must convey to government leadership and the general public that “any U.S. first strike on North Korea would result in a devastating loss in American and South Korean lives.”⁸⁴ Ergo, the US should consider deterrence to be a far more preferable alternative to a preemptive strike. Civilian leadership must also promise Kim Jong-un “that the United States will not attempt to overthrow his regime unless he begins a war.”⁸⁵ In essence, Sagan argues that military and civilian leadership needs to convey separate messages to their respective audiences. By refraining from preemptive strikes and limiting the power of the President, the US can refrain from making rash decisions that could spark an all-out war. Finally, Sagan hopes that Kim Jong-un will not launch a nuclear attack if the US promises not pursue regime change on the Korean Peninsula.

Even if denuclearization is no longer a feasible goal, Vipin Narang, a political scientist at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, points out, “the good news is that deterrence can work, coupled with coercive diplomacy.”⁸⁶ Moreover, an effective deterrence policy “depends on clarity, consistency, coherence, and communications.”⁸⁷ Even though Narang fails to elaborate on this criteria, this stance suggests that a focus on cultivating perceptions and creating clear, consistent messages can contribute to effective deterrence. Logical and comprehensive strategies can also further these goals. Michael Singh, the former senior director for Middle East affairs at the US National Security Council (NSC), assumes a similar approach, stating that the US needs to adopt a “single, sustained strategy” that equally weighs military and diplomatic solutions. In his article, “Trump Should Focus on Deterring North Korea,” Singh points out that strengthening deterrence “is not a solution to the problem, but a way of coping with the absence of solutions.”⁸⁸ While debating various policy options, the least the US can do to ensure national security is strengthen deterrence capabilities.

Though it may be the “least bad” option, some scholars argue that strengthening deterrence risks escalating tensions and increases the chance of conflict. James M. Acton, the co-

⁸⁴ Scott D. Sagan, “The Korean Missile Crisis: Why Deterrence Is Still the Best Option,” *Foreign Affairs*, September 10, 2017, <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/north-korea/2017-09-10/korean-missile-crisis>.

⁸⁵ Ibid.

⁸⁶ Parker, “Why nuclear deterrence can work on North Korea,”

⁸⁷ Ibid.

⁸⁸ Michael Singh, “Trump Should Focus on Deterring North Korea,” *Foreign Policy*, October 17, 2017, <http://foreignpolicy.com/2017/10/17/trump-should-focus-on-deterring-north-korea/>.

director of the Nuclear Policy Program and a senior fellow at the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, states in the article, “North Korea: In Deterrence We Trust,” that an emphasis on military capabilities may lead US policy makers to focus too narrowly on perfecting a singular military-based strategy. Instead, policy makers would be better off developing risk-reduction measures to ensure that subsequent actions will avoid escalating tensions.⁸⁹ Dr. Johnson Nilsson-Wright, a senior research fellow within the Asia Programme of the Chatham House, reinforces this idea by stating that North Korea and the United States both face the same dilemma: Any action that contributes to increased deterrence could also increase escalation.⁹⁰ As such, these two scholars caution that deterrence strategies cannot be exclusively focused on military capabilities. For deterrence to be effective, both parties must consider the perceptions of the opposing side and take measures to avoid escalation, thus decreasing the likelihood of war.

Furthermore, scholars have different suggestions for which kind of deterrence would be most effective against North Korea. Aurelia George Mulgan, a Professor at the University of South Wales Canberra, claims that a style of “active deterrence,” or deterrence by punishment, is one that presents an opponent with “the certainty of retaliation, thus raising the threshold for aggressors and giving them pause to consider the potential consequences of their actions.”⁹¹ Mulgan goes on to explain that “active deterrence” can be used in response to North Korea’s ballistic missile tests by having the “will and capability to shoot down missiles test-fired towards and across the territory of other states.”⁹² In reality, “active deterrence” combines deterrence by punishment and deterrence by denial strategies by promising overwhelming retaliation and threat neutralization. Other the other hand, A. Wess Mitchell, the president of the Center for European Policy Analysis, argues that deterrence by denial is preferable to deterrence by punishment.⁹³ This is because deterrence by punishment relies on the ability to credibly retaliate against an aggressor. However, the author observes that it is becoming increasingly difficult to punish potential aggressors without incurring significant costs. As such, the United States needs to

⁸⁹ James M. Acton, “North Korea: In Deterrence We Trust,” *The Diplomat*, September 12, 2017, <https://thediplomat.com/2017/09/north-korea-in-deterrence-we-trust/>.

⁹⁰ John Nilsson-Wright, “North Korea’s Tight Line Between Deterrence and Escalation,” *Chatham House*, November 30, 2017, <https://www.chathamhouse.org/expert/comment/north-koreas-tight-line-between-deterrence-and-escalation>.

⁹¹ Aurelia George Mulgan, “Time to Consider ‘Active Deterrence’ of North Korea,” *The Diplomat*, September 05, 2017, <https://thediplomat.com/2017/09/time-to-consider-active-deterrence-of-north-korea/>.

⁹² *Ibid.*

⁹³ Mitchell, “The Case for Deterrence by Denial.”

utilize deterrence by denial by searching for new ways to instill fear in “would-be” predators while “revisionists,” such as Kim Jong-un, “are still mulling over their options.”⁹⁴ Finally, Omar Lamrani advocates for a “proactive deterrence” strategy modeled after South Korea, in which “its military chain of command is compressed to speed up decision-making, while [aiming] to detect and pre-empt any North Korean missile launch before it occurs.”⁹⁵ Sagan would argue that speeding up the decision-making process may not be suitable to the United States. Nevertheless, early detection and threat neutralization are still crucial elements of deterrence by denial strategies. Although these articles fail to say anything particularly new, these suggestions do highlight recurring conditions that are required for deterrence to be successful, such as credibility. For deterrence to be effective, the US must be able to guarantee deterrence by punishment through retaliation, while also furthering deterrence by denial through improved missile defense and preventing nuclear launches before they start.

The most significant flaw of this strategy is that deterrence can fail. While Cold War-era literature consistently points to the possibility of failure, it seems that more recent literature is unwilling to acknowledge this fact. A recent work by David Krieger of the Nuclear Age Peace Foundation succinctly argues that deterrence has many serious flaws. Krieger claims that in reality, deterrence is only a theory. The fact that a nuclear attack has not yet occurred does not prove that it was prevented by deterrence. Since it is impossible to prove a negative, it is also impossible to prove that deterrence is actually effective, and any attempt to do so creates “a false assumption of causality.”⁹⁶ Furthermore, successful deterrence strategies require effective communications and rational decision-makers, which are not always guaranteed. To add insult to injury, Krieger also claims that deterrence instills nuclear weapon states with a false sense of confidence, emboldening leaders to take risks that would otherwise be avoided.⁹⁷ Barry Wolf, a researcher at the RAND Corporation, published the report, “When the Weak Attack the Strong: Failures of Deterrence,” to analyze cases in which seemingly weaker states have attacked stronger states. This study found that weaker nations initiated fourteen out of forty-three conflicts

⁹⁴ Ibid.

⁹⁵ Omar Lamrani, “Against North Korea, Deterrence Of A Different Kind,” *Forbes Magazine*, October 5, 2017, <https://www.forbes.com/sites/stratfor/2017/10/05/against-north-korea-deterrence-of-a-different-kind/#1dbb95f84f43>.

⁹⁶ David Krieger, “Ten Serious Flaws in Nuclear Deterrence Theory,” *Nuclear Age Peace Foundation*, February 7, 2011, <https://www.wagingpeace.org/ten-serious-flaws-in-nuclear-deterrence-theory/>.

⁹⁷ Ibid.

during the 20th century, totaling 3% of all conflicts at that time.⁹⁸ These cases were characterized by one of the following conditions: the weaker state was highly motivated, the weaker state misperceived some facet of the situation, or the stronger state had an apparent vulnerability.⁹⁹ Although this study focuses exclusively on conventional wars and does not necessarily apply to nuclear deterrence, it does demonstrate that even in cases where a weak state is far outmatched by a stronger state, and it does not make logical sense for a weak state to provoke conflict, in some cases, a weak state will still choose to attack first. Therefore, despite overwhelming advantages, deterrence can and often does fail. Thus, the US must be careful when placing overwhelming faith in deterrence. If deterrence is the best option, then the US must do everything in its power to ensure strategic deterrence is indeed effective.



⁹⁸ Barry Wolf, “When the Weak Attack the Strong: Failures of Deterrence,” *RAND Corporation*, 1991, <https://www.rand.org/content/dam/rand/pubs/notes/2005/N3261.pdf>.

⁹⁹ *Ibid.*

Chapter 4: Theoretical Considerations

The most relevant theories to this analysis are realism and constructivism. While realism assumes state behavior is driven by a rational desire for power, constructivism argues that behavior is instead determined by constructed images and norms. Though realism and constructivism provide differing perspectives as to why states desire nuclear weapons, both make relevant insights as to what makes nuclear deterrence effective.

4.1. Realism

Realists argue that states make strategic decisions based on the following assumptions: states are the central actors in international politics, the international political system is anarchic, states are rational actors, and that all states desire power. Based on these assumptions, structural realism (or Neorealism), contends that it is the constraints or opportunities available in the international environment that will ultimately determine a state's behavior.¹⁰⁰ Since states are motivated to take opportunities that will increase power, realism considers power to be the driving factor of international relations. Nye asserts that there are two kinds of power: hard power and soft power. Hard power employs material resources, such as population, territory, economic power, and most importantly, military capabilities, to influence state policy. In contrast, soft power uses persuasion and attraction, such as diplomacy, to influence other states. Nye claims that "smart power," or a combination of "hard power" coercion and "soft power" persuasion, is the best strategy for addressing strategic decisions.¹⁰¹ Therefore, it makes sense that US foreign policy towards North Korea would require both compellent and deterrent components to be successful.

Nuclear proliferation issues are usually considered within the context of realism. At this time, nuclear weapons are the most powerful weapon known to man, instantaneously causing widespread, indiscriminate destruction on a massive scale. With the most powerful weapon, a state can guarantee its national security, regardless of its population size, economic power, or military strength. By increasing a state's bargaining power and access to opportunities, nuclear

¹⁰⁰ Charles Glaser, "Realism," in *Contemporary Security Studies*, 3rd ed., ed. Alan Collins (Oxford: Oxford University Press), 14.

¹⁰¹ Joseph S. Nye, Jr., *The Future of Power* (New York, NY: PublicAffairs, 2011), 4-24.

weapons are extremely desirable to states. To counter this tendency, “liberal institutionalists” argue that multilateral policies can engage non-democratic states in dialogue, and use political pressure and sanctions to address security concerns through a “rule-based liberal world order.” This approach not only curbs nuclear proliferation tendencies, but also lowers the overall likelihood of war.¹⁰² In response, structural realists contend that international agreements are not strong enough to prevent competition and alleviate perceptions of insecurity, both of which drives states to pursue nuclear weapons development. The UN, as led by the US, has created a strong “global nuclear nonproliferation regime” that condemns the clandestine development and accumulation of nuclear weapons.¹⁰³ However, self-interested states, such as North Korea, who do not adhere to international norms and standards, will continue to acquire nuclear weapons and illicit technology beyond the control of the UN. As demonstrated by North Korea’s withdrawal from the NPT and its ensuing nuclear weapons development, liberal institutions and international agreements may not be strong enough to prevent nuclear proliferation or war. As long as nuclear weapons exist, states will use them to gain or maintain power within the international system.

4.2. Constructivism

On the contrary, constructivism provides a different perspective on what drives states to acquire and develop nuclear weapons. Constructivism is a theory in which certain aspects of international relations are considered to be socially constructed. Therefore, social interaction and shared ideas play a far more influential role in shaping interests and identities than by human nature or the international structure.¹⁰⁴ As such, Wendt claims that shared ideas create the structures of human association, including anarchy itself, stating “whether a system is conflictual or peaceful is a function not of anarchy and power but of the shared culture created through discursive social practices.”¹⁰⁵ Therefore, anarchy is a product of “cultural instantiations,” and that states can gradually reshape structures through processes, developing new gestures, interests,

¹⁰² Heinz Gaertner, “North Korea, Deterrence, and Engagement,” *Defense & Security Analysis* 30, no. 4 (2014): 336.

¹⁰³ International Institutions and Global Governance Program, “The Global Nuclear Nonproliferation Regime,” *Council on Foreign Relations*, May 21, 2012, accessed May 20, 2018, <https://www.cfr.org/report/global-nuclear-nonproliferation-regime>.

¹⁰⁴ Alexander Wendt, *Social Theory of International Politics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 1.

¹⁰⁵ Dale C. Copeland, “The Constructivist Challenge to Structural Realism,” *International Security* 25, no. 2 (Autumn 2000): 187-188.

and identities to gradually move towards peaceful resolutions of conflict.¹⁰⁶ In this way, constructivism offers an interesting alternative to realist thought.

Scholars of constructivism argue that following World War II, nuclear weapons were given a new meaning. In other words, nuclear weapons are now considered to be a means of “total, non-discriminate devastation,” a source of enduring insecurity, an opportunity for power and prestige, and a new taboo.¹⁰⁷ Therefore, the formulation and institutionalization of new norms and standards, such as the NPT, are a product of changing perceptions of nuclear weapons. Another application of constructivism is the “norms model,” which considers the symbolic functions of nuclear weapons, the identity of the state, and global norms to be the major motivating factors for states to acquire nuclear weapons.¹⁰⁸ In Iran’s case, Ashley argues that its nuclear weapons development was popularly supported because of a constructed sense of national pride, not because of strategic appeal.¹⁰⁹ Thus, despite the existing taboo against nuclear proliferation, North Korea’s nuclear weapons program serves a symbolic purpose, promoting animosity against Western powers, fostering national pride, and constructing a narrative in which nuclear weapons are essential to regime survival.

4.3. Theoretical Applications to Deterrence

Realism and constructivism provide different perspectives regarding North Korea’s relationship with nuclear weapons. In a broader sense, these theories specify which factors are responsible for influencing a state’s behavior. From a security-based perspective, realism argues that power is the strongest source of influence, forcing states to seek out “hard power” and “soft power” capabilities. On the contrary, constructivism argues that shared ideas and constructed norms mainly influence how states behave. By doing so, these theories also provide some insight into what makes deterrence effective. “Hard power” military capabilities will surely be required to ensure that threats are credible. However, “soft power” capabilities are also necessary to influence perceptions and convince adversaries of threat credibility. In addition, constructivism

¹⁰⁶ Ibid.

¹⁰⁷ Jo-Ansie van Wyk, “The International Politics of Nuclear Weapons: A Constructivist Analysis,” *Scientia Militaria, South African Journal of Military Studies* 35, no.1 (2007): 23-31.

¹⁰⁸ Yewon Ji, “Three Paradigms of North Korea’s Nuclear Ambitions,” *Journal of Political Inquiry* 2 (2009): 1-11.

¹⁰⁹ Sean Paul Ashley, “The Iranian Nuclear Program: Realist vs. Constructivist Models,” (PhD Diss., Princeton University, 2012).

considers how symbolism and identity can influence a state's perceptions and political will. Thus, constructed norms influence state behavior by dictating which behaviors are legitimate. With this in mind, realism and constructivism can both provide a fuller understanding of the factors that influence state behavior. Theory can explain what motivates states to obtain nuclear weapons, and in doing so, expose how states can influence one another to deter a nuclear attack.



Chapter 5: Analytical Framework

This chapter differentiates between the two primary means of influencing other states: compellence and deterrence. Though there are many rising challengers to US power within the international system, North Korea is the most salient threat to US national security at this time. Therefore, North Korea has become the primary target of US deterrence efforts. Though the US generally reserves its nuclear capabilities for deterrence purposes, it also maintains a “first use” policy for when compellence may be required. Although this implies that the US reserves the right to launch a preemptive strike, provoking conflict is still less desirable than deterrence.

5.1. Coercion, Compellence, and Deterrence

In a general sense, international relations is the study of how states interact with one another. Assuming a realist perspective, states will pursue foreign policy strategies that will safeguard interests and achieve national goals. To do this, states will attempt to influence the behavior of other states through coercion, compellence, and deterrence. Though international relations theorists have described coercion in a number of ways, a general definition is “the threat or use of punitive measures against states, groups, or individuals in order to force them to undertake or desist from specified actions.”¹¹⁰ Expanding on this idea, Schelling explains that “coercive diplomacy” is based on a state’s power to inflict harm on another state.¹¹¹ Ergo, coercion is based on a state’s ability to exploit its capacity to harm as a source of bargaining power.¹¹² Coercion differs from “brute force” as it does not require a state to use its full military power. Rather, a state must use its military potential as a basis for threatening damage to convince an adversary to comply.¹¹³ In sum, coercion is meant to influence another state’s behavior by threatening violence without actually resorting to military force.

Schelling argues that there are two distinctive components of coercion: compellence and deterrence. Compellence is used to describe “offensive” behaviors that require actively changing the status quo. It is defined as “the ability of one state to coerce another state into action, usually

¹¹⁰ Mujeeb R. Khan, *Encyclopedia Britannica*, “Coercion,” accessed March 23, 2018, <https://www.britannica.com/topic/coercion>.

¹¹¹ Thomas C. Schelling, *Arms and Influence* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1966), 3.

¹¹² *Ibid*, 2.

¹¹³ *Ibid*, 3.

by threatening punishment.”¹¹⁴ Acts of compellence can be identified as “a direct action that persuades an opponent to give up something that is desired.”¹¹⁵ Such acts may employ military and non-military tools, such as threatening violence against military and civilian targets, as well as economic sanctions. Furthermore, there are two basic forms of compellence: diplomacy and demonstration. Diplomatic (or immediate) compellence uses verbal threats and promises of violence, while demonstrative compellence relies on limited shows of force coupled with possible escalation if an adversary fails to comply. Both forms may reinforce one other, collectively compelling an adversary to comply with state demands.

In contrast, deterrence is a passive approach which “is designed to discourage an opponent from action by threatening punishment.”¹¹⁶ Deterrence is a “defensive” form of coercion, which seeks to passively prevent change by maintaining the status quo. This approach is generally considered to be a military-based strategy, “under which one power uses the threat of reprisal effectively to preclude an attack from an adversary power.”¹¹⁷ As a result, effective deterrence relies heavily upon military capabilities and is often used alongside nuclear power. Since the Cold War, nuclear weapons have provided the foundation for deterrence between nuclear weapon states. Moreover, powerful allies have extended deterrence capabilities to allies in an effort to curb nuclear proliferation and reassure non-nuclear weapon states. Though threats and limited shows of force may also benefit deterrence strategies, the purpose of these behaviors is not to force action but to ensure inaction by supporting the status quo. Thus, deterrence is a passive approach that relies upon military capabilities to persuade an opponent from an undesirable behavior.

Even though these concepts share overlapping principles, there are three key differences between compellence and deterrence. The first concerns which party is required to act first. In acts of compellence, the initiating state must first demonstrate its commitment to act.¹¹⁸ Deterrence does not require the initiating state to act first. Instead, an initiating state will “lay the trap,” but will only respond if the target state engages in the undesirable behavior. Since

¹¹⁴ *Encyclopedia Britannica*, “Compellence,” accessed March 23, 2018, <https://www.britannica.com/topic/compellence>.

¹¹⁵ *Ibid.*

¹¹⁶ *Ibid.*

¹¹⁷ *Encyclopedia Britannica*, “Deterrence,” accessed March 23, 2018, <https://www.britannica.com/topic/deterrence-political-and-military-strategy>.

¹¹⁸ Schelling, “Arms and Influence,” 69.

deterrence is contingent upon the target state's decision to act, the target state must act first.¹¹⁹ The second difference is who must decide to act, or rather whose will is being tested. Compellence tests the will of the initiating state, as they must choose to act first. Deterrence tests the will of the target state, who must choose whether or not to comply with the initiating state's demands. Finally, the third difference is when the initiating state chooses to punish the target state. In acts of compellence, the punishment is implemented until the target state acts in the desired fashion. In cases of deterrence, punishment is only implemented when deterrence fails and the target state proceeds in the undesired behavior. If deterrence is successful, then no punishment occurs.¹²⁰ In sum, compellence uses offensive means to push states to engage in a certain behavior, while deterrence assumes a passive approach to discourage states from engaging in a certain behavior.

Due to these differences, deterrence appears easier to achieve than compellence. Deterrence is less provocative than compellence, as it does not require any initial actions or commitment to act. It is clearly less risky to make a threat than it is to begin a war. Deterrence also allows a target state to comply with demands without suffering audience costs. Audience costs promise a negative response from domestic constituencies if the state leader backs down in a crisis.¹²¹ By choosing to back down, a state leader risks incurring audience costs by losing credibility and domestic support. Furthermore, state leaders fear that compliance indicates weakness, and those who readily give in to demands are susceptible to outside influence. As a result, compellence might even have the opposite effect by incentivizing state leaders to double down against coercion.¹²² On the other hand, deterrence allows a target state to "save face." Since compliance does not require action, a target state can simply choose to maintain the status quo and "ignore" the deterrent threat. Finally, it is incredibly difficult to compel a state to act from the outside. From a sociological perspective, human beings have consistently demonstrated a resistance to change.¹²³ By this logic, even when compellence is successful, it will still be more

¹¹⁹ Ibid, 70.

¹²⁰ Ibid.

¹²¹ James D. Fearon, "Domestic Political Audiences and the Escalation of International Disputes," *The American Political Science Review* 88, no. 3 (September 1994): 577, accessed April 13, 2018, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/2944796>.

¹²² Ibid.

¹²³ John T. Jost, "Resistance to Change: A Social Psychological Perspective," *Social Research* 82, no. 3 (Fall 2015): 607.

difficult to change the status quo than to maintain it.¹²⁴ Since deterrence is less provocative and requires less effort, it is much easier to achieve and less likely to fail.

Table 1: A Comparison of Coercion, Compellence, and Deterrence

	General Definitions	Active or Passive?	Who Moves First?	Is Initial Action Required?	When Does Punishment Occur?
<i>Coercion</i>	To modify state behavior	Both			
<i>Compellence</i>	To persuade an opponent to give up something desired	Active	Initiating State	Yes	Until desired action occurs
<i>Deterrence</i>	To persuade an opponent from an action by threatening punishment	Passive	Target State	No	Only if undesired action occurs

5.2. The Relevance of Deterrence in US-North Korea Relations

In the 2017 National Security Strategy (NSS) and the 2018 Nuclear Posture Review (NPR), the Trump Administration articulated its foreign policy goals and described the current state of international affairs. Like previous administrations, President Trump has emphasized collaboration with allies who share US values and interests, calling for enhanced multilateral cooperation on collective issues, such as security and trade. However, these documents also identify “three main sets of challengers” to the US and its allies. These challengers include “the revisionist powers of China and Russia, the rogue states of Iran and North Korea, and transnational threat organizations, particularly jihadist groups.”¹²⁵ The Trump Administration considers these challengers to be rivals who compete with US influence across political, economic, and military arenas to shift regional balances of power in their favor.¹²⁶

Of these competitors, North Korea has become the primary target of US coercion and the most fitting candidate for deterrence theory. Even though China and Russia have both become increasingly aggressive in their foreign policy, these states have yet to present a tangible threat to

¹²⁴ *Encyclopedia Britannica*, “Compellence.”

¹²⁵ United States, and Donald Trump, *National Security Strategy of the United States of America*, 25.

¹²⁶ *Ibid.*

the US beyond ordinary exercises of power. Specifically, neither state has directly threatened to attack the US or its allies. Jihadist groups and other sources of terrorism regularly threaten the US, but have yet to acquire nuclear weapons or other Weapons of Mass Destruction (WMD). Although the Trump Administration has recently withdrawn from the Iran Nuclear Deal, the IAEA continues to affirm Iran's compliance with the agreement.¹²⁷

In comparison, North Korea has made numerous threats against the US, some of which include “[turning] the U.S. mainland into the theater of a nuclear war,” threatening an “unimaginable strike at an unimaginable time,” or making the supporters of UN sanctions “pay [a] heavy price for what they have done.”¹²⁸ Most recently, in March 2018, North Korea's official news agency, the *Korean Central News Agency* (KCNA), commented that if the US proceeds in joint military exercises with South Korea while maintaining sanctions against North Korea, then the DPRK will choose to “counter the U.S. by its own mode of counteraction and the U.S. will be made to own all responsibilities for the ensuing consequences.”¹²⁹ What is even more troubling is the fact that North Korea may already have the capabilities to carry out these extreme threats. Though it is impossible to know for certain how sophisticated North Korea's nuclear program is, the NPR states that “North Korea may now be only months away from the capability to strike the United States with nuclear armed ballistic missiles.”¹³⁰ Since withdrawing from the NPT, North Korea is no longer bound by international laws governing nuclear proliferation. Moreover, North Korea has a history of breaking commitments, particularly those relevant to its nuclear weapons program. In this way, North Korea clearly differs from other challengers and is the most latent threat to US national security.

While the aim of US compellence is to denuclearize North Korea, the aim of deterrence is to prevent a nuclear attack against the US and its allies. Compellent strategies, such as economic

¹²⁷ Carol Morello, “IAEA confirms Iran is meeting its commitments under nuclear agreement,” *Washington Post*, November 13, 2017, accessed April 13, 2018, https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/national-security/iaea-confirms-iran-is-meeting-its-commitments-under-nuclear-deal/2017/11/13/8d9b9fb0-c893-11e7-b0cf-7689a9f2d84e_story.html.

¹²⁸ Jonathan Kaiman, “North Korea threatens to turn U.S. mainland into a ‘theater of nuclear war,’” *Los Angeles Times*, August 9, 2017, accessed April 13, 2018; Tom Batchelor, “North Korea threatens ‘unimaginable’ strike on US after military drills,” *The Independent*, October 19, 2017, accessed April 13, 2018; Faith Karimi and James Griffiths, “North Korea calls latest UN sanctions ‘an act of war,’” *CNN Politics*, December 25, 2017, accessed April 13, 2018.

¹²⁹ Reuters Staff, “North Korea threatens to ‘counter’ U.S. over military drills,” *Reuters*, March 3, 2018, accessed April 13, 2018.

¹³⁰ U.S. Department of Defense, *Nuclear Posture Review Report* (Washington, DC: Office of the Secretary of Defense, 2018), 11.

sanctions, verbal threats, and limited shows of force, have failed to yield lasting results thus far. Scholars of international security, nuclear policy, and US-North Korea relations, such as Sagan and Acton, argue that the US needs to shift the focus of foreign policy away from compellence and towards deterrence. This shift is not surprising, given how difficult it is to compel states to act, let alone give up their nuclear weapons. Rather, as North Korea uses its nuclear weapons program to threaten the US homeland, these academics argue that the US needs to focus efforts on effectively deterring a nuclear attack.

US coercion towards North Korea includes a wide range of policy tools. Of these tools, nuclear weapons currently play the most prominent role in US-North Korea foreign policy. As the name implies, “nuclear deterrence” views nuclear weapons as the primary deterrent against foreign aggression. The NPR reaffirms this strategy: “U.S. nuclear capabilities make essential contributions to the deterrence of nuclear and non-nuclear aggression. The deterrence effects they provide are unique and essential to preventing adversary nuclear attacks, which is the highest priority of the United States.”¹³¹ On a basic level, nuclear deterrence implies that a nuclear attack will face retaliation with nuclear weapons. Therefore, each nuclear power must “maintain a high level of instant and overwhelming destructive capability against any aggression.”¹³² As a nuclear weapon state, the US promises to punish potential adversaries as a way to ward off attacks to the US homeland and allies protected by the US “nuclear umbrella.” By doing so, the US has set the stage for nuclear deterrence.

On the other hand, the US has refused to adopt a “No First Use” policy, which would declare “that the sole purpose of U.S. nuclear weapons is to deter – and, if necessary, respond – to the use of nuclear weapons against the United States and its allies and partners.”¹³³ A “No First Use” policy would essentially prevent the US from threatening to use nuclear weapons in an “offensive” or compellent manner. The NPR states that, “the United States has never adopted a ‘no first use’ policy and, given the contemporary threat environment, such a policy is not justified today.”¹³⁴ It goes on to explain that it is necessary to “retain some ambiguity regarding the precise circumstances that might lead to a U.S. nuclear response.”¹³⁵ Under previous

¹³¹ United States, *Nuclear Posture Review Report*.

¹³² *Encyclopedia Britannica*, “Deterrence.”

¹³³ Michael S. Gerson, “The Future of U.S. Nuclear Policy: The Case for No First Use,” *Quarterly Journal: International Security* (February 2011): 1.

¹³⁴ United States, *Nuclear Posture Review Report*, 22.

¹³⁵ *Ibid.*

administrations, this “ambiguity” refers to preemptive strikes against nuclear targets, chemical and biological weapons, or even large-scale conventional aggression.¹³⁶ Hence, the US argues there may be cases in which a preemptive strike might be considered necessary. Critics of nuclear first-use argue that the US already commands more than adequate conventional advantages, making nuclear first-use unnecessary. In response, the US maintains that “non-nuclear forces also play essential deterrence roles, but do not provide comparable deterrence effects.”¹³⁷ Furthermore, “conventional forces alone are inadequate to assure many allies who rightly place enormous value on U.S. extended nuclear deterrence for their security, which correspondingly is also key to non-proliferation.”¹³⁸ Despite the power of conventional weapons, the US reserves the right to nuclear first-use because of its overwhelming contributions to effective deterrence and its ability to reassure allies of mutual defense. Finally, the NPR states, “Effective U.S. deterrence of nuclear attack and non-nuclear strategic attack requires ensuring that potential adversaries do not miscalculate regarding the consequences of nuclear first use, either regionally or against the United States itself.”¹³⁹ Though the NPR demonstrates an understanding of the dangers involved in nuclear first-use, the US continues to emphasize the importance of nuclear weapons to effective deterrence, while simultaneously reserving the right to use nuclear weapons in a compellent manner if necessary.

¹³⁶ Gerson, “The Future of U.S. Nuclear Policy.”

¹³⁷ United States, *Nuclear Posture Review Report*, vi-vii.

¹³⁸ Ibid.

¹³⁹ Ibid, 30.

Chapter 6: Criteria for Effective Deterrence

What Makes Deterrence Successful?

Deterrence is a psychological concept whose influence reaches into a number of fields, including law, criminology, international relations, and security studies. Nevertheless, these fields all concur that in order for deterrence to be successful, the threatened punishment must be credible. Credibility may be generally defined as “the quality of being trusted and believed in,” or rather, “the quality of being convincing or believable.”¹⁴⁰ Though this term is used in a number of contexts, there are specific factors that influence how credible a threat may be. Therefore, this section will briefly introduce the four key factors that influence credibility within deterrence theory: Capabilities, political will, perceptions, and legitimacy.

Military Capabilities

The deterring state must have sufficient military capabilities to produce a credible threat. This means the deterring state must have “enough” military capabilities to inflict costs that outweigh the potential benefits of the undesired action. This requires a knowledge of an adversary’s goals, interests, and capabilities. If the target state has nuclear weapons, at the very least, the initiating state must also have nuclear weapons or the support of a nuclear-armed ally. The deterring state also has to survive and retaliate following an initial attack. Finally, the deterring state needs adequate conventional and non-conventional capabilities to provide a proportional response.

Political Will

For deterrence to be effective, the deterring state must have sufficient political will to follow through on the threatened action. Political will depends primarily on the commitment of decision-makers at the individual and the national level. At the individual level, the personality of state leaders plays a significant role in the expression of political will. Personality influences how state leaders make decisions and how committed they are to those decisions once they are made. Regime type also matters to political will. Since democratic states are more susceptible to

¹⁴⁰ *Oxford Dictionary*, “Credibility,” accessed March 29, 2018, <https://en.oxforddictionaries.com/definition/credibility>.

audience costs than autocracies, democracies are more committed to following through on threats. Deterrence builds on the realist assumption that states are rational actors. Though states may appear to be irrational, an understanding of common influential factors can explain irrational behavior in otherwise rational states.

Perceptions

Successful deterrence requires the initiating state to persuade the target state that it has the military capability and political will to follow through on a stated threat. To do this, states must actively cultivate perceptions, either using uncertainty to perpetuate false impressions that strengthen bargaining power, or reducing uncertainty through signaling behavior that clearly conveys intent. Though conventional wisdom suggests that a reputation of consistency can also contribute to perceptions of credibility, balance of power and interests at stake are more accurate indicators of how adversaries assess threat credibility.

Legitimacy

Deterrence is more likely to be successful when it is considered a legitimate exercise of power within the international community. Legitimacy validates behavior, proving to domestic and international audiences that a certain course of action is legal, logical, or both. If a state wants to take action beyond the usual bounds of law, then that state must be able to explain why. Domestic audiences want justification for the decisions of state leaders, while international institutions demand compliance with international law, norms, and standards. If a state's behavior is validated through law or is otherwise justifiable, then the state is more likely to follow through on that behavior. In this way, legitimacy strengthens realized and perceived credibility and contributes to effective deterrence.

Chapter 7: Military Capabilities

First, the deterring state must have adequate military capabilities to present a legitimate threat. Realists believe that military capabilities are the key to power, and states desire power as a means of self-preservation. Mearsheimer asserts, “Power is based on the material capabilities that a state controls.”¹⁴¹ Hence, the balance of power that results is “mainly a function of the tangible military assets that states possess, such as armoured divisions and nuclear weapons.”¹⁴² Although wealth, population, technology, and other resources are essential to state survival, military strength is the most central, universally-recognized means of acquiring and maintaining power. Therefore, any notion of “soft power” cannot be exercised without first providing national security, which requires “hard power” military capabilities.

In cases of deterrence, if a state has weak or insufficient military capabilities, then the threatened punishment would not be credible. Therefore, without military strength, deterrence is not possible. However, the purpose, quantity, and kind of military capabilities that are required for effective deterrence tends to vary between scholars. George and Smoke argue that “in its most general form, deterrence is simply the persuasion of one’s opponent that the costs and/or risks of a given course of action he might take outweigh its benefits.”¹⁴³ De Mesquita supports this idea, stating “the party receiving the deterrent counter-threat must believe that the maker of that threat has the capability to inflict a punishment that would exceed the expected gain from whatever it is he or she may threaten to do.”¹⁴⁴ By this logic, a state only requires enough military capabilities to incur costs that outweigh the potential gains. But as Schelling points out, “‘enough’ depends on how much an opponent has.”¹⁴⁵ The quantity and kind of military capabilities required to deter an adversary requires some knowledge of an adversary’s arsenal. Furthermore, credible nuclear deterrence relies upon “the ability to retaliate after a surprise attack.”¹⁴⁶ This shows that simply having strong military capabilities is not enough to deter an adversary. States must also ensure that military capabilities are able to survive a surprise attack

¹⁴¹ John J. Mearsheimer, “Structural Realism,” in *International Relations Theories: Discipline and Diversity*, ed. Tim Dunne, Milja Kurki, and Steve Smith (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), 72.

¹⁴² Ibid.

¹⁴³ Alexander L. George and Richard Smoke, *Deterrence in American Foreign Policy: Theory and Practice* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1974), 11.

¹⁴⁴ Bueno de Mesquita, “Perceptions, Deterrence, and Terrorism,” 322.

¹⁴⁵ Schelling, *Arms and Influence*, 1.

¹⁴⁶ *Encyclopedia Britannica*, “Deterrence.”

and retaliate in case deterrence fails. Thus, a deterring state must possess some knowledge of the adversary's military capabilities, have "enough" capabilities to inflict costs that outweigh potential gains, and ensure those capabilities can survive an initial attack.

Since the dawn of the nuclear age, nuclear weapons have become an essential component of deterrence strategy. Nuclear weapon states wield substantial bargaining power within the international system. If a target state has nuclear weapons, it follows that the initiating state must also have nuclear weapons for successful deterrence. But military capabilities are not strictly limited to nuclear weapons. De Mesquita points out that during the Cold War, critics challenged MAD doctrine by sowing doubt that "either party would use its massive destructive force to unleash a potential nuclear holocaust."¹⁴⁷ Therefore, MAD could not be considered a credible punishment strategy because it required a "massive response to even a minor violation of the territorial status quo."¹⁴⁸ In response, the US developed a flexible response strategy which prioritized proportionality. In other words, the US would create a retaliatory response in proportion to the level of force applied by the USSR. Flexible response was then criticized by US allies in NATO who felt deprived of "needed assurance that the United States would adequately defend their territories against Soviet incursions."¹⁴⁹ With this in mind, nuclear weapons are necessary to deter threats to the US homeland and assure allies, but cannot be the only solution to international crises. States must also consider the kind and degree of punishment that would be most effective towards a potential adversary and prepare conventional and non-conventional military capabilities accordingly. Moreover, regarding coercive diplomacy, Schelling claims "the coercive use of the power to hurt, though, is the very exploitation of enemy wants and fears."¹⁵⁰ Hence, with a thorough understanding of an adversary's capabilities, goals, and interests, a state can develop proportional deterrence strategies for specific targets.

For deterrence to be credible, the initiating state must at least have adequate military capabilities to support the threatened action. State leadership must also have some idea of who the target is and what military capabilities it has. Based on this knowledge, a state can determine the kind and quantity of military capabilities that would be necessary to deter an adversary. Knowledge of a target state's goals and interests can also inform the direction and application of

¹⁴⁷ De Mesquita, "Perceptions, Deterrence, and Terrorism," 322

¹⁴⁸ Ibid, 325

¹⁴⁹ Ibid.

¹⁵⁰ Schelling, *Arms and Influence*, 3

military capabilities. These capabilities must be “enough” to inflict costs that outweigh the potential gains of the undesired action. The deterring state must also ensure military capabilities are able to prevent or survive an initial strike, and then effectively retaliate to the full extent of the threatened punishment. Even though nuclear weapons play a central role in deterrence, other non-nuclear capabilities also contribute to effective deterrence strategies.

7.1. The US Nuclear Arsenal and Deterrence Capabilities

The NSS claims to be a “strategy of principled realism that is guided by outcomes.” “Principled realism” provides a moral underpinning to realist concepts, highlighting the “contests between those who value human dignity and freedom and those who oppress individuals and enforce uniformity.”¹⁵¹ To challenge the growing power and ideology of competitors, the Trump Administration has demonstrated its commitment to “principled realism” by “making historic investments in the United States military.”¹⁵² On February 12, 2018, the Trump Administration released the proposed Federal Budget for 2019, contributing \$686 billion to the Department of Defense (DoD). This would be an \$80 billion, or a 13% increase, from the 2017 enacted level, and include a 2.6% military pay raise, which is largest increase in nine years.¹⁵³ On March 23, 2018, President Trump also signed a \$1.3 trillion spending bill for 2018 that includes \$700 billion for defense spending.¹⁵⁴ Upon agreeing to sign the bill, President Trump said, “My highest duty is to keep America safe. Nothing is more important.”¹⁵⁵ In other public engagements, such as the Easter Egg Roll Speech at the White House, the President has publicly affirmed his commitment to building up military capabilities, even at the expense of other areas of government.¹⁵⁶ In this way, the Trump Administration consistently demonstrates its belief in realism and the importance of military capabilities through its allocation of resources.

¹⁵¹ United States, and Donald Trump, *National Security Strategy of the United States of America*, 1.

¹⁵² *Ibid.*, I.

¹⁵³ United States, and Donald Trump, *An American Budget: Budget of the U.S. Government* (Washington, DC: Office of Management and Budget, 2018), 33.

¹⁵⁴ Lisa Ferdinando, “Trump, Mattis Hail Spending Bill to Fund Strongest Military Ever,” *DoD News, Defense Media Activity*, March 23, 2018, <https://www.defense.gov/News/Article/Article/1474925/trump-mattis-hail-spending-bill-to-fund-strongest-military-ever/>.

¹⁵⁵ *Ibid.*

¹⁵⁶ Donald Trump, “Remarks by President Trump at the 2018 White House Easter Egg Roll,” *The White House*, April 2, 2018, accessed April 26, 2018, <https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefings-statements/remarks-president-trump-2018-white-house-easter-egg-roll/>.

According to DoD, military capability is defined as “the ability of the force to achieve a wartime objective.”¹⁵⁷ State military capability is assessed based on four “pillars”: readiness, sustainability, force structure, and modernization. These four pillars account for the size, composition, endurance, and sophistication of weapon systems and equipment. It considers how effectively military forces are able to execute a designated task, as well as how efficiently a weapon system can fulfill its intended purpose. With these factors in mind, the US considers military capability to be a reflection of the effectiveness and efficiency of its manpower and weaponry.

In the NSS, President Trump claims, “America’s military remains the strongest in the world.”¹⁵⁸ Since the Cold War, this statement has been unquestionably true. A 2018 study conducted by GlobalFirepower ranks 136 “modern military powers” based on over fifty-five different factors that contribute to “potential war-making capability.” By this metric, the US is currently the strongest military in the world.¹⁵⁹ Regardless of whether this designation is completely accurate, the US still has more than enough military capabilities to produce a believable threat. Nonetheless, this same study also shows that North Korea has become the 18th most powerful military in the world. This is not an insignificant accomplishment. Although the US appears to have the upper hand, North Korea’s military strength and nuclear weapons program makes it more difficult to deter. With nuclear war on the line, the US needs to carefully reassess the strength of its military capabilities to make certain that nuclear deterrence is successful.

US nuclear deterrence strategy relies on the combined power of the “strategic nuclear triad,” non-strategic nuclear forces, and nuclear command, control, and communications (NC3) systems. The “strategic nuclear triad” consists of “nuclear ballistic missile submarines (SSBNs) armed with submarine-launched ballistic missiles (SLBM); land-based intercontinental ballistic missiles (ICBM), and strategic bombers carrying gravity bombs and air-launched cruise missiles (ALCMs).”¹⁶⁰ The NPR explains, “the triad’s synergy and overlapping attributes help ensure the enduring survivability of our deterrence capabilities against attack and our capability to hold at

¹⁵⁷ U.S. Government Accountability Office, *Measures of Military Capability: A Discussion Of Their Merits, Limitations, And Interrelationships* (Washington, DC: US General Accounting Office, 1985), 1.

¹⁵⁸ United States, and Donald Trump, *National Security Strategy of the United States of America*, 3

¹⁵⁹ “2018 Military Strength Ranking,” GlobalFirepower.com, last modified 2018, accessed March 26, 2018, <https://www.globalfirepower.com/countries-listing.asp>.

¹⁶⁰ U.S. Department of Defense, *Nuclear Posture Review Report*, IX.

risk a range of adversary targets throughout a crisis or conflict.”¹⁶¹ As of February 2018, the United States’ nuclear triad maintains fourteen OHIO-class SSBNs, four hundred single-warhead Minuteman III ICBMs, forty-six nuclear-capable B-52H bomber aircraft, twenty nuclear-capable B-2A “stealth” strategic bomber aircraft, and B83-1 and B6-11 gravity bombs. The current non-strategic nuclear force is comprised of F-15E fighter aircraft and allied dual capable aircraft (DCA) which carry B61 gravity bombs. Finally, the NC3 system is crucial for maintaining control over US nuclear forces at all times. NC3 capabilities “must assure the integrity of transmitted information and possess the resiliency to reliably overcome the effects of a nuclear attack.”¹⁶² Most importantly, this system is responsible for early detection, communication, and the deployment of forces and weapons systems. This strategy is then supported by “an effective, responsive, and resilient nuclear weapons infrastructure” that is designed to “adapt flexibly to shifting requirements.”¹⁶³ The combined power of the nuclear triad, non-strategic nuclear forces, NC3 systems, and nuclear weapons infrastructure provide “diversity and flexibility as needed to tailor U.S. strategies,” which is subsequently used to deter adversaries, assure allies, hedge against uncertainty, and achieve objectives should deterrence fail.¹⁶⁴ If deterrence does fail, the US maintains that it has sufficient military capabilities “to survive any potential adversary attack and endure throughout crises and conflict.”¹⁶⁵ Extensive capabilities promise an overwhelming nuclear response should deterrence fail and provide adequate means for deterrence by punishment to be effective.

Another important aspect of US deterrence strategy is missile defense. The US National Defense Strategy claims that future “investments will focus on layered missile defenses and disruptive capabilities for... North Korean ballistic missile threats.”¹⁶⁶ These investments include the procurement of twenty new Ground-Based Interceptors to contribute to missile defense.¹⁶⁷ In the NSS, President Trump also states, “the United States is deploying a layered missile defense system” that “includes the ability to defeat missile threats prior to launch.”¹⁶⁸ This missile

¹⁶¹ Ibid.

¹⁶² Ibid, XIII.

¹⁶³ Ibid, XIV.

¹⁶⁴ Ibid, IX

¹⁶⁵ Ibid, 43

¹⁶⁶ U.S. Department of Defense, *Summary of the 2018 National Defense Strategy of The United States of America* (Washington, DC: Office of the Secretary of Defense, 2018), 6.

¹⁶⁷ United States, and Donald Trump, *An American Budget: Budget of the U.S. Government*, 37.

¹⁶⁸ United States, and Donald Trump, *National Security Strategy of the United States of America*, 8.

defense system is said to have the “defensive and offensive capabilities to intercept and otherwise defeat North Korea’s missile capabilities.”¹⁶⁹ US missile defense systems also utilize “early warning systems and strike capabilities [which are] necessary to degrade North Korean missile capabilities before launch.”¹⁷⁰ Furthermore, since North Korea uses “underground facilities and natural terrain features” to protect military forces, command and control capabilities, and even North Korea’s top leadership, the US has developed a range of conventional and nuclear capabilities to “hold such targets at risk.”¹⁷¹ These documents all assume that missile defense capabilities are effective. By improving deterrence by denial through missile defense, the US is able to ensure that an attack by North Korea will always fail to yield the desired results.

The US has also developed adequate nuclear and non-nuclear capabilities to provide proportionate responses and deny competitors potential advantages. “Supplements” to modernization programs create more flexible nuclear options and provide credible deterrence against regional aggression.¹⁷² During the Cold War, MAD doctrine was criticized for promising an unreasonable, overwhelming military response to any degree of aggression. In the pursuit of more proportional nuclear responses, the DoD has started upgrading DCA with nuclear-capable F-35 aircraft. Additionally, the DoD has begun restoring retired nuclear-armed sea-launched cruise missile (SLCM) capabilities by modifying a small number of existing SLBM warheads to provide a low-yield nuclear option, while also starting development of a modern nuclear-armed SLCM.¹⁷³ These kinds of “supplements” are aimed to tailor deterrence strategies, expand the range of credible deterrence options against nuclear and non-nuclear strategic attack, and signal to potential adversaries that limited nuclear escalation offers no potential advantage. Nevertheless, the US also acknowledges that “many actors have become skilled at operating below the threshold of military conflict,” dissolving the immediate need for any military-based response.¹⁷⁴ In response, the US has focused investments on maintaining space, cyberspace, and ISR (intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance) capabilities. By doing so, the US seeks to deny competitors access to networks and exploitable information, and maintain advantages

¹⁶⁹ Ibid.

¹⁷⁰ Ibid, 33

¹⁷¹ Ibid.

¹⁷² U.S. Department of Defense, *Nuclear Posture Review Report*, XI-XIII.

¹⁷³ Ibid.

¹⁷⁴ United States, and Donald Trump, *National Security Strategy of the United States of America*, 3.

across all “warfighting domains.”¹⁷⁵ In this way, low-yield “supplements” to existing nuclear capabilities and US supremacy across multiple domains all contribute to successful deterrence.

7.2. Underprepared for Overmatch?

The Trump Administration advocates for the preservation of “overmatch” in military capabilities. The NSS states, “The United States must retain overmatch—the combination of capabilities in sufficient scale to prevent enemy success and to ensure that America’s sons and daughters will never be in a fair fight.”¹⁷⁶ Overmatch implies that the US must be “stronger, better armed, and more skillful” than potential challengers in the international system.¹⁷⁷ From a realist perspective, overmatch makes sense. With the strongest military capabilities, the US is not only able to guarantee state sovereignty, but also maintain its influential role within the international system. From such a position of power, “overmatch strengthens our diplomacy and permits us to shape the international environment to protect our interests”¹⁷⁸ Moreover, overmatch has already proven itself to be beneficial to the US. Former National Security Advisor H.R. McMaster has been quoted saying, “since the end of the Cold War, any time the United States entered a military conflict it was not a fair fight.”¹⁷⁹ Threatened by the return of great power competition, preserving overmatch has become a key goal of the Trump Administration.

However, maintaining a state of true overmatch, at least where military capabilities are concerned, may be more difficult than the Trump Administration realizes. Majumdar argues that the Trump Administration’s focus on overmatch is misguided, as “potential rivals, such as Russia and China will not directly challenge American strengths, but will instead exploit Washington’s weak points.”¹⁸⁰ The most striking of these weaknesses is the erosion of US military advantages. The NSS explains that since the 1990s, the US has suffered from “strategic complacency,” dramatically reducing the size of the military, limiting the procurement and development of new weapon systems, and failing to provide adequate funding to effectively

¹⁷⁵ U.S. Department of Defense, *Summary of the 2018 National Defense Strategy*, 6.

¹⁷⁶ United States, and Donald Trump, *National Security Strategy of the United States of America*, 28.

¹⁷⁷ *Oxford Dictionary*, “Overmatch,” accessed April 26, 2018, <https://en.oxforddictionaries.com/definition/overmatch>.

¹⁷⁸ United States, and Donald Trump, *National Security Strategy of the United States of America*, 28.

¹⁷⁹ Zalmay Kahlilzad, “Trump Has Unveiled a Strong National Security Strategy,” *National Interest*, December 26, 2017, <http://nationalinterest.org/feature/trump-has-unveiled-strong-national-security-strategy-23807>.

¹⁸⁰ Dave Majumdar, “Trump Unveils His New National Security Strategy,” *National Interest*, December 18, 2017, <http://nationalinterest.org/feature/trump-unveils-his-new-national-security-strategy-23703>.

execute warfighting objectives.¹⁸¹ The US has not kept pace with emerging threats and technologies, and incorrectly believed that sophisticated technologies could compensate for reduced military capacity. Furthermore, a study conducted by the Heritage Foundation reports that overall capacity and readiness has dramatically decreased across all branches of service, including the Marine Corps, Army, Navy, and Air Force. This study also doubts the ability of the US to wage war against two major adversaries simultaneously, arguing that the US lacks the “right force” to meet these requirements and is “not ready to carry out its duties effectively.”¹⁸² Even if this study is not a totally accurate reflection of the US military today, it is apparent that a few decades of “strategic complacency” has severely weakened overall US military capability.

Ironically, the perceived victory of the Cold War had detrimental effects on US nuclear deterrence. The US reduced investments in nuclear capabilities and minimized the role of nuclear weapons in grand strategy.¹⁸³ As a result, the strategic nuclear triad, as well as its supporting infrastructure, has aged considerably. Carried over from the Cold War, some capabilities are now over thirty years old.¹⁸⁴ While the US reduced its nuclear weapons to encourage worldwide nonproliferation behavior, other powers, such as Russia, have since “expanded their nuclear arsenals and range of delivery systems”¹⁸⁵ Although the US does not intend to match the nuclear arsenals of rival powers, at the very least, the US must be able to “sustain a stockpile that can deter adversaries, assure allies and partners, and achieve U.S. objectives if deterrence fails.”¹⁸⁶ Though the US maintains that it has adequate capabilities to ensure credible deterrence and assure allies, the condition of the US military and the aging of nuclear capabilities calls into question how far military capabilities have eroded, how long the US can feasibly maintain overmatch, and how these developments ultimately influence effective deterrence.

By increasing federal contributions to defense, the Trump Administration hopes to address these shortcomings: “To retain military overmatch the United States must restore our ability to produce innovative capabilities, restore the readiness of our forces for major war, and grow the size of the force so that it is capable of operating at sufficient scale and for ample

¹⁸¹ United States, and Donald Trump, *National Security Strategy of the United States of America*, 27.

¹⁸² “An Assessment of U.S. Military Power,” *The Heritage Foundation*, last modified 2018, <https://www.heritage.org/military-strength/an-assessment-of-us-military-power>.

¹⁸³ United States, and Donald Trump, *National Security Strategy of the United States of America*, 30.

¹⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, 30.

¹⁸⁵ *Ibid.*

¹⁸⁶ *Ibid.*

duration to win across a range of scenarios.”¹⁸⁷ This push for modernization comes at a necessary time, allowing the DoD to revamp existing capabilities and ultimately stay ahead of the competition. As a result, the US has launched a series of modernization programs to improve and gradually replace capabilities that are most relevant to nuclear deterrence, including the strategic nuclear triad, the non-strategic nuclear force, the NC3 system, and missile defense. Regarding the US nuclear triad, the OHIO-class SSBNs will be “maintained and operationally effective and survivable” until replaced by the COLUMBIA program, which will deliver at least twelve COLUMBIA-class SSBNS. These new SSBNs are “designed to provide required deterrence capabilities for decades.”¹⁸⁸ To replace the ICBM forces, the US has initiated the Ground-Based Strategic Deterrence (GBSD) program to begin replacing the Minuteman III in 2029. This program will also modernize the 450 ICBM launch facilities that support the fielding of these new ICBMs. Additionally, a program to develop and deploy the next-generation bomber, the B-21 Raider, is already underway. The DoD estimates that this program will supplement and eventually replace elements of the conventional and nuclear-capable bomber force beginning in the mid-2020s. The DoD also anticipates that the B61-12 gravity bomb will be available in 2020 to replace the current B83-1 and B6-11 gravity bombs. Since the DoD estimates that the current ALCMS are already 25 years past design life, the US has begun the Long-Range Stand-Off (LRSO) cruise missile replacement program to “maintain into the future the bomber force capability to deliver stand-off weapons that can penetrate and survive advanced integrated air defense systems.”¹⁸⁹ The non-strategic nuclear force has also begun incorporating nuclear capabilities into the newest F-35 fighter aircraft to replace the aging allied DCA. The current NC3 system, which was last updated three decades ago, is also being revamped to ensure survivability and effectiveness during crisis and conflict. Modernization efforts include strengthening protection against cyber-based and space-based threats, increasing warning time, maintaining reliable communication and support systems, and ensuring the proper organization and management of the entire NC3 system.¹⁹⁰

Finally, missile defense systems and other non-nuclear capabilities, including early warning systems, strike capabilities, and programs meant to “locate, track, and target mobile

¹⁸⁷ Ibid, 28.

¹⁸⁸ U.S. Department of Defense, *Nuclear Posture Review Report*, X.

¹⁸⁹ Ibid.

¹⁹⁰ Ibid, 56-58.

systems of regional adversaries,” are being improved to complement existing nuclear forces.¹⁹¹ Although the NSS claims that “US and allied missile defenses are increasingly capable against North Korea,” the US must continue to invest in missile defense systems because it provides “the basis for significant damage limiting in the event deterrence fails.”¹⁹² The modernization efforts meant to improve nuclear and non-nuclear capabilities, infrastructure, support systems, and missile defense all contribute to lasting and effective deterrence capabilities. Nevertheless, it is unclear whether these reforms will reach fruition in time to contribute to the deterrence of North Korea. Such ambitious reforms across multiple domains under a relatively short period of time also risks spreading resources too thin, challenging the military’s capacity to meet these demands in a timely fashion. Until the Trump Administration’s reforms are underway, the US military will be forced to “do more with less” in order to achieve these modernization initiatives.

7.3. Quantifying North Korea’s Military Capabilities

Another problem that the US faces when deterring North Korea is establishing how much is “enough” to be effective. North Korea benefits from the secrecy surrounding its regime. The true scope of North Korea’s military capabilities and the extent of its nuclear weapons development is largely unknown. What the international community does know is based on carefully selected pieces of information released by Kim Jong-un’s regime. Based on this information, international audiences have attempted to gauge North Korea’s conventional, unconventional, and nuclear capabilities. North Korea contributes significant resources and manpower to developing and sustaining its military power. The DPRK commands the fourth-largest military in the world with over 1.1 million personnel, accounting for nearly 5% of North Korea’s total population.¹⁹³ Mandatory military service is also required by Chapter 5 of the Constitution of North Korea, explicitly stating “citizens shall defend the country and serve in the army as required by law.”¹⁹⁴ Despite its relatively poor economy, the DPRK contributes almost a quarter of its gross domestic product (GDP) to national defense, spending an average of \$3.5 billion annually on military expenditures from 2004 to 2014.¹⁹⁵ As a result, the US estimates that

¹⁹¹ Ibid, 23.

¹⁹² Ibid.

¹⁹³ Albert, “North Korea’s Military Capabilities.”

¹⁹⁴ *Korea (Democratic People’s Republic of)’s Constitution of 1972*, ch. 4, art. 86.

¹⁹⁵ Albert, “North Korea’s Military Capabilities.”

as of 2015, North Korea has over 800 combat aircraft, over 300 transport aircraft, 300 helicopters, 430 combatant vessels, 260 amphibious vessels, 70 submarines, 4,200 tanks, 2,200 armored vehicles, 8,600 field artillery, and 5,500 multiple-rocket launchers.¹⁹⁶

Moreover, the US also suspects that North Korea possesses “significant... cyber, chemical, and biological capabilities,” exhibiting North Korea’s pursuit of unconventional military capabilities.¹⁹⁷ The DoD believes the DPRK has stockpiled between 2,500 to 5,000 tons of chemical weapons, and is capable of producing “nerve, blister, blood, and choking agents.”¹⁹⁸ Asymmetric capabilities, such as special operations, cyber warfare, and intelligence collection have also taken a more prominent role within North Korea’s military strategy. North Korea claims to have the “world’s largest special operations forces (SOF),” though the validity of this claim is debatable.¹⁹⁹ Regardless, the DoD agrees that North Korea’s SOF are “among the most highly trained, well-equipped, best-fed, and highly motivated forces in the Korean People’s Army (KPA).”²⁰⁰ North Korea’s cyber-attack on Sony Pictures Entertainment on November 24, 2014 also demonstrates the growing sophistication of its offensive cyber operations (OCO) capability.²⁰¹ Although the DoD observes “significant resource shortfalls and aging hardware,” North Korea’s forward-deployed military “retains the capability to inflict serious damage on the ROK.”²⁰² As North Korea’s conventional and unconventional military capabilities continue to grow, it is impossible to deny that the DPRK has sufficient capabilities to inflict harm on a massive scale, even without nuclear weapons.

Though North Korea has tested a range of missiles, including short-range, medium-range, intermediate-range, intercontinental-range, and submarine-launched ballistic missiles, the total number of North Korea’s missiles and launchers are still unknown.²⁰³ The DoD estimates that North Korea has “several hundred short-range and medium-range ballistic missiles (SRBMs and MRBMs) available for use against targets on the Korean Peninsula and Japan,” including SCUD missiles, No-Dong systems, and the KN-02.²⁰⁴ As of 2015, intermediate-range and long-range

¹⁹⁶ U.S. Department of Defense, *Military and Security Developments*, 16-18.

¹⁹⁷ U.S. Department of Defense, *Nuclear Posture Review Report*, 32.

¹⁹⁸ U.S. Department of Defense, *Military and Security Developments*, 22.

¹⁹⁹ Rosett, “Our Nagging North Korea Problem,” 49.

²⁰⁰ U.S. Department of Defense, *Military and Security Developments*, 12.

²⁰¹ *Ibid*, 14.

²⁰² *Ibid*, 1.

²⁰³ Albert, “North Korea’s Military Capabilities.”

²⁰⁴ U.S. Department of Defense, *Military and Security Developments*, 13.

capabilities were still considered “untested and unreliable as a weapon.”²⁰⁵ Since then, North Korea’s long-range missile tests have shown significant progress, culminating in the tests of the Hwasong-14 in July 2017 and the Hwasong-15 in November 2017.²⁰⁶ Though North Korea has displayed two additional types of ICBMs, the KN-08 and KN-14, these missiles have not yet been tested.²⁰⁷

North Korea also has an infamously active nuclear weapons program, having conducted a total of six nuclear tests. Under Kim Jong Il’s leadership, North Korea conducted its first nuclear test in October 2006, and its second nuclear test in May 2009. In December 2012, Kim Jong-un conducted North Korea’s “most successful long-range missile launch” under the guise of a satellite launch.²⁰⁸ This was followed by nuclear tests in February 2013, January 2016, September 2016, and September 2017. It is difficult to know for sure what nuclear capabilities North Korea currently possesses and how effective these capabilities are. There is an emerging consensus that North Korea has the information and technology to produce nuclear bombs with weapons-grade uranium and plutonium. The DPRK’s nuclear arsenal is estimated to have anywhere from 30-60 nuclear weapons.²⁰⁹ By monitoring seismic activity, the US has made predictions regarding North Korea’s nuclear capabilities based on seismic activity produced by nuclear tests. This data shows that each test has grown with power, with the latest test on September 3, 2017, being the largest. The blast, which exceeded one hundred kilotons, suggests that North Korea may have developed a hydrogen bomb.²¹⁰ North Korean officials later claimed that the test of a miniaturized hydrogen bomb that could be loaded onto an intercontinental ballistic missile (ICBM) was a “perfect success.”²¹¹

Nevertheless, there is still skepticism surrounding North Korea’s ability to miniaturize a nuclear warhead, affix that warhead to an ICBM, and successfully deliver that payload to the United States. While some experts claim that North Korea already possesses these technologies, either developing it themselves or acquiring illicit support, others claim the US still has some

²⁰⁵ Ibid.

²⁰⁶ “Missiles of North Korea,” Missile Defense Project, Center for Strategic and International Studies, last modified 2018, accessed May 21, 2018, <https://missilethreat.csis.org/country/dprk/>.

²⁰⁷ Ibid.

²⁰⁸ Rosett, “Our Nagging North Korea Problem,” 48.

²⁰⁹ Albert, “North Korea’s Military Capabilities.”

²¹⁰ Ibid.

²¹¹ Joshua Berlinger and Taehoon Lee, “Nuclear test conducted by North Korea, country claims; South Korea responds with drills,” *CNN*, September 4, 2017, <http://edition.cnn.com/2017/09/03/asia/north-korea-nuclear-test/index.html>

time before these threats may be realized. In either case, it is clear that North Korea's nuclear program has progressed on both these fronts. As of August 2017, US intelligence officials claim that North Korea is currently capable of miniaturization.²¹² Although North Korea claims that the US mainland is well within reach of its ICBMs, analysts were initially doubtful, calling into question the accuracy of North Korea's ballistic missiles.²¹³ In July 2017, the DPRK conducted two tests of the Hwasong-14 ICBM, which is said to be capable of carrying a large nuclear warhead. Analysts estimate this missile has an estimated range of 10,400 kilometers and could potentially reach the West Coast of the continental United States.²¹⁴ On November 29, 2017, North Korea tested the Hwasong-15 missile, the newest ICBM that is said to travel more than 13,000 kilometers on a standard trajectory, thus reaching "any part of the continental united states."²¹⁵ Even though there are serious obstacles to creating effective and deployable nuclear weapons, experts concur that the DPRK is well on their way to addressing these problems.²¹⁶ However, on April 20, 2018, Kim Jong-un unexpectedly announced the suspension of nuclear tests and ICBM launches, as well as the closure of the Punggye-ri nuclear test site. With this announcement, Kim claims to have "verified the completion of nuclear weapons," further stating, "We no longer need any nuclear test or test launches of intermediate and intercontinental range ballistic missiles, and because of this the northern nuclear tests site has finished its mission."²¹⁷ Though seismologists assert that the closure might be due to the partial collapse of the test site, the state of North Korea's nuclear facilities and the extent of North Korea's nuclear weapons development has yet to be publicly confirmed.²¹⁸ Hence, the US and the international community continue to approach North Korea's claims with some degree of skepticism, failing to accept the reality that might be a nuclear-armed and dangerous North Korea.

²¹² "North Korea's nuclear programme: How advanced is it?" *BBC News*, August 10, 2017, <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-pacific-11813699>.

²¹³ William J. Broad et al., "This Missile Could Reach California. But Can North Korea Use It With a Nuclear Weapon?" *New York Times*, September 3, 2017, <https://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2017/08/22/world/asia/north-korea-nuclear-weapons.html>.

²¹⁴ Ibid.

²¹⁵ "North Korea says new missile puts all of US in striking range," *BBC News*, November 29, 2017, <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-42162462>.

²¹⁶ Broad, "This Missile Could Reach California."

²¹⁷ Fifield, "North Korea says it will suspend nuclear and missile tests, shut down test site."

²¹⁸ Stephen Chen, "North Korea's nuclear test site has collapsed... and that may be why Kim Jong-un suspended tests," *South China Morning Post*, April 25, 2018, <http://www.scmp.com/news/china/diplomacy-defence/article/2143171/north-koreas-nuclear-test-site-has-collapsed-and-may-be-why-kim-jong-un>.

General estimates concur that despite these recent developments, the US continues to have stronger military capabilities than North Korea. Nevertheless, military strength alone does not guarantee successful deterrence. Though the US has tried to approach North Korea's nuclear development in a number of ways, it is hard to tell how effective any specific approach has been. More specifically, it is difficult to discern which approach will ultimately produce lasting results. Beyond military capabilities, the best way to tailor effective deterrence strategies is by understanding the target state's goals and interests. If an initiating state knows what its target state wants, fears, or values, then deterring that state is easy. In this case, the biggest obstacle to deterrence is not knowing enough about Kim Jong-un and his regime. As previously stated, North Korea has three specific goals it wants to achieve. The first is the survival of the Kim regime. North Korea considers its nuclear program key to achieving this goal, creating leverage within security, economic, diplomatic, and political affairs. Hence, the second goal is protecting its nuclear weapons program by becoming an official nuclear weapon state, proving to domestic and international audiences that North Korea is a legitimate member of the international community. Finally, the Kim regime aspires to achieve its lifelong goal of unification with South Korea.²¹⁹

There are some ways US military capabilities can be used to target North Korea's goals and interests. In September 2017, South Korean defense minister, Song Young-moo, announced the establishment of a special forces brigade described as the "decapitation unit." Though the name implies that the unit aims to assassinate Kim Jong-un, South Korea views it simply as a means of deterrence. Shin Won-sik, a South Korean general, explains, "The best deterrence we can have, next to having our own nukes is to make Kim Jong-un fear for his life."²²⁰ In this way, South Korea attempts to use scare tactics as a means of deterring North Korea by developing one specific area of the military. Despite its ally's actions, the US claims it does not seek leadership change in North Korea, and has only threatened the survival of North Korea in the event of a nuclear attack. In the NPR, Secretary of Defense Jim Mattis states, "There is no scenario in which the Kim regime could employ nuclear weapons and survive."²²¹ Furthermore, the US also

²¹⁹ David Maxwell, "What to Make of North Korea," *The Diplomat*, April 11, 2013, <https://thediplomat.com/2013/04/what-to-make-of-north-korea/>.

²²⁰ Choe Sang-Hun, "South Korea Plans 'Decapitation Unit' to Try to Scare North's Leaders," *New York Times*, September 12, 2017, <https://www.nytimes.com/2017/09/12/world/asia/north-south-korea-decapitation.html?mtrref=www.google.com.tw>.

²²¹ United States, and Donald Trump, *National Security Strategy of the United States of America*, 33.

claims to have conventional and nuclear capabilities that could target buried nuclear and military facilities.²²² In this way, both South Korea and the US have channeled resources into developing military capabilities specifically to threaten Kim Jong-un's regime and address North Korea's nuclear capabilities.

Even though the US and South Korea both prioritize diplomacy over military force, and certainly do not want to initiate a war with North Korea, the US cannot discount the role of military capabilities in deterrence strategies: "While nuclear deterrence strategies cannot prevent all conflict, they are essential to prevent nuclear attack, non-nuclear strategic attacks, and large-scale conventional aggression."²²³ Therefore, the US must carefully examine North Korea's capabilities, goals, and interests, to determine how to use its advantages against Kim's regime. As previously discussed, the US must consider both nuclear and non-nuclear capabilities to find specific ways to target North Korea's goals and interests. The US cannot fail to consider North Korea's threshold of pain, which then determines which costs will outweigh the potential benefits of a nuclear strike.

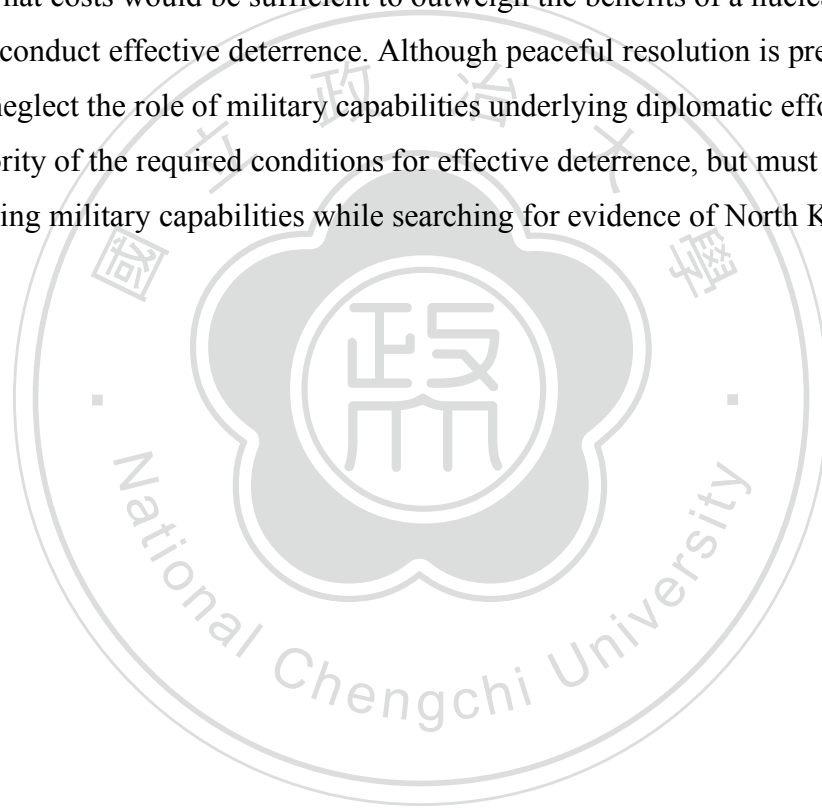
7.4. Chapter Conclusion

In sum, does the US have sufficient military capabilities to credibly threaten North Korea? The short answer is "yes." As the strongest military in the world, the US clearly has sufficient capabilities to deter a nuclear threat from North Korea. Existing deterrence capabilities, such as the nuclear triad, the non-strategic nuclear force, and the NC3 system boost deterrence by punishment, promising an overwhelming response following a nuclear attack. A layered missile defense system, flexible nuclear and non-nuclear options, and contingency plans in case deterrence fails, all contribute to deterrence by denial by ensuring that a nuclear attack cannot be successfully launched nor achieve the desired gains. While President Trump advocates for military "overmatch," policy documents, including the NSS, the NPR, and the National Defense Strategy, all acknowledge that US military capabilities are in desperate need of modernization. The bulk of current nuclear capabilities are holdovers from the Cold War era and face strong competition from the modernized systems of rising powers. With competing security interests around the globe, rapid modernization across multiple domains also risks spreading US

²²² Ibid.

²²³ Ibid, 30.

resources too thin. Furthermore, the insular nature of North Korea makes it difficult to know how much is “enough” for deterrence to be successful. It is assumed that if an initiating state attempts to deter a target state with nuclear weapons, at the very least, the initiating state must also have ready access to nuclear weapons. Though the US is well-equipped in this regard, North Korea’s formidable conventional, unconventional, and nuclear capabilities make it increasingly difficult to deter with just hard power alone. As a result, the US must closely examine North Korea’s goals, interests, and military capabilities, to ascertain the regime’s threshold of pain. If the US does not know what “costs” North Korea is willing to endure to protect its interests, and subsequently, what costs would be sufficient to outweigh the benefits of a nuclear strike, the US will struggle to conduct effective deterrence. Although peaceful resolution is preferable to war, the US cannot neglect the role of military capabilities underlying diplomatic efforts. The US fulfills the majority of the required conditions for effective deterrence, but must continue to modernize existing military capabilities while searching for evidence of North Korea’s true intentions.



Chapter 8: Political Will

The deterring state must have the political will to deliver on the stated threat, even after an attack has been launched. Political will is defined as “political intention or desire... specifically the firm intention or commitment on the part of a government to carry through a policy, especially one which is not immediately successful or popular.”²²⁴ In other words, a deterring state “must be viewed as having the will to carry out the actions specified in its counter threat.”²²⁵ Political will is akin to the “fight-or-flight response” of state leaders and governments. In physiology, when a human is faced with a threat, it triggers a “fight-or-flight response” within the body, physically preparing to either confront the threat or retreat.²²⁶ By threatening to attack, the initiating state triggers the “fight-or-flight response” of the target state. At a heightened level of stress, the target state must decide to either continue in the undesired behavior and risk retaliation or comply and change its behavior. If the target state fails to comply, then the initiating state must also assume a “fight-or-flight response,” choosing to follow through on the stated threat or back off to avoid potential conflict.

At this point, an initiating state’s political will is put to the test. If the target state anticipates that the initiating state does not have the political will to retaliate, then the target state will continue to conduct the undesired behavior. In the case of nuclear deterrence, the undesired behavior is usually a nuclear attack. Even if deterrence fails and the initiating state survives an attack, the initiating state may still be reluctant to follow through on the stated threat. A state must also have adequate coordination to approve and launch a retaliatory strike in a reasonable amount of time, even if the decision is unpopular. Reluctance from decision-makers might hinder this process. If the target state believes the initiating state is unable to build the necessary consensus to launch a retaliatory strike, then it will be more likely to proceed in the undesired behavior. For deterrence to be successful, an initiating state must clearly express its political will and demonstrate its willingness to follow through on the stated threat.

²²⁴ *Oxford Dictionary*, “political will,” accessed April 26, 2018, https://en.oxforddictionaries.com/definition/political_will.

²²⁵ Bueno de Mesquita, “Perceptions, Deterrence, and Terrorism,” 322.

²²⁶ *Encyclopedia Britannica*, “Fight-or-flight response,” accessed April 28, 2018, <https://www.britannica.com/science/fight-or-flight-response>.

Whether initiating states make threats and subsequently follow through on those threats depends primarily on the decision-makers involved in the process, specifically at the individual and national levels. At the individual level, “key individuals [are] believed to play a critical role in decision making on national security matters.”²²⁷ Moreover, “it is assumed that personal qualities and characteristics are important in determining the behavior of these individuals, which in turn drives the policies and actions of their governments.”²²⁸ By this logic, the personality and idiosyncrasies of leaders can radically affect the application and ultimately the success of deterrence strategies. Morgan argues, “deterrence is a relationship between (at least) two sets of unique personalities.”²²⁹ Therefore, for deterrence to be successful, “a deterrent threat must be tailored to mesh with the nature of the particular individuals in charge of the other government.”²³⁰ As the primary representatives of their state’s political will, it is the responsibility of state leaders to express political will in a way that resonates with an adversary. When creating deterrence strategies, one must consider the personalities of both initiating and target states and assess the compatibility of the two personalities. This often requires tactful communication between the initiating and the target state, as well as ample understanding of the target’s leadership style and personality.

At the national level, some studies indicate that regime type influences political will. These studies indicate that the strength of a state’s political will is closely linked to audience costs, which promises a negative response from domestic constituencies if the state leader fails to follow through on a threat or backs down in a crisis.²³¹ A study conducted by de Mesquita and Siverson conclude that “leaders who engage their nation in war subject themselves to a domestic political hazard that threatens... the retention of political power.”²³² This hazard is especially prevalent among democratic leaders. In contrast, authoritarian leaders, who benefit from longevity, experience, and a lack of political rivals, are less affected by this hazard. As a result, democratic leaders tend to participate in wars with a lower risk of defeat, while authoritarian

227 Patrick M. Morgan, *Deterrence: A Conceptual Analysis*, (Beverly Hills: Sage Publications, Inc., 1977), 49.

228 Ibid.

229 Ibid, 50.

230 Ibid.

231 Fearon, “Domestic Political Audiences and the Escalation of International Disputes,” 577.

232 Bruce Bueno de Mesquita and Randolph M. Siverson, “War and the Survival of Political Leaders: A Comparative Study of Regime Types and Political Accountability,” *The American Political Science Review* 89 no. 4 (December 1995): 841. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/2082512>

leaders are more willing to engage in riskier wars. In a separate article, Tanageras argues that in democracies, leaders are held accountable by their constituencies. Since these leaders fear being removed from office, “democratic leaders are more selective about the wars they initiate and on average win more of the wars they start.”²³³ These studies indicate that because democratic leaders are more vulnerable to audience costs, democracies are more selective about the wars they participate in. But once democracies do commit to war, audience costs will discourage state leaders from backing down and incentivize them to win. For deterrence to be effective, an initiating state must be willing to threaten a target state and risk escalation to conflict. Thus, democratic initiating states must have strong political will and be motivated to win. If the deterring state is democratic, then that state probably has the political will to follow through on a stated threat.

A key assumption of realism is that all states are rational actors. Morgan asserts that this is not always the case. State leaders exert the strongest influence over state behavior, but not all state leaders are rational. Therefore, state policies and behaviors are not always based on rational decision-making processes. If a state is irrational, it is highly difficult to deter. Nevertheless, from an outside perspective, it is difficult to know if a state is truly irrational. There are varying degrees and kinds of irrationality. While some leaders are irrational in ways that make them easier to deter, others may be irrational in ways that make them impervious to outside influence.²³⁴ In response, an initiating state needs to pay careful attention to a target state’s behavior and look for signs of irrationality. Jervis argues that an understanding of common misperceptions can indicate where irrational decisions might be made. This can prevent initiating states from misdiagnosing target states as irrational, and increase states’ awareness of their own irrational tendencies.²³⁵ For instance, irrational decisions may result when leaders are wed to pre-existing beliefs. This leads them to look for evidence that is consistent with current beliefs and reject contradicting sources of information. State leaders also tend to consider an adversary to be more hostile than it actually is. At the same time, these leaders are also reluctant to view themselves as “the adversary” of the relationship. Finally, state leaders tend to focus on crafting

²³³ Thomas Tanageras, “Democracy, Autocracy and the Likelihood of International Conflict,” *Research Institute of Industrial Economics*, IFN Working Paper No. 751, 2008, accessed April 13, 2018, <http://www.ifn.se/wfiles/wp/wp571.pdf>.

²³⁴ *Ibid*, 51-55

²³⁵ Robert Jervis, *Perception and Misperception in International Politics* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1976), 423-424.

messages without considering the context of the message and how the message may be received, which can lead to misunderstandings. With this in mind, states need to be mindful of common misperceptions when assessing an adversary's political will and account for irrational behaviors of state leaders.²³⁶

Studies show that irrational decision-making can be magnified by a group setting. "Groupthink" has been used to describe "an excessive form of concurrence-seeking among members of high prestige, tightly knit policy-making groups."²³⁷ In these cases, individuals value group membership more than anything else and are willing to suppress personal opinions and doubts in favor of "quick and painless" unanimity.²³⁸ To maintain the integrity of the group, members silence potential sources of dissent and unquestioningly follow the group leader, enabling more risk-taking among group members. Rampant risk-taking within an environment devoid of creativity and independent thought has "negative personal and political implications for both group members and outside parties," especially when such decisions lead to policy changes.²³⁹ According to Janis, "groupthink" produces "[a] distorted view of reality, excessive optimism producing hasty and reckless policies, and a neglect of ethical issues."²⁴⁰ Hart observes that such decisions are rarely successful, as collective deficiencies make groups "particularly vulnerable to initiate or sustain projects that turn out to be policy fiascoes."²⁴¹ *Psychology Today* corroborates this claim, stating outright that "Groupthink decisions rarely have successful outcomes."²⁴² Although this concept is usually applied to organizations and businesses, "groupthink" has clear applications to government settings. In a national context, state leaders surround themselves with individuals who are meant to provide guidance, advice, and expertise on a broad range of issues. Though heads of state are the most important decision-makers, surrounding members of government may exert influence on that leader's decisions (depending on their proximity to the leader). As evidenced by the Bush Administration and the launch of the Iraq War, "groupthink" can lead to the reinforcement of high-level decisions that result in bad

²³⁶ Ibid, 424.

²³⁷ Paul't Hart, "Irving L. Janis' Victims of Groupthink," *Political Psychology* 12, no. 2 (June 1991): 247, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/3791464>.

²³⁸ Ibid.

²³⁹ "Groupthink," *Psychology Today*, last modified 2018, accessed May 1, 2018, <https://www.psychologytoday.com/us/basics/groupthink>.

²⁴⁰ Hart, "Irving L. Janis' Victims of Groupthink," 247.

²⁴¹ Ibid.

²⁴² *Psychology Today*, "Groupthink."

policies.²⁴³ On the other hand, “groupthink” also rallies support and advances political will for the execution of policies, even if those policies are risky or irrational. With this in mind, one must consider how group dynamics affect both the initiating state and the target state’s degree of rationality and political will.

For deterrence to be credible, the state must have the political will to follow through on the threatened punishment. How political will is expressed is influenced by the personality and rationality of state leaders. An understanding of state leaders allows for more tailored threats, which in turn leads to more credible deterrence. Regime type may also indicate an initiating state’s level of political will. Democracies who attempt to deter a target state through public threats and actions are likely to suffer audience costs should deterrence fail. Therefore, democracies that make threats will not do so lightly, and have a strong political will to follow through on the stated threat. In contrast, autocracies are less susceptible to audience costs, making them more willing to engage in risky wars and back down in crises. Even if state leaders make irrational decisions, an understanding of the common misperceptions surrounding a leader’s decision-making process allows for a clearer understanding of that leader’s political will. Furthermore, the influence of “groupthink” may contribute to the creation and execution of irrational decisions, but also increases political will to follow through on those decisions. Thus, individual personalities and the influence of groups can strongly affect the strength and exercise of political will.

8.1. The US Political System and the Power of the President

The way a state manifests its political will depends on the structure of its main governing body. The distribution of power among individuals and groups influence government decision-making processes. This subsequently affects the level of state commitment to follow through on those decisions. In autocratic states, power is consolidated in one person who singlehandedly drives foreign policy. In cases of deterrence, if an autocratic dictator lacks the political will to follow through on a threat, then no one is in a position to force him to do so. In democratic states, separation of powers ensures that one branch of government will not overwhelm the others. Therefore, one branch that has expressed strong political will to launch a retaliatory strike

²⁴³ Dina Badie, “Groupthink, Iraq, and the War on Terror: Explaining US Policy Shift toward Iraq,” *Foreign Policy Analysis* 6, no. 4 (October 2010): 277, <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1743-8594.2010.00113.x>.

could be tempered by other branches that are less willing to act. With this in mind, government structure and distribution of powers shapes how a state demonstrates its political will.

The United States is well-known throughout the international community for its unique form of democracy. A reaction to the tyranny experienced under British colonial rule, the US Constitution was originally framed to outline a form of government that limits the power of any single branch, or more importantly, any single person. However, as the head of the executive branch, the Constitution gives the President substantial powers within the US government. The President of the United States acts as the head of state and the Commander-in-Chief of the armed forces. The President is responsible for implementing and enforcing laws written by Congress and appointing the heads of federal agencies and commissions, including the Cabinet, the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA), and the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI).²⁴⁴ On the other hand, Congress also maintains the right to confirm or reject Presidential appointments. Although the President has the power to sign or veto bills enacted by congress, Congress can override a veto with a two-thirds vote in both the House of Representative and in the Senate. As head of state, the President also has the power to negotiate and sign treaties with other countries, but those treaties must be ratified by two-thirds of the Senate.

The President has the authority to issue executive orders, “which direct executive officers or clarify and further existing laws.”²⁴⁵ In other words, executive orders are used to “instruct the government how to work within the parameters already set by Congress and the Constitution,” allowing the President to make policy changes without requiring Congressional approval.²⁴⁶ Even though executive orders hold the same power as laws, they are also subject to judicial review through the Supreme Court and can be revoked through new legislation passed by Congress. Nevertheless, executive orders give the President broad administrative and enforcement powers to influence domestic and foreign policy in many ways.

Contrary to popular belief, the President cannot declare war. According to the Constitution, only Congress has the authority to declare war. However, as the Commander-in-Chief of the armed forces, the President can send troops into battle without an official war

²⁴⁴ The White House, *Our Government: The Executive Branch*, accessed April 28, 2018, <https://www.whitehouse.gov/about-the-white-house/the-executive-branch/>.

²⁴⁵ Ibid.

²⁴⁶ NCC Staff, “Executive Orders 101: What are they and how do Presidents use them?” *National Constitution Center*, January 23, 2017, accessed April 28, 2018, <https://constitutioncenter.org/blog/executive-orders-101-what-are-they-and-how-do-presidents-use-them/>.

declaration. In 1973, the War Powers Resolution was passed to limit this power by requiring the President to notify Congress within forty-eight hours of committing armed forces to military action, and forbidding armed forces from remaining overseas for over 60 days without the approval of Congress.²⁴⁷ Moreover, the resolution only permits the President to send US armed forces into action overseas following consultation with Congress and a formal declaration of war, or in special cases of national emergency. Even though the War Powers Resolution was meant to limit the President's ability to initiate or escalate military actions abroad, many Presidents have resisted or ignored the resolution, which they perceive to be an infringement on their executive authority and role as Commander-in-Chief.²⁴⁸

Most importantly, the President has the sole authority to launch a nuclear attack. A key tenet of the US Constitution is "civilian control of the military."²⁴⁹ By giving Congress the power to declare war and appointing the President as Commander-in-Chief, the Constitution ensures that civilian lawmakers maintain control over the military. At the height of the Cold War, when an immediate response was required in the event of a nuclear attack, a general consensus emerged that nuclear weapons, like the military and all other weapons systems, should be placed under strict civilian control. As an extension of the President's war powers articulated in the Constitution, it was assumed that the President would also have the exclusive right to launch a nuclear weapon. It was not until November 14, 2017 that this assumption was confirmed by the Congressional Foreign-Affairs Committee during a hearing held with the singular purpose of determining who has the authority to order the use of nuclear weapons.²⁵⁰ This hearing not only validated the President's authority to use nuclear weapons, but also confirmed his ability to launch a preemptive strike.²⁵¹ It also revealed that once the President orders a nuclear strike, there are few measures to prevent the order from being carried out by the military. The US DoD recognizes National Command Authority, which refers to the collective power of the President

²⁴⁷ *Encyclopedia Britannica*, "War Powers Act," accessed April 28, 2018, <https://www.britannica.com/topic/War-Powers-Act>.

²⁴⁸ *Ibid.*

²⁴⁹ William Lanouette, "Civilian Control of Nuclear Weapons," *Arms Control Today*, May 8, 2009, accessed April 29, 2018, https://www.armscontrol.org/act/2009_5/Lanouette.

²⁵⁰ U.S. Congress, Senate, Committee on Foreign Relations, *Full Committee Hearing Authority to Order the Use of Nuclear Weapons*, 115th Cong., 2017.

²⁵¹ Amy F. Woolf, "Defense Primer: Command and Control of Nuclear Forces," *Congressional Research Service*, December 1, 2016, accessed April 29, 2018, <https://fas.org/sgp/crs/natsec/IF10521.pdf>.

and the Secretary of Defense.²⁵² However, as Commander-in-Chief, the President is the military's ultimate authority.²⁵³ The President has the prerogative to fire those who disobey, even the Secretary of Defense himself. Although top military and civilian advisors (and to a lesser extent, military personnel) may delay or expedite the execution of an order, "the president retains constitutional authority to order some military action."²⁵⁴ Therefore, should the President decide to use nuclear weapons, he has the authority to use any means possible to ensure that it happens.

But what does all this mean for deterrence? For deterrence of North Korea to be successful, the US must have the political will to follow through on the stated threat. Based on the structure of the US government, the President plays the most important role in expressing political will. The President has the prerogative to decide when to deploy troops overseas, launch a nuclear strike, and essentially start the US down the path to war. As head of state and Commander-in-Chief, the President must be the one to decide if and when to retaliate. Therefore, for deterrence to be successful, the President must have the political will to carry out the stated threat, which would mean launching a retaliatory nuclear strike. To help make such decisions, the President has the Cabinet, the NSC, and members of the White House staff to provide guidance and advice. Since psychologists attest that personality traits can be linked to behavior and decision-making, an understanding of President Trump's personality may explain how he has expressed his political will towards North Korea. President Trump's leadership style and his relationship with his Cabinet might also indicate if "groupthink" has influenced President Trump's decisions. Since the United States is a representative democracy, Congress and other elected officials are responsible for expressing the political will of their constituencies, and use public opinion as a means of justifying military action. Finally, it is important to consider how the compatibility of President Trump and Kim Jong-un's personalities may influence deterrence.

8.2. Donald Trump: A New Kind of American President

When it became clear that Donald Trump would become the 2016 Republican Presidential Nominee and stood a strong chance of becoming the 45th President of the United States, many were curious as to what a Trump presidency would actually look like. Psychologists

²⁵² U.S. Department of Defense, "DoD 101: Overview of the Department of Defense," accessed April 28, 2018, <https://www.defense.gov/About/DoD-101/>.

²⁵³ Ibid.

²⁵⁴ U.S. Congress, *Authority to Order the Use of Nuclear Weapons*.

were among the first to answer this call. Psychological analysis is commonly applied to public figures, including past presidents, to determine how fundamental differences in personality can shape decision-making and leaderships styles. McAdams argues that based on President Trump’s public history and behavior, as documented in books, biographical sources, public engagements, and the press, President Trump’s personality is considered “certainly extreme by any standard.”²⁵⁵ Of what psychological scientists call the “Big Five,” or the five basic categories of human personality traits, President Trump has “sky-high extroversion combined with off-the-chart low agreeableness.”²⁵⁶ Extroversion is characterized by “gregariousness, social dominance, enthusiasm, and reward-seeking behavior.”²⁵⁷ Such individuals tend to pursue positive emotional experiences and seek public recognition, either through social approval, fame, or wealth. A study conducted by Immelman and the Unit for the Study of Personality in Politics finds similar results even after the election, concluding that President Trump’s predominant personality patterns are “ambitious” and “outgoing.”²⁵⁸ Ambitious individuals are bold, competitive, self-assured, and entitled, often expecting recognition for achievements. Additionally, outgoing individuals are “are dramatic attention-getters who thrive on being the center of social events, go out of their way to be popular with others, have confidence in their social abilities, tend to be impulsive and undisciplined, and become easily bored — especially when faced with repetitive or mundane tasks.”²⁵⁹ As an extroverted, outgoing, and ambitious individual, President Trump’s personality profile indicates he is a bold, confident, enthusiastic, and impulsive leader who actively seeks social dominance and public recognition, despite his “lack of focus and attention to detail.”²⁶⁰

In contrast, agreeableness is described as “warmth, care for others, altruism, compassion, and modesty.”²⁶¹ Individuals who are low in agreeableness are described as “callous, rude, arrogant, and lacking in empathy.”²⁶² McAdams claims that based upon a lifetime of widely

²⁵⁵ Dan P. McAdams, “The Mind of Donald Trump,” *The Atlantic*, June 2016, accessed April 28, 2018, <https://www.theatlantic.com/magazine/archive/2016/06/the-mind-of-donald-trump/480771/>.

²⁵⁶ Ibid.

²⁵⁷ Ibid.

²⁵⁸ Aubrey Immelman, “The Leadership Style of U.S. President Donald J. Trump,” *St. John’s University and the College of St. Benedict, Unit for the Study of Personality in Politics*, January 2017, accessed April 29, 2018. https://digitalcommons.csbsju.edu/psychology_pubs/107/.

²⁵⁹ Ibid.

²⁶⁰ Andrew Griffin, “Officials put Trump’s name in ‘as many memo paragraphs as we can because he keeps reading if he’s mentioned,’” *The Independent*, May 17, 2018, <https://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/americas/donald-trump-intelligence-reports-white-house-read-them-mentioned-name-president-a7740726.html>.

²⁶¹ McAdams, “The Mind of Donald Trump.”

²⁶² Ibid.

observed interactions, President Trump is a “remarkably disagreeable person,” encouraging violence at campaign rallies and denouncing critics and opponents as “disgusting” or as “losers.” McAdams believes that this is because President Trump’s charisma and political rhetoric is driven by anger, feeding aggression and social ambition. Aggression plays a key role in President Trump’s narrative identity, which is what psychologists call an unconscious, self-cultivated explanation of who they are and how they came to be. McAdams claims that a narrative identity provides adults with a driving purpose and consistency over time. Furthermore, when applied to national leaders, narrative identities can also influence perceptions of national identity, priorities, and progress. President Trump’s narrative identity is centered on the need for toughness and will to survive in a dangerous world. In an interview with *People Magazine* in 1981, President Trump once said, “Man is the most vicious of all animals, and life is a series of battles ending in victory or defeat.”²⁶³ In this way, anger and aggression feed President Trump’s desire for survival and success in a world that cannot be trusted, viewing others as competition or impediments to victory. In turn, this influences how President Trump treats other people, starving his agreeableness while reinforcing his extroverted tendencies.

Immelman’s study characterizes President Trump’s “core personality-based leadership traits” as “an active-positive presidential character with mobilization.”²⁶⁴ As seen throughout his campaign, President Trump’s strongest leadership asset is “mobilization,” or his ability to arouse, engage, and direct the public. President Trump’s extroversion also makes him a highly charismatic leader. Nevertheless, President Trump’s strongest personality trait is narcissism. From naming his business enterprises after himself to allegations that NSC officials incorporate Trump’s name in “as many memo paragraphs as we can because he keeps reading if he’s mentioned,” Trump’s personality has been described as “remarkably narcissistic.”²⁶⁵ Narcissism is defined as “excessive self-love and the attendant qualities of grandiosity and a sense of entitlement.”²⁶⁶ Narcissists always try to draw attention to themselves and their positive qualities. Through charismatic leadership and mobilization, President Trump has used campaigns and rallies to feed narcissistic tendencies, rallying public support while simultaneously satisfying his

²⁶³ Ibid.

²⁶⁴ Immelman, “The Leadership Style of U.S. President Donald J. Trump.”

²⁶⁵ Griffin, “Officials put Trump’s name in ‘as many memo paragraphs as we can because he keeps reading if he’s mentioned.’”

²⁶⁶ McAdams, “The Mind of Donald Trump.”

desire for public approval. This may explain why such rallies have continued even after President Trump was sworn into office. Narcissism also complements and reinforces extraverted, ambitious, and outgoing tendencies. According to a 2013 *Psychological Science* research article discussing “grandiose narcissism,” former US presidents who were highly narcissistic produced both extremely positive and negative performances. On one hand, grandiose narcissism is associated with positive outcomes, such as “initiating legislation, public persuasiveness, agenda setting, and historians’ ratings of ‘greatness.’” On the other hand, it is also associated with extremely negative outcomes, such as “unethical behavior and congressional impeachment resolutions.”²⁶⁷ Therefore, President Trump’s leadership skills allow him to effectively mobilize groups and foster public support while feeding his narcissistic tendencies. Though it has been called a “double-edged sword,” it is too soon to tell if narcissism will ultimately produce positive or negative results for the Trump Administration.

Nevertheless, President Trump’s potential for irrational behavior stems from his penchant for lying and allegations that he is mentally unfit to serve as President. An ongoing project by *The Washington Post*, “analyzes, categorizes and tracks every suspect statement” the President has made since his inauguration. As of May 1, 2018, President Trump has made 3,001 false or misleading claims since becoming President of the United States, or an estimated average of 6.5 false or misleading claims per day.²⁶⁸ Many of these false claims exaggerate the success of Trump Administration initiatives (such as tax cuts, job growth, and the border wall project), incorrectly state facts, deny the “fake news” perpetuated by major television and news sources, and reject Russia’s involvement in the 2016 US Presidential Election. An ongoing study by PolitiFact claims that only 5% of Trump’s claims are undeniably true.²⁶⁹ This has led concerned psychiatrists, psychologists, and mental health professionals, to call into question President Trump’s mental fitness. Over 60,000 mental health professionals are calling for President Trump’s removal from office, signing a petition stating, “in our professional judgement... Donald Trump manifests a serious mental illness that renders him psychologically incapable of

²⁶⁷ Ibid.

²⁶⁸ Glenn Kessler, Salvador Rizzo, and Meg Kelly, “President Trump has made 3,001 false or misleading claims so far,” *Washington Post*, May 1, 2018, accessed May 1, 2018, https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/fact-checker/wp/2018/05/01/president-trump-has-made-3001-false-or-misleading-claims-so-far/?utm_term=.d3d231127254.

²⁶⁹ “Donald Trump’s File,” PolitiFact, last modified May 2, 2018, accessed May 5, 2018, <http://www.politifact.com/personalities/donald-trump/>.

competently discharging the duties of President of the United States.”²⁷⁰ While one psychologist contends that President Trump has narcissistic and antisocial personality disorders that make President Trump a dangerous leader, another psychiatrist contends that his “pattern of violent behavior and violent tendencies” actually makes him a violent person.²⁷¹ Furthermore, research shows that strongly narcissistic leaders cultivate and thrive on conflict, inferring that President Trump’s personality might tempt him to take unnecessary military action.²⁷² Although these individuals are concerned that President Trump could become the greatest kind of “public-health-risk,” none of them have examined President Trump in person, leading White House sources and other mental health professional to deny these allegations as speculative. Regardless of whether President Trump actually has a serious mental illness, it is important to consider how Trump’s unusual habits, including his habit of exaggeration, lying, and observed patterns of violent behavior could influence decision-making and contribute to irrational decisions.

Psychologists argue that personality, leadership style, and irrationality can significantly affect decision-making processes. Research suggests that extroverted, outgoing, and narcissistic individuals are more likely to take high-stakes risks in an effort reap bigger rewards. McAdams explains: “He’s unlikely to shy away from risky decisions that, should they work out, could burnish his legacy and provide him an emotional payoff.”²⁷³ Moreover, since President Trump seems less committed to party ideology than most presidential candidates, taking different stances on a wide range of issues throughout his campaign, he “may be able to switch positions more easily, leaving room to maneuver in negotiations with Congress and foreign leaders.”²⁷⁴ Due to President Trump’s low agreeableness, he is unlikely to be emotionally influenced by “warm sentiments or humanitarian impulses,” allowing him to balance interests and bargain with adversaries without sacrificing pragmatism. But just as “tough talk” can intimidate an adversary into backing down, it can also provoke rival states into starting conflict. President Trump’s narcissism, weakness for flattery, and perceived admiration for strong, authoritarian leaders, may

²⁷⁰ Rosemary K.M. Sword and Philip Zimbardo, “The Dangerous Case of Donald Trump,” *Psychology Today*, September 28, 2017, accessed May 2, 2018, <https://www.psychologytoday.com/us/blog/the-time-cure/201709/the-dangerous-case-donald-trump>.

²⁷¹ Elaine Godfrey, “The Psychiatrist Telling Congress Trump Could Be Involuntarily Committed,” *The Atlantic*, January 12, 2018, <https://www.theatlantic.com/politics/archive/2018/01/bandy-lee/550193/>.

²⁷² Frederick M. Burkle, “Antisocial Personality Disorder and Pathological Narcissism in Prolonged Conflicts and Wars of the 21st Century,” *Disaster Medicine and Public Health Preparedness* 10, no. 1 (February 2016): 119, <https://doi.org/10.1017/dmp.2015.113>.

²⁷³ McAdams, “The Mind of Donald Trump.”

²⁷⁴ *Ibid.*

also make President Trump a vulnerable target to outside influence.²⁷⁵ While President Trump's personality may allow for more flexibility and pragmatism in his decisions, it may also lead him to take bigger risks and or be swayed by outside influences who appeal to his narcissistic tendencies.

This spectrum of possibilities has been clearly demonstrated throughout President Trump's tenure, particularly regarding his relationship with Kim Jong-un. Since the nuclear crisis began in 2017, President Trump has threatened Kim Jong-un with "fire and fury like the world has never seen," and referred to Kim Jong-un as "Little Rocket Man" to the UN General Assembly, stating the US will "totally destroy" North Korea in defense of the US and its allies.²⁷⁶ Over Twitter, President Trump even called Kim Jong-un "short and fat," and bragged that the US has a "bigger and more powerful" nuclear button than North Korea.²⁷⁷ President Trump's threatening and condescending language, coupled with his "maximum pressure" policy, were risky moves that escalated tensions between the two countries and risked pushing North Korea over the edge to nuclear war. However, when prompted with an offer to meet with Kim Jong-un on March 9, 2018, President Trump immediately accepted, even after Defense Secretary Jim Mattis and former National Security Advisor H.R. McMaster both encouraged him to proceed more cautiously.²⁷⁸ Despite these risks, President Trump could not ignore the international recognition and public approval he would surely gain if the meeting is successful. President Trump's public tone also dramatically shifted, praising Kim Jong-un as "very open and very honorable" for taking steps towards conciliation.²⁷⁹ When Cheung Eui-yong, South Korea's national security office chief, announced that President Trump had agreed to the meeting, he praised President Trump's "leadership and... maximum pressure policy, [which] together with

²⁷⁵ Krishnadev Calamur, "Nine Notorious Dictators, Nine Shout-Outs From Donald Trump," *The Atlantic*, March 4, 2018, accessed May 2, 2018, <https://www.theatlantic.com/international/archive/2018/03/trump-xi-jinping-dictators/554810/>.

²⁷⁶ Kaitlyn Schallhorn, "Trump on North Korea, from 'Rocket Man' to 'fire and fury,'" *Fox News*, April 18, 2018, <http://www.foxnews.com/politics/2018/04/18/trump-on-north-korea-from-rocket-man-to-fire-and-fury.html>.

²⁷⁷ Ibid.

²⁷⁸ Peter Baker and Choe Sang-Hun, "With Snap 'Yes' in Oval Office, Trump Gambles on North Korea," *New York Times*, March 10, 2018, <https://nyti.ms/2DhrbxV>.

²⁷⁹ S.A. Miller, "Trump praises Kim Jong-un: 'Very open and very honorable,'" *Washington Times*, April 24, 2018, <https://www.washingtontimes.com/news/2018/apr/24/trump-praises-kim-jong-un-very-open-very-honorable/>.

international security, brought [them] to this juncture.”²⁸⁰ In a follow up statement, Vice President Mike Pence claimed “North Korea’s desire to meet to discuss denuclearization – while suspending all ballistic missile and nuclear testing – is evidence that President Trump’s strategy to isolate the Kim regime is working.”²⁸¹ Pence also asserted that the Trump Administration has made “zero concessions” throughout this process. Following the historic summit between South Korea’s President Moon Jae-in and Kim Jong-un, President Moon even publicly stated that President Trump deserves to be awarded the Nobel Peace Prize for “bringing about the inter-Korean talks.”²⁸² At a recent campaign rally in Michigan, Trump took credit for the event, stating he had “everything” to do with inter-Korean talks.²⁸³ Even though the anticipated summit between the US and North Korea was later cancelled by President Trump, it appears that both parties will salvage the summit scheduled for June 12, 2018.²⁸⁴

Though it is unclear whether North Korea’s dramatic policy change was actually due to the Trump Administration’s “maximum pressure” policy or President Trump’s bellicose approach, South Korea’s move to credit the Trump Administration may be a way of appealing to President Trump’s narcissism and desire for approval. Moreover, Vice President Pence’s claim is meant to validate President Trump’s hardline approach and his tough negotiating stance. Finally, President Trump’s last minute decision to save the summit that he canceled may be an effort to “save face” after acting prematurely. At this point in time, it is still unclear whether President Trump’s risky behavior will pay off. Nevertheless, President Trump has no problem taking credit and drawing more attention to himself in the process. Based on this series of events, it is clear that President Trump’s personality has clearly influenced his interactions with North Korea. President Trump’s narcissistic tendencies has led to the expression of strong political will. But

²⁸⁰ “South Korea and White House on talks with North: full transcript,” *The Guardian*, March 9, 2018, accessed March 24 2018, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2018/mar/09/south-korea-white-house-talks-north-full-transcript>.

²⁸¹ Mike Pence, “Statements from Vice President Mike Pence on North Korea,” *The White House*, March 9, 2018, accessed March 24 2018, <https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefings-statements/statement-vice-president-mike-pence-north-korea-2/>.

²⁸² Hyonhee Shin, “South Korea president says Trump deserves Nobel Peace Prize,” *Reuters*, April 30, 2018, <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-northkorea-southkorea-trump/south-korea-president-says-trump-deserves-nobel-peace-prize-idUSKBN11100D>.

²⁸³ Phil Helsel, Jonathan Allen, and Dennis Romero, “Trump cheered at Michigan rally, roasted in absence at correspondents’ dinner,” *NBC News*, April 29, 2018, <https://www.nbcnews.com/politics/politics-news/trump-bashes-media-claims-credit-korea-talks-michigan-rally-n869836>.

²⁸⁴ Kevin Liptak, “Trump ramps up pressure to get North Korea summit on track,” *CNN Politics*, May 28, 2018, <https://edition.cnn.com/2018/05/28/politics/north-korea-trump-summit/index.html>.

just as this unorthodox behavior could have convinced North Korea to move decisively towards diplomatic options, it just as easily risked aggravating North Korea into starting a conflict. While President Trump's commitment to retaliation is reinforced by his survivalist perspective, it could also be undermined by his habit of lying and the perception that he may be mentally unstable. In this way, President Trump's personality is evident through his actions, decisions, and his expressions of political will.

8.3. "Groupthink" in the White House?

Although the President is the most important decision-maker within the US government, the President relies on close advisors, namely the members of the Cabinet and the NSC, to provide guidance and expertise on a wide range of issues. According to the White House, the Vice President serves as the "top adviser to the President."²⁸⁵ Next, the White House Chief of Staff oversees the Executive Office of the President, which has been "traditionally been home to many of the President's closest advisers."²⁸⁶ The Cabinet serves as "an advisory body made up of the heads of the 15 executive departments." All members are appointed by the President and must be confirmed by the Senate. According to the White House, "Members of the Cabinet are often the President's closest confidants." Finally, the NSC "advises President on foreign policy, intelligence, and national security matters."²⁸⁷ Not all members of the NSC, namely the National Security Advisor, require Senate confirmation.

Of these groups, the most important to applications of deterrence is the NSC. This is because deterrence relies on the creation of credible threats, which requires military capabilities and political will. While military leadership is responsible for the development and application of capabilities, government leadership is responsible for conveying political will. Representatives from both these groups participate in the NSC. Key members of the Cabinet whose positions are relevant to national security also participate, including the Vice President, the Secretary of State, the Secretary of Defense, the Director of National Intelligence, the Director of the Central Intelligence Agency, and the White House Chief of Staff. In this way, military and the political leadership comes together in the NSC, helping the President conduct more effective deterrence

²⁸⁵ The White House, *Our Government: The Legislative Branch*, accessed April 28, 2018, <https://www.whitehouse.gov/about-the-white-house/the-legislative-branch/>.

²⁸⁶ Ibid.

²⁸⁷ Ibid.

by directing military capabilities and crafting messages that express political will. Therefore, the members of the NSC can directly influence how successful US deterrence may be.

Given that the President has the right to appoint individuals to the Cabinet and to the NSC, he also has the right to remove and replace them as he deems fit. As a result, the President has the authority to choose who makes up his inner circle, selecting members based on their backgrounds, level of expertise, or even party affiliation. But through this self-selection process, the President also risks choosing individuals who have similar perspectives to his own, creating an environment that fosters a “groupthink” mentality. Just like any leader of any organization, the President must be wary of how “groupthink” and members of his inner circle may influence his decision-making processes.

The Trump Administration has been marked by the rapid turnover of key leadership positions within the Cabinet and among senior White House staff, some of which serve as members of the NSC. Changes in key positions can drastically impact the President’s stance on national security issues and how the President manifests political will. Two of these individuals are the Secretary of State and the National Security Advisor. The Secretary of State acts as the United States’ principal diplomat and is largely responsible for foreign policy matters. After winning the election, President Trump selected Rex Tillerson, a former Exxon Mobil CEO, to serve as Secretary of State. But after roughly a year in office, President Trump announced Tillerson’s replacement by Mike Pompeo, Director of the CIA, over Twitter.²⁸⁸ President Trump and Tillerson disagreed on a number of issues, including the Iran Nuclear Deal and the North Korea nuclear crisis. Although President Trump was a vocal critic of the Iran Nuclear Deal, Tillerson attempted to save the deal while addressing President Trump’s concerns.²⁸⁹ Tillerson was an early advocate of diplomacy with North Korea, but President Trump favored a harsher approach, as demonstrated by his “maximum pressure” foreign policy.²⁹⁰ This rift was evident when President Trump agreed to meet with Kim Jong-un, shortly after Tillerson had claimed that

²⁸⁸ “Trump fires Rex Tillerson as secretary of state,” *BBC News*, March 13, 2018, accessed May 3, 2018, <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-us-canada-43388723>.

²⁸⁹ Dan De Luce and Keith Johnson, “Tillerson’s Exit Could Doom the Iran Nuclear Deal,” *Foreign Policy*, March 13, 2018, <http://foreignpolicy.com/2018/03/13/tillersons-exit-could-doom-the-iran-nuclear-deal/>.

²⁹⁰ Steve Holland and Lesley Wroughton, “Differences on North Korea key to Trump’s Tillerson decision: sources,” *Reuters*, March 15, 2018, <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-usa-trump-tillerson/differences-on-north-korea-key-to-trumps-tillerson-decision-sources-idUSKCN1GQ3CD>.

talks were still “a long way off.”²⁹¹ When asked if President Trump consulted Tillerson on the decision, President Trump claimed, “I made that decision by myself.”²⁹² In the end, sources claim that President Trump was concerned Tillerson would be “too willing to make concessions to North Korea,” and that President Trump wanted “somebody in [negotiations] that he totally trusts.”²⁹³ Since Tillerson’s departure, Pompeo has been confirmed by the Senate as the new Secretary of State, and Gina Haspel has been confirmed as the new Director of the CIA.²⁹⁴

Another key position is the National Security Advisor, who serves as a senior aide in the Executive Office of the President and the chief in-house advisor on national security issues. After the election, President Trump selected Michael Flynn to serve as National Security Advisor. As a retired three-star Army general who supported President Trump throughout his campaign, the two had a positive rapport heading into the White House. But amid allegations that Flynn had lied to the FBI about contacts with Russia, President Trump fired Flynn and replaced him with H.R. McMaster, another three-star Army general.²⁹⁵ After roughly a year in the position, McMaster was also fired and replaced by John Bolton, a former UN ambassador. Though McMaster has been hailed as a “soldier-scholar” and earned bipartisan support from Congress, President Trump and McMaster were at odds from the beginning. President Trump has called McMaster gruff, condescending, aggressive, rigid, and “prone to lecture.”²⁹⁶ In some ways, President Trump saw McMaster as a threat to his position, openly complaining that McMaster was contributing to “the general undermining of [his] policy.”²⁹⁷ In February 2018, McMaster said evidence that Russia had meddled in the 2016 presidential election was “incontrovertible,” causing President Trump to fire back at him on Twitter.²⁹⁸ Following President Trump’s comments that the US would force South Korea to pay for a new missile defense system, McMaster called his South Korean counterpart to assure him that this was not official policy. In the aftermath, White House officials allege that “Trump screamed at McMaster

²⁹¹ David Smith, “Rex Tillerson’s firing leave US diplomacy in turmoil,” *The Guardian*, March 13, 2018, <https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2018/mar/13/rex-tillerson-fired-latest-news-donald-trump>.

²⁹² Ibid.

²⁹³ Holland, ““Differences on North Korea key to Trump’s Tillerson decision: sources.”

²⁹⁴ Smith, “Rex Tillerson’s firing leave US diplomacy in turmoil.”

²⁹⁵ Eli Lake, “Washington Loves McMaster, but Trump Doesn’t,” *Bloomberg*, May 8, 2017, <https://www.bloomberg.com/view/articles/2017-05-08/washington-loves-general-mcmaster-but-trump-doesn-t>.

²⁹⁶ “HR McMaster: Why did Trump dump national security adviser?” *BBC News*, March 22, 2018, <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-39033934>.

²⁹⁷ Lake, “Washington Loves McMaster, but Trump Doesn’t.”

²⁹⁸ Ibid.

on a phone call, accusing him of undercutting efforts to get South Korea to pay its fair share.”²⁹⁹ Since McMaster’s departure, John Bolton has assumed his position as National Security Advisor and has fired McMaster’s Deputy National Security Advisor Ricky Waddell.³⁰⁰

The replacement of these leaders shed light on what President Trump values in his inner circle. Personal compatibility and perceptions of loyalty matter deeply to President Trump. Various news sources have accused President Trump of “[valuing] loyalty above everything else,” selecting leadership positions based on perceptions of trustworthiness and firing those “he considers insufficiently reliable.”³⁰¹ Instead of embracing differing opinions, President Trump shut them out, weakening working relationships and eroding mutual trust. When President Trump felt he could no longer trust Tillerson or McMaster, he replaced them. Unlike Tillerson or McMaster, both Pompeo and Bolton appear to have positive pre-existing relationships with President Trump. President Trump has already demonstrated that he trusts Pompeo by sending him as a primary envoy to North Korea. Moreover, President Trump is also known to regularly watch *Fox News*, a “trusted” US-based news source where Bolton appears regularly as a contributor. In this way, President Trump chooses to associate himself with individuals he feels he can trust. What seems to qualify their trust is the quality of their relationship and their shared perspectives. At the same time, it appears that President Trump does not trust those who have differing perspectives than himself, which could lead to the manifestation of “groupthink.”

Members of Congress are concerned that President Trump’s chosen replacements for Tillerson and McMaster will have strong repercussions for deterrence and the future of foreign policy. Mike Pompeo and John Bolton’s foreign policy approaches have been characterized as “hawkish,” or likely to advocate for a more aggressive or warlike policy in foreign affairs. During his confirmation hearing, Pompeo denied any “hawkish” tendencies and claimed he does not advocate for regime change in North Korea. Though Pompeo stated he would seek to amend the Iran Nuclear Deal in his confirmation hearing, he has previously taken a highly critical stance against the deal, stating on Twitter that he looked forward to “rolling back this disastrous deal”

²⁹⁹ Ibid.

³⁰⁰ Kevin Breuninger, “Another national security official departs Trump administration as John Bolton cleans house,” *CNBC*, April 12, 2018, <https://www.cnbc.com/2018/04/12/john-bolton-pushes-out-deputy-national-security-advisor-rick-waddell.html>.

³⁰¹ Michael Kruse, “I Need Loyalty,” *Politico Magazine*, March/April 2018, accessed May 2, 2018, <https://www.politico.com/magazine/story/2018/03/06/donald-trump-loyalty-staff-217227>.

after President Trump won the election.³⁰² Pompeo has previously encouraged similarly hardline stances against North Korea and Russia. Given that Pompeo has closely interacted with North Korean officials in the lead up to the Trump-Kim summit, it is possible that Pompeo's perspective towards North Korea has softened in favor of diplomacy. Even so, it is difficult to know if this shift is representative of his own perspective or if it is meant to echo the changing policy of President Trump. On the other hand, Bolton previously served as the US Ambassador to the UN under the Bush Administration and has been labeled a "war hawk" in his foreign policy views. A harsh critic of the Iran Nuclear Deal, Bolton has advocated for regime change in Iran and North Korea and has generally supported the use of military force, publishing two op-eds famously titled, "To Stop Iran's Bomb, Bomb Iran," and "The Legal Case for Striking North Korea First."³⁰³ He was also highly supportive of the Iraq War during the Bush Administration, and has regularly voiced support for military intervention.³⁰⁴ Even though Pompeo and Bolton may not have the exact same foreign policy views, it is clear that both individuals are trusted by the President and exercise some influence on his foreign policy decisions.

To be clear, this research is not meant to definitively determine whether "groupthink" exists within the White House. From an outside perspective, it is almost impossible to know exactly how the President makes decisions and whose opinions he values the most. Most importantly, the general public does not have adequate evidence or access to the White House to determine if "groupthink" is present. In any case, this research simply means to point out that President Trump's personality and values creates the conditions necessary for "groupthink" to be possible. If this is the case, then members of Congress are rightfully concerned that extreme positions could influence President Trump to engage in aggressive and risky behavior. Though hardline stances could strengthen political will and demonstrate US resolve, it also risks agitating and provoking adversaries, creating opportunities for misunderstanding and increasing the chance of war. By removing individuals with differing opinions and surrounding himself with like-minded individuals, "groupthink" can easily take hold of the President and his inner circle, leading to irrational decision-making and forcing the President to follow through on "bad"

³⁰² Rebecca Shabad, "Mike Pompeo promises to be a 'talent hawk' for the State Department," *NBC News*, April 12, 2018, <https://www.nbcnews.com/politics/congress/mike-pompeo-address-criticism-he-s-too-hawkish-secretary-state-n865271>.

³⁰³ Colin Kahl and John Wolfsthal, "John Bolton Is a National Security Threat," *Foreign Policy*, March 23, 2018, <http://foreignpolicy.com/2018/03/23/john-bolton-is-a-national-security-threat/>.

³⁰⁴ *Ibid.*

policies. Moreover, changes in key leadership positions and rapid shifts in foreign policy could also send mixed signals to potential adversaries about US intentions and obfuscate political will. It is possible that some members of President Trump's Cabinet, namely Secretary of Defense Jim Mattis, are able to limit the effects the "groupthink" by providing a stabilizing force against extreme perspectives. Though Pompeo and Bolton are only two of many advisors that serve the President, their specific roles do have direct implications for how the US approaches North Korea and expresses political will.

8.4. The Role of Congress and Public Opinion

Even though the President and his inner circle command substantial influence within the Executive Branch, the Legislative Branch, comprised primarily of Congress, retains two key powers that check the power of the Executive Branch and contribute to the nation's political will. Congress has the authority to formally declare war and is responsible for raising and supporting the military.³⁰⁵ As previously discussed, the President can choose to engage military troops overseas without the consent of Congress. However, by formally endorsing military action and declaring war in the event of an attack, Congress would send a strong message of American political will. Since the decision must pass both the Senate and the House of Representatives, a formal declaration of war would certainly contribute to threat credibility.

Since the United States is a representative democracy, elected officials rely on the support of constituencies to maintain their political positions. If officials fail to represent the interests of their voters, they will suffer audience costs and simply be voted out of office with the next election cycle. As a public figure, the President is elected to represent the entire nation and risks incurring the largest audience costs. Congressmen are only responsible for representing the interests of their party and individual state. Currently, there are 535 members of Congress representing all 50 states.³⁰⁶ To retain the support of state constituencies, members of Congress must pay close attention to public opinion and approach issues with specific interests in mind. In most cases, the elected candidate reflects the dominant political party within that state at the time of their election. Since political parties already assume clear stances on a number of issues, constituencies will tend to vote for the candidate from the party that most aligns with their

³⁰⁵ *U.S. Constitution*, art. 1, sec. 8.

³⁰⁶ The White House, *Our Government: The Legislative Branch*.

interests. As a result, elected officials who deviate from the party line also risk suffering audience costs. Through elections, members of Congress are incentivized to acknowledge public opinion and protect the interests of their constituencies, which is aided by the endorsement of a political party.

When it comes to conflict and the potential for war, most Americans share similar opinions. Since the Vietnam War, the US has been averse to conflict when the perceived benefits were low, the costs were high, and the reasons for engagement were unclear.³⁰⁷ Military engagements in Iraq furthered this perspective, shifting public opinion strongly against US military intervention overseas.³⁰⁸ By perpetuating a liberal, democratic international order, the US has encouraged diplomacy and non-violent means of conflict resolution. This perspective remains consistent with American public opinion today. A J. Wallin opinion survey of 1,000 Americans released in January 2018 found that 86.4% of Americans believe “the U.S. military should only be used as a last resort.”³⁰⁹ Approximately 67% of voters also disapproved of the current policy which allows US forces to engage in conflicts overseas without formal approval. In response, nearly 71% of voters were in favor of new legislation that would provide Congress more oversight on military action overseas.³¹⁰ But as far as North Korea is concerned, this may not necessarily be the case. On September 2017, a Gallup Poll of 1,022 US adults found that 58% of Americans would “favor military action against North Korea if the United States cannot accomplish its goals by more peaceful means first.”³¹¹ The survey reports that roughly half of the participants “still think the situation can be resolved with sanctions and diplomacy,” given the fact that many Americans “still think North Korea is bluffing.”³¹² Political party also turned out to be a source of influence, finding that 82% of Republicans, 37% of Democrats, and 56% of independents would support military action. The sharp rise in support among Republican voters

³⁰⁷ Timothy S. Mundy, “Casualty Aversion: Dispelling the Myth” (Monograph, School of Advanced Military Studies, United States Army Command and General Staff College, 1999), 8-11.

³⁰⁸ Jeffrey M. Jones, “Support for Iraq Military Action Low in Historical Context,” *Gallup*, June 25, 2014, accessed April 29, 2018, <http://news.gallup.com/poll/171968/support-iraq-military-action-low-historical-context.aspx>.

³⁰⁹ John Haltiwanger, “Do Americans Want War with North Korea? Majority of U.S Public is Against Military Interventions, Poll Says,” *Newsweek*, January 9, 2018, <http://www.newsweek.com/war-north-korea-military-interventions-poll-775636>.

³¹⁰ *Ibid.*

³¹¹ “U.S. majority backs military action vs. North Korea: Gallup poll,” *Reuters*, September 15, 2017, Accessed April 29, 2018, <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-northkorea-missiles-usa-poll/u-s-majority-backs-military-action-vs-north-korea-gallup-poll-idUSKCN1BQ1LP>.

³¹² *Ibid.*

may reflect President Trump's aggressive rhetoric towards North Korea. Nonetheless, the survey concludes that "a majority of Americans appear ready to support military action against [North Korea], at least as a last resort."³¹³

The results of these survey indicate that public opinion could influence American political will. For deterrence to be successful, the target state must believe that the initiating state has the political will to carry through on the stated threat. If the target state knows that the US is historically averse to conflict and has consistently demonstrated a preference for peaceful solutions, then the target state may not believe that the US has the political will to retaliate. Furthermore, even though the majority of Americans believe military force is only appropriate as a last resort, it is almost impossible to know when the "last resort" has been reached. As previously stated, challengers to US power often operate under the threshold of military conflict. If this is the case, how will Congress know when it is time for military action? Would anything less than a nuclear attack be considered sufficient for a military response? This hesitation and the need for deliberation in Congress could signal that the US lacks the political will to respond in a reasonable amount of time. On the other hand, strong public opinion in favor of a military response, especially from one political party, could motivate Congress to authorize military action preemptively. With strong support from Republican constituents, Republican representatives in Congress may be more inclined to support military action against North Korea, ultimately strengthening political will. Since President Trump's charismatic leadership style enhances his ability to directly engage and mobilize the general public, a demonstration of strong political will could rouse public support and foster political will from the top down. In the end, these surveys indicate that American public opinion will support military action as a "last resort." But it may be difficult to discern when military action should be supported. Even though historical aversion to conflict can weaken political will, growing support for military force against North Korea, especially among Republican constituents, and strong leadership from President Trump could overwhelm this weakness and ultimately strengthen political will.

8.5. Kim Jong-un: Friendly Force or Fearsome Fiend?

Now that President Trump and Kim Jong-un are scrambling to save the previously cancelled US-North Korea summit, international audiences are curious as to what a summit will

³¹³ Ibid.

mean for the future of US-North Korea relations. As two charismatic leaders who are well-known for shows of aggression on the international stage, this summit calls into question how compatible President Trump and Kim Jong-un's personalities will be. Following a lengthy discussion of President Trump's personality and leadership style and a summary of US public opinion, the last piece of the puzzle is Kim Jong-un's personality. According to a separate study directed by Immelman and the Unit for the Study of Personality in Politics, a remote psychological assessment from 2017-2018 found that Kim Jong-un's primary personality patterns were "outgoing" and "dominant." While "outgoing" individuals, like President Trump, are impulsive, confident, and thrive on attention, "dominant" individuals "enjoy the power to direct others and to evoke obedience and respect." Furthermore, Immelman claims that dominant individuals are "tough and unsentimental and often make effective leaders."³¹⁴ While President Trump's personality composite has been characterized as "high-dominance charismatic," Kim Jong-un has been characterized as "high-dominance extrovert," demonstrating many similar characteristics to President Trump.

On the contrary, Immelman's study has a very different assessment of Kim Jong-un's leadership style. This study identifies Kim Jong-un's "major personality-based leadership strength" as "congenial-cooperative," which is characterized as "a distinctly outgoing tendency, supplemented by an accommodating inclination."³¹⁵ Such leaders are expected to be "jovial, socially gregarious, agreeable, accommodating, and obliging in their relationships with others," as well as "characteristically gracious, neighborly, and benevolent, preferring to avoid conflict and seek harmony with others."³¹⁶ Over the course of three studies, Kim Jong-un's characterization as a "congenial-cooperative" leader has remained the same.

When the first report was released in 2013, members of the study found that Kim Jong-un's personality seemed inconsistent with the "bellicose rhetoric" emerging from the DPRK. This inconsistent behavior may imply that Kim Jong-un is not fully in control of the DPRK. Nevertheless, Kim Jong-un's personality has not prevented him from committing acts of brutality, including the suspected sinking of a South Korean warship, the purge of hundreds of

³¹⁴ Aubrey Immelman, "The Personality Profile of Kim Jong-un," *St. John's University and the College of St. Benedict, Unit for the Study of Personality in Politics*, April 26, 2018, accessed May 1, 2018. <http://personality-politics.org/the-personality-profile-of-north-korean-supreme-leader-kim-jong-un>.

³¹⁵ Ibid.

³¹⁶ Ibid.

senior officials, the murder of his uncle Jang Song-thaek, the assassination of his half-brother Kim Jong-nam, as well as other reported executions of family members, allies, and rivals to his power.³¹⁷ Dekleva, a professor of psychiatry, has also observed that Kim Jong-un's "savvy, ambition, and ruthlessness" originally "shocked outside observers."³¹⁸ This might suggest that Kim Jong-un used brutality as a means of securing his power despite his accommodating personality. By rallying military and security elites behind the development of North Korea's nuclear program, developing a cult of personality for himself and his family, and removing all potential rivals, Kim Jong-un has made himself indispensable to his regime. As a result, Kim Jong-un has demonstrated "an aspirational style of leadership, recognizing that real tangibles – including nuclear weapons – are required in order to sustain his power."³¹⁹ Though Kim Jong-un is an autocratic leader who's actual power would suffer little from audience costs, Dekleva also observes that "Kim Jong-un and the DPRK's ruling elite are sensitive to nuance and to loss of face."³²⁰ Despite the fact that Kim Jong-un could be a "congenial-cooperative" leader, he is still a dictator who maintains control of his regime by any means possible.

Should Immelman's analysis and Dekleva's observations be correct, this could have positive implications for the future of US-North Korea relations. As both extroverted individuals, Kim Jong-un and President Trump may understand each other's personalities and have similar conceptions of political will. Although both leaders are bold and confident, their individual desires for attention may lead to some competition between the two. Both appear to have low agreeableness, making them tough negotiators who will not be distracted by sentiment. But since Kim Jong-un made the first move to initiate a dialogue with the US, he has already demonstrated some accommodating and cooperative leadership behavior. Therefore, Kim Jong-un might be more flexible and willing to make concessions throughout negotiations. This will work well with President Trump, whose ambition and competitive personality will make him unwilling to compromise. Previous claims that the US has made "zero concessions" to North Korea to bring about negotiations will also motivate President Trump to maintain a hardline stance.³²¹ Instead, Kim Jong-un's "dominant" personality might cause him to place more value

³¹⁷ Mercy A. Kuo, "Kim Jong-un's Political Psychology Profile: Insights from Ken Dekleva," *The Diplomat*, October 17, 2017, <https://thediplomat.com/2017/10/kim-jong-uns-political-psychology-profile/>.

³¹⁸ Ibid.

³¹⁹ Ibid.

³²⁰ Ibid.

³²¹ Pence, "Statements from Vice President Mike Pence on North Korea."

on earning President Trump's respect. If this is true, then Kim Jong-un would be more willing to let President Trump win some concessions in favor of cooperation and international recognition. Dekleva points out that as rational, political actors, "face-saving gestures on both sides" can be critical to effective negotiations.³²² Since "words and gestures matter" to North Koreans, and President Trump has a habit of exaggerating and misspeaking, President Trump must be especially cautious when he finally meets with Kim Jong-un. President Trump must clearly express US political will without accidentally offending Kim Jong-un. Based on this understanding of Kim Jong-un's personality, there is a chance that a summit between the US and North Korea could be productive, or at the very least, convey US political will in such a way that allows US deterrence of North Korea to be successful.

8.6. Chapter Conclusion

In the NPR, Secretary of State Jim Mattis articulates US political will: "Our deterrence strategy for North Korea makes clear that any North Korean nuclear attack against the United States or its allies and partners is unacceptable and will result in the end of that regime."³²³ Based on this document alone, a rival state can definitively conclude that the US has the political will to retaliate against a preemptive strike from any rival state. Nonetheless, the US cannot assume that rival states, namely North Korea, will read these documents. Therefore, it is the responsibility of the President and Congress to express American political will. As the Commander-in-Chief, the President is responsible for effective deterrence. As the only person who is authorized to launch a nuclear attack, the President must have the political will to retaliate in the event of an initial strike. However, as an extroverted and ambitious individual who is willing to take risks, talk tough to potential adversaries, and change his policy perspectives on a dime, President Trump's narcissistic tendencies could strengthen political will while simultaneously agitating North Korea into initiating conflict. This situation could be further exacerbated by "groupthink" within the White House. By removing leaders with differing opinions and placing a premium on loyalty, President Trump risks creating a White House environment that encourages "groupthink" and reinforces bad policy decisions. While the somewhat "hawkish" perspectives of Secretary of State Mike Pompeo and National Security Advisor John Bolton may strengthen political will,

³²² Kuo, "Kim Jong-un's Political Psychology Profile."

³²³ U.S. Department of Defense, *Nuclear Posture Review Report*, 33.

cases of accidental misunderstanding could lead to the immediate and unquestioned use of military force, preemptively beginning conflict with North Korea. Congress is meant to check the power of the President by retaining the right to declare war. Since members of Congress are held accountable by their constituencies, they must also consider the public's opinion. Surveys indicate that the majority of Americans would be supportive of military action against North Korea as a last resort, especially among Republican participants. Even though the US is historically averse to conflict, growing support for military force against North Korea could strengthen political will and encourage members of Congress to authorize a full declaration of war. If the US does commit to war with North Korea, then audience costs would further motivate the US to win. Finally, the similarities between Kim Jong-un and President Trump's personality profiles suggest that the two leaders could be understanding of one another. Kim Jong-un's ruthless behavior may be attributed to his desire to maintain power, and not to his actual leadership personality, which is characterized as cooperative and accommodating. If this is true, then Kim Jong-un may be willing to make concessions in exchange for President Trump's recognition and respect. Therefore, President Trump should be able to convey his political will in a way that Kim Jong-un would understand, thus allowing US deterrence of North Korea to be effective.

Chapter 9: Perceptions

An adversary must believe in the credibility of the threatened punishment. Military capabilities and political will alone does not guarantee that deterrence will work. De Mesquita argues, “Credible deterrence...depends on a party’s ability to persuade its opponent that it has both the wherewithal and the will to punish effectively. In effect, persuasion here depends on perception.”³²⁴ The deterring state must cultivate the perception that it intends to carry out the threatened attack no matter what. If the target state does not believe that the initiating state will follow through on the stated punishment, for reasons such as weak leadership, bluffing, or survivability, then the target state will proceed in the undesired behavior and deterrence will fail. On the other hand, if the target state believes the threatened punishment and chooses to comply, then deterrence is successful. In this case, no conflict is required, and the deterring state would never have to prove its political will or military capabilities. Therefore, an initiating state has to convince the target state that it has the military capability and political will to present a credible threat. To do this, an initiating state must formulate and convey perceptions that persuade the target state to comply.

Uncertainty plays a fundamental role in the formation of perceptions. Carl von Clausewitz, a Prussian general and famed military theorist, first introduced this concept by claiming, “War is the realm of uncertainty.”³²⁵ In other words, the “fog of war” refers to the inherent complexity and ambiguity of military operations.³²⁶ Therefore, in crises and military conflict, there will always be information about the adversary that a state will not have. Specifically, a state cannot know for sure what an adversary intends to do or what it is capable of doing until it actually happens.³²⁷ When using deterrence, an initiating state will not know for absolute certain what military capabilities or political will the target state has at the time. On the other hand, the target state may not know for sure if the initiating state is capable of carrying out the stated threat. For deterrence to be successful, the initiating state must cultivate the perception that it has the political will and military capabilities to follow through on a threatened

³²⁴ Bueno de Mesquita, “Perceptions, Deterrence, and Terrorism,” 322.

³²⁵ *Oxford Dictionary of Phrase and Fable*, “Fog of war,” Encyclopedia.com, accessed May 3, 2018, <https://www.encyclopedia.com/humanities/dictionaries-thesauruses-pictures-and-press-releases/fog-war>.

³²⁶ *Ibid.*

³²⁷ Bueno de Mesquita, “Perceptions, Deterrence, and Terrorism,” 326.

punishment without actually engaging in conflict. In essence, for the threatened punishment to be credible, it must be believable.

Given the uncertainty that naturally exists between two parties, an initiating state can use perceptions to address uncertainty in two different ways. The first method utilizes uncertainty to perpetuate false perceptions. A threat that is believable does not necessarily have to be true. A weaker state may use uncertainty to cultivate perceptions of their military capabilities and political will. In this way, an initiating state can appear stronger than it actually is, concealing potential weaknesses and increasing bargaining power. This also allows a weaker state to exert influence on a stronger state. To strengthen deterrence, a state's leaders may cultivate strong perceptions of their military capabilities and political will or adopt extreme postures to catch the attention of the international community. For example, when the US first suspected North Korea of nuclear weapons development during the Clinton Administration, the US was willing to provide food, aid, and a new light water nuclear reactor in exchange for North Korea's willingness to reduce its nuclear weapons program.³²⁸ Even though North Korea maintained that it was only conducting research on peaceful uses of nuclear energy, the United States had "considerable evidence" that suggested otherwise. The resulting agreement shows that North Korea was able to use the United States' perceptions of its nuclear development to boost its international legitimacy, extract aid and resources, and actually improve North Korea's nuclear capabilities. Thus, by using uncertainty to their advantage, weak states, such as North Korea, can adopt extreme positions to improve their bargaining position, or manipulate perceptions of capabilities that they may not necessarily have.³²⁹

The second method of addressing uncertainty is by reducing it. This can be done through signaling behavior. In crises, if a state wants to express its "vital interests" to an adversary, or the "interests over which a state is willing to fight if challenged," a state may express this interest through "costly signals."³³⁰ Fearon explains that "costly signals" are threats that incur an undesired cost. By doing so, a state demonstrates its resolve to retaliate over a specific issue. Therefore, "to be credible, a threat must have some cost or risk attached to it that might

³²⁸ Ibid, 332.

³²⁹ Ibid, 332-333.

³³⁰ James D. Fearon, "Signaling Foreign Policy Interests: Tying Hands versus Sinking Costs," *The Journal of Conflict Resolution* 41, no. 1 (February 1997): 69, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/174487>.

discourage an unresolved state from taking it.”³³¹ A leader typically generates costly signals by creating audience costs. Other methods include “financially costly mobilization or arming measures, engaging in limited conflicts, or running risks that the other side will opt for a first strike.”³³² Therefore, in cases of deterrence, an initiating state may use verbal threats and promises to convey its political will to retaliate, or even use limited acts of force to demonstrate the extent of its military capabilities. Moreover, states with stronger domestic audiences, such as democracies, are always less likely to back down than states with fewer audience costs, such as autocracies. According to this logic, “democracies should be able to signal their intentions to other states more credibly and clearly than authoritarian states can.”³³³ By engaging in “costly signals,” a state can increase threat credibility and indicate the seriousness of an issue. Through such actions, a state decreases uncertainty by presenting a clear, consistent message to the target state. But at the same time, the initiating state must also be willing to risk elevating tensions and accidentally sparking conflict to get the message across.

Nonetheless, there is one more highly-debated method of increasing credibility and reducing uncertainty: consistency. Within society, one of the most common ways to demonstrate credibility is by consistently following through on promises and threats. In contrast, those who fail to follow through are perceived to have low credibility. Conventional wisdom dictates that “decision-makers” assess their enemies’ credibility by evaluating their history for keeping (or breaking) commitments.”³³⁴ States who break commitments suffer high costs by eroding state credibility, “weakening its ability to deter enemies and reach agreements with friends.”³³⁵ By this logic, a state attempting to use deterrence must demonstrate its credibility through previous performances. If a state consistently follows through on threats, then the threat is more likely to be perceived as credible and deterrence is more likely to be successful. However, Press argues against this claim, stating that decision-makers do not consider past performance when assessing an adversary’s credibility. Instead, “decision-makers believe the threats and promises that are backed by sufficient power and serve clear interests.”³³⁶ When assessing the credibility of an

³³¹ Ibid.

³³² Ibid.

³³³ Fearon, “Domestic Political Audiences and the Escalation of International Disputes,” 577.

³³⁴ Daryl G. Press, *Calculating Credibility: How Leaders Assess Military Threats*, (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2005), 8.

³³⁵ Ibid.

³³⁶ Ibid, 8-9.

adversary, state leaders focus on the balance of capabilities and the interests at stake at that particular time. For this reason, states that repeatedly broke commitments were still perceived to have high credibility. Even though state leaders will make significant efforts to keep their commitments and preserve their credibility, other states will not assess their credibility in the same way.³³⁷ Hence, the most important indicators of credibility are perceptions of power and interests.

For deterrence to be effective, a state must cultivate perceptions of its capabilities and political will. A state can either use uncertainty to their advantage by manipulating perceptions, or eliminate uncertainty through costly signaling. Fearon claims that audience costs are a strong indicator of credibility when signaling intentions. In contrast, Press argues that state leaders will always assess threat credibility based on power and interests. Though state leaders believe in the importance of their own credibility, a state's previous actions are not as essential when assessing an adversary's credibility.

9.1. Exchanging Messages with the Enemy

At its core, states formulate perceptions to send messages. These messages can be verbal or non-verbal, direct or indirect, physical or abstract. Through this exchange of messages, the initiating state attempts to accomplish two goals. The first goal is to convince the target state to comply. Such messages focus on conveying the initiating state's military capabilities and political will to follow through on the stated threat. The second goal is to use the exchange of messages as a basis for constructing their own perception of the target state. In turn, the target state follows a reciprocal process to gauge how credible the initiating state's threat actually is. Therefore, it is important to consider how the initiating state and the target state both send and receive messages. For deterrence to be successful, the US must send messages that North Korea will understand and respond to in the desired manner. When doing so, US decision-makers must also be conscious of how pre-existing perceptions of North Korea influences the messages it sends and how these messages are received. Thus, the US must consider North Korea's perceptions of the US and how its messages serve to reinforce perceptions of itself.

³³⁷ Ibid, 10.

9.2. Signaling Through the Smoke: US Messages to North Korea

Throughout the North Korea nuclear crisis, the Trump Administration has attempted to use public communications and signaling behavior to formulate honest perceptions regarding foreign policy and deterrence. As previously discussed, current US policy calls for the CVID of North Korea. To achieve this goal, the Trump Administration launched a policy of “maximum pressure and engagement” in April 2017. This policy has been reaffirmed through numerous policy documents, such as the NSS, and White House press releases. Even after President Trump agreed to meet with Kim Jong-un, Vice President Mike Pence reaffirmed US policy by stating, “All sanctions remain in place and the maximum pressure campaign will continue until North Korea takes concrete, permanent, and verifiable steps to end their nuclear program.”³³⁸ Through these channels, the US has utilized public communications to convey to North Korea that sanctions will remain in place until North Korea takes definitive steps towards CVID.

Beyond foreign policy, the US has used strategy documents and signaling behavior to deter North Korea. As stated in the NPR, “Our deterrence strategy for North Korea makes clear that any North Korean nuclear attack against the United States or its allies and partners is unacceptable and will result in the end of that regime.”³³⁹ By doing so, the US guarantees retaliation against North Korea in the event of a nuclear strike. Other defense-oriented documents, such as the NPR and the National Defense Strategy, corroborate this claim by articulating US military capabilities and political will. To prove US commitment to retaliation, US and South Korean military forces conduct joint drills to “ensure the interoperability” between the two forces.³⁴⁰ Even though the US insists that joint military drills are routine exercises meant to “demonstrate the Alliance’s commitment to the defense of the ROK through combined and joint training,” these drills also serve as a form of “costly signaling.”³⁴¹ Joint military drills are a convenient way to showcase the combined military capabilities of the US and South Korea. Since the US and South Korea are both democracies with high audience costs, these drills credibility indicate the closeness of US-North Korea relations and their commitment to mutual defense. Though US military leadership emphasizes that these exercises are not conducted with

³³⁸ Pence, “Statements from Vice President Mike Pence on North Korea.”

³³⁹ U.S. Department of Defense, *Nuclear Posture Review Report*, 33.

³⁴⁰ Neuman, “U.S., South Korea Begin Massive Military Exercises.”

³⁴¹ Kanga Kong, “U.S.-South Korea Military Drills to Test Kim’s Desire for Talks,” *Bloomberg*, March 20, 2018, <https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2018-03-20/u-s-south-korea-military-drills-to-start-april-1-pentagon-says>.

North Korea in mind, North Korea considers these drills to be preparations for war “aimed to deliberately deteriorate the situation of the Korean peninsula and push it to the brink of war.”³⁴² In this way, these “grave provocations” escalate the likelihood of conflict as a “costly signal” to North Korea.

Although President Trump announced the suspension of joint military exercises following the Trump-Kim summit, much to South Korea and the DoD’s surprise, it has yet to be seen how this suspension will affect perceptions of the US and its commitment to mutual defense.³⁴³ Kim Jong-un also agreed to the “complete denuclearization” of the Korean Peninsula, but scholars have pointed out that this agreement leaves out the “verifiable” and “irreversible” aspects that are key to CVID. US leadership has generally relied upon public communications, strategy documents, and joint military exercises to convey to domestic and international audiences that the US has the military capabilities and the political will to present a credible threat to North Korea. As democracies, the US and South Korea can also signal their intentions more credibly because of higher audience costs. On the contrary, President Trump’s decision to cancel joint military exercises may call into question US deterrence capabilities, as well as its commitment to defend South Korea in the event of a nuclear attack. Though it may be too soon to tell, this suspension may be detrimental to US credibility and the effectiveness of deterrence.

9.3. The Strength of the Enemy Image: Lessons from the Iraq War

There are two clear messages that the US wants to convey to North Korea. The first message concerns US foreign policy, stating that the US will continue its “maximum pressure” policy until CVID is achieved. The second message involves deterrence, asserting that if North Korea launches a nuclear attack against the US or its allies, the US will retaliate. Since these two messages are rather straight forward, it seems that conveying these messages in a way that forms an accurate perception should be a simple task. Nonetheless, an initiating state’s pre-existing perceptions of a target state can negatively influence decision-making and perception formation. If an initiating state relies too heavily on its own perceptions of the target state without paying

³⁴² Ibid.

³⁴³ Kevin Liptak and Joshua Berlinger, “Trump misrepresents North Korea nuclear agreement,” *CNN Politics*, June 22, 2018, accessed June 23, 2018, <https://edition.cnn.com/2018/06/21/politics/trump-north-korea-nuclear-agreement/index.html>.

ample attention to new information, then the initiating state may send messages that create the wrong perception within the target state.

In an article by Duelfer and Dyson, the formation of an “enemy image” is a clear manifestation of these pre-existing perceptions. Prior to the Iraq War, President Bush designated Saddam Hussein to be an adversary of the US. Therefore, any actions taken by Hussein were perceived to be “evidence of hostile intent toward the United States.”³⁴⁴ Although this masked the uncertainty surrounding Hussein’s behavior, it also contributed to “chronic misperception” between the two states. Hussein perceived “US intelligence as close to omniscient” leading him to believe that the US always knew Iraq possessed no WMD (which are nuclear, biological, or chemical weapons capable of inflicting indiscriminate death and destruction on a massive scale).³⁴⁵ Instead, Hussein believed that the US was trying to engage him “in some kind of elaborate bluff or ruse.”³⁴⁶ In contrast, President Bush was certain that there was WMD in Iraq because Hussein would have otherwise cooperated with IAEA inspectors.³⁴⁷ Additionally, US decisionmakers misunderstood Hussein’s perceptions of threat, causing US leadership to incorrectly assume that actions meant to deter Iran were actually signs of “dangerous malignity” towards the US.³⁴⁸ During his famed State of the Union Address in 2002, President Bush coined the term “axis of evil” by accusing Iran, Iraq, and North Korea of sponsoring terrorism and seeking WMD. This address also served to rally domestic support for the War on Terror and lay the foundation for the 2003 Invasion of Iraq. President Bush justified the Iraq War based on evidence that Saddam Hussein possessed WMD and maintained connections to al-Qaeda, the terrorist group who claimed responsibility for the 9/11 attacks. As a result, the US was able to gain the support of the United Kingdom and other coalition forces. On March 19, 2003, the United States launched what would become an eight-year-long protracted war against Hussein’s regime. Although the invasion was initially successful, the violence and chaos that ensued made

³⁴⁴ Brad DeWees, “The Psychology of Perceiving Uncertainty,” *War on the Rocks*, March 23, 2018, accessed May 10, 2018, <https://warontherocks.com/2018/03/the-psychology-of-perceiving-uncertainty/>.

³⁴⁵ *Encyclopedia Britannica*, “weapon of mass destruction (WMD),” last modified November 14, 2007, accessed April 27, 2017, <https://global.britannica.com/technology/weapon-of-mass-destruction>.

³⁴⁶ Charles A. Duelfer and Stephen Benedict Dyson, “Chronic Misperception and International Conflict: The U.S.-Iraq Experience,” *International Security* 36, no. 1 (Summer 2011): 73-74, https://www.mitpressjournals.org/doi/pdf/10.1162/ISEC_a_00045.

³⁴⁷ DeWees, “The Psychology of Perceiving Uncertainty.”

³⁴⁸ Duelfer and Dyson, “Chronic Misperception and International Conflict,” 74.

the Iraq War wildly unpopular within the international community, claiming the lives of 461,000 people from 2003 to 2011.³⁴⁹ To add insult to injury, no WMD was ever found in Iraq.

In hindsight, there were signs that the decision to launch the Iraq War was unfounded. Sources claim that prior to the invasion, there was little to no evidence indicating links between Iraq and al-Qaeda.³⁵⁰ Moreover, the Bush Administration was found to have exaggerated conclusions from intelligence reports regarding the existence of WMD.³⁵¹ Some reports indicate that these incorrect conclusions were reinforced by senior officials within the Bush Administration. In one infamous account, following an intelligence briefing on Iraq's supposed WMD activity, President Bush asked CIA Director George Tenet, "I've been told all this intelligence about having WMD and this is the best we've got?" Tenet replied, "It's a slam dunk case!"³⁵² Though it is clear now that the case for WMD in Iraq was far from a "slam dunk," Tenet's confidence in the decision reassured President Bush and masked the uncertainty surrounding the decision.

In the lead up to the Iraq War, the Bush Administration's pre-existing perception of Iraq as an enemy to the US influenced how intelligence was interpreted and how decisions were made. By relying too heavily on existing perceptions, the US failed to accurately interpret Hussein's behavior and the extent of his military capabilities. Since the US did not understand Hussein's perceptions of threat, the Bush Administration sent messages that Hussein did not understand, leading him to think it was all just a ruse. Though President Bush played a leading role in perpetuating the "enemy image" of Iraq, Cabinet members, military leaders, and intelligence officials, also reinforced misperceptions at the highest levels of leadership. Not only did the Bush Administration's confidence in this perception rally domestic support for the Iraq War, it also convinced allies to join the US in their cause. Even though the primary justifications for the invasion turned out to be unsupported, the Iraq War demonstrates how the "enemy image" guided the Bush Administration into war.

"Enemy images" can be a powerful tool to create perceptions of a target state, but a powerful image is not necessarily a correct one. As Duelfer and Dyson point out, "enemy

³⁴⁹ "Iraq study estimates war-related deaths at 461,000," *BBC*, October 18, 2013. <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-24547256>.

³⁵⁰ U.S. Congress, *Report on the U.S. Intelligence Community's Prewar Intelligence Assessments on Iraq*, 108th Cong., 1st sess., July 7, 2004.

³⁵¹ *Ibid.*

³⁵² DeWees, "The Psychology of Perceiving Uncertainty."

images” mask feelings of uncertainty by narrowing public attention to a few perceived threats. Publicly-accessible policy documents which identify specific states as “adversaries” or “challengers” contribute to the dissemination of enemy images through convenient labels. If a state adheres too closely to this perception of the “enemy,” new messages will be interpreted according to existing perceptions and will fail to consider the real-life context of the situation. By failing to understand the perceptions of the adversary, states also risk crafting messages the adversary will not understand. In this way, “enemy images” can lead decision-makers to come to incorrect conclusions and make decisions based on perception without considering the reality.

9.4. North Korea’s Enemy Image

The US has crafted a substantial “enemy image” of North Korea and Kim Jong-un’s regime. Since the Korean War, North Korea has been perceived as an enemy to the US and its allies. This “enemy image” continues to play a central role in President Trump’s rhetoric, which perceives the world to be a dangerous place and rallies domestic support through recognition of a common threat. Within policy and strategy documents, the Trump Administration paints an unfavorable image of North Korea, labeling the regime as a “rogue state,” an aggressor, a challenger to US power, and a “clear and grave threat to U.S. and allied security.”³⁵³ In the NSS, North Korea is depicted as “a ruthless dictatorship without regard for human dignity,” “a country that starves its own people,” and a regime that is “determined to destabilize regions, threaten Americans and our allies, and brutalize their own people.”³⁵⁴ This kind of language fuels the “enemy image” and clearly implies negative perceptions of North Korea.

According to the National Defense Strategy, “North Korea seeks to guarantee regime survival and increased leverage by seeking a mixture of nuclear, biological, chemical, conventional, and unconventional weapons and a growing ballistic missile capability to gain coercive influence over South Korea, Japan, and the United States.”³⁵⁵ In other words, the US perception is that North Korea’s growing military capabilities are meant to ensure regime survival, increase bargaining power, and ultimately gain an advantage over the US and its allies. By referencing allies that are most susceptible to North Korean aggression, the US wants to share

³⁵³ U.S. Department of Defense, *Nuclear Posture Review Report*, 32.

³⁵⁴ United States, and Donald Trump, *National Security Strategy of the United States of America*, 1-26.

³⁵⁵ U.S. Department of Defense, *Summary of the 2018 National Defense Strategy*, 2.

this perception by consolidating support against a common enemy. Though the US continues to use strategy and policy documents to reaffirm allied support, the language of these documents is also directed to the larger international community, specifically the UN. By doing so, the US attempts to expand the “enemy image” to an international scale, targeting the regime’s credibility and rallying international opinion against North Korea. Key documents, including the NSS, the NPR, and the National Defense Strategy, all remind international audiences of North Korea’s disregard for international law, norms, and standards. The NSS undermines North Korea’s credibility by stating, “for more than 25 years, [North Korea] has pursued nuclear weapons and ballistic missiles in defiance of every commitment it has made.”³⁵⁶ These commitments refer specifically to UN-led efforts to curb North Korea’s nuclear weapons development, such as the NPT and the Six Party Talks. The NPR claims, “North Korea continues its illicit pursuit of nuclear weapons and missile capabilities in direct violation of United Nations (UN) Security Council resolutions.”³⁵⁷ Moreover, as stated in the National Defense Strategy, “North Korea’s outlaw actions and reckless rhetoric continue despite United Nation’s censure and sanctions.”³⁵⁸ Therefore, “despite universal condemnation in the United Nations,” North Korea’s nuclear weapons and provocative behavior continue to threaten international security.³⁵⁹ Speaking from the perspective of the international community, the US is cultivating the perception that North Korea’s nuclear weapons and missile programs are a security threat to the US, its allies, and the international community. From this perspective, North Korea is not only an enemy of the US, but rather an enemy to the international community and the norms and standards it serves to protect.

Based on North Korea’s provocative actions and incendiary language throughout the nuclear crisis, this “enemy image” is not necessarily unwarranted. North Korea did choose to leave the NPT to pursue nuclear weapons development, deliberately violating international norms prioritizing nuclear non-proliferation. By launching ballistic missiles over Japan and threatening South Korea with a “fire attack,” North Korea has deliberately engaged in aggressive behavior against US allies.³⁶⁰ Until recently, the Trump Administration had adequate cause for

³⁵⁶ United States, and Donald Trump, *National Security Strategy of the United States of America*, 26.

³⁵⁷ U.S. Department of Defense, *Nuclear Posture Review Report*, V.

³⁵⁸ U.S. Department of Defense, *Summary of the 2018 National Defense Strategy*, 1.

³⁵⁹ U.S. Department of Defense, *Nuclear Posture Review Report*, I.

³⁶⁰ “KAPPC Spokesman on DPRK Stand toward UNSC ‘Sanctions Resolution,’” *KCNA*, September 12, 2017, accessed May 10, 2018, <https://kcnawatch.co/newstream/1505345461-35556086/kapcc-spokesman-on-dprk-stand-toward-uns-sanctions-resolution/>.

maintaining this “enemy image” and projecting it on an international scale. Nevertheless, the Trump Administration must be careful not to make the same mistakes as the Bush Administration by adhering too closely to existing perceptions and failing to account for new developments. Thus, the Trump Administration must strive to understand North Korea’s perceptions and send messages in a way that North Korea will surely understand.

9.5. Perceiving Uncertainty Within the Trump Administration

As discussed in the previous chapter, the US approach to North Korea can be influenced by a number of factors, including President Trump’s personality and the influence of his inner circle. DeWees argues that these factors may also influence how individuals and organizations perceive uncertainty. Simply put, “seeing uncertainty makes us less likely to fight the wrong war with the wrong tools.”³⁶¹ In other words, those who are better at perceiving uncertainty are sensitive to changing situations, receptive to new pieces of information, and willing to adapt strategies to address challenges in an efficient and effective manner. At an individual level, differences in personality, such as openness, ambiguity tolerance, and need for closure, influence whether individuals perceive uncertainty.³⁶² Thus far, President Trump has sent mixed signals regarding his ability to do so. Within the US political system, research shows that conservatives have low ambiguity tolerance and are generally less open to the unknown.³⁶³ This makes sense given the fact that political conservatism “at its ideological core... values tradition and stability over societal upheaval and social change.”³⁶⁴ Since President Trump is not as committed to conservative ideology as other members of his party and has shifted his stance on a number of issues, his ability to perceive uncertainty cannot be determined by political party alone.

Throughout his campaign, President Trump became extremely popular for his “anti-politically-correct” rhetoric and his “tell it like it is” attitude, making him appear to be a more honest, genuine, and credible candidate than seasoned politicians. Despite his inflammatory comments, disagreeable temperament, and tendency to change his stance on issues, President

³⁶¹ DeWees, “The Psychology of Perceiving Uncertainty.”

³⁶² Ibid.

³⁶³ Melanie Tannenbaum, “Decoding Trump-Mania: The Psychological Allure of Hating Political Correctness, Part 1,” *Scientific American*, August 14, 2015, accessed May 10, 2018, <https://blogs.scientificamerican.com/psysociety/decoding-trump-mania-the-psychological-allure-of-hating-political-correctness-part-1/>.

³⁶⁴ Ibid.

Trump still appeared more credible than other “politically correct” politicians. As such, President Trump created the perception that he was an unambiguous leader, one who would give honest, definitive answers the public could trust. Upon entering the White House, the Trump Administration began working on a number of ambitious campaign promises with varied degrees of success. Since President Trump’s ambitious personality makes him “concerned about results and getting things done,” he looked for opportunities to deliver “quick wins” for his administration.³⁶⁵ Some of these “quick wins” included signing an executive order meant to “ease the burden” of Obamacare, nominating a new conservative justice to the Supreme Court, and withdrawing from the Paris Climate Agreement.³⁶⁶ Since then, President Trump has struggled to deliver on more hefty campaign promises, such as the promise to build a border wall that would be paid for by Mexico or prosecute 2016 Democratic Presidential Nominee Hillary Clinton. Since President Trump is “quick to make decisions and to make things happen,” his desire to see results has led to riskier decisions.³⁶⁷ When confronted with the opportunity to renew sanctions relief for the Iran Nuclear Deal on May 12, 2018, President Trump could not resist delivering on yet another campaign promise. On May 8, 2018, President Trump announced the US will withdraw the Iran Nuclear Deal and reimpose sanctions against Iran. In his address at the White House, President Trump stated: “Today’s action sends a critical message: The United States no longer makes empty threats. When I make promises, I keep them.”³⁶⁸ This demonstrates that President Trump prioritizes being as unambiguous as possible, delivering on promises and achieving tangible goals. Furthermore, President Trump’s observed “[reluctance] to listen to feed back – especially negative feedback – from others,” suggests it is especially difficult to change his mind once it is made up.³⁶⁹ In this case, world leaders, including French President Emmanuel Macron, could not convince President Trump not to withdraw from the

³⁶⁵ Ryne A. Sherman, “The Personality of Donald Trump,” *Psychology Today*, September 17, 2015, accessed May 10, 2018, <https://www.psychologytoday.com/us/blog/the-situation-lab/201509/the-personality-donald-trump>.

³⁶⁶ Donald Trump, “Executive Order 13765, Minimizing the Economic Burden of the Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act Pending Repeal,” January 20, 2017, Executive Office of the President, <https://www.federalregister.gov/documents/2017/01/24/2017-01799/minimizing-the-economic-burden-of-the-patient-protection-and-affordable-care-act-pending-repeal>.

³⁶⁷ Sherman, “The Personality of Donald Trump.”

³⁶⁸ Brian Bennett, “How Talks with North Korea Convinced Trump to Scrap the Iran Deal,” *Time Magazine*, May 8, 2018, <http://time.com/5269958/iran-nuclear-deal-donald-trump-north-korea/>.

³⁶⁹ Sherman, “The Personality of Donald Trump.”

deal. Based on these actions, one can surmise that President Trump's low openness, low tolerance for ambiguity, and need for closure make it difficult for him to perceive uncertainty.

On the other hand, President Trump has also become known for his unpredictable approach to foreign policy, "depriving allies and foes alike of their confidence of what he might do next."³⁷⁰ US Senator, Bob Corker, has voiced his support for this approach, stating that President Trump's "unpredictability gave him an edge" in negotiations.³⁷¹ President Trump has stated on various occasions that previous administrations were "totally predictable," allowing adversaries to take advantage of the US.³⁷² But to be unpredictable, Fuchs surmises that President Trump wants to shed the "predictable" aspects of US foreign policy, including those that have, "until now, helped keep the world somewhat stable."³⁷³ Without these limitations, President Trump's perceived unpredictability gives him more freedom and leverage in foreign policy. As President Trump once said, "I don't want them to know what I'm thinking."³⁷⁴ This can be a positive approach when dealing with potential adversaries, such as North Korea, because it provides the necessary flexibility to deal with uncertainty and adapt to changing situations. However, by neglecting the predictable aspects of foreign policy, such as alliances, agreements, and international norms and standards, President Trump risks perpetuating destabilizing behaviors that reduce the credibility of the US within the international system. Most importantly, this kind of behavior undermines direct and extended deterrence by obfuscating whether the US will follow through on a stated threat. Allegations that Trump disagrees with elements of his NSS and other foreign policy initiatives contribute to perceptions of unpredictability, but also undermine the credibility of those documents, including the alliances, commitments and capabilities that are reaffirmed therein.³⁷⁵ Furthermore, Fuchs argues

³⁷⁰ Bennett, "How Talks with North Korea Convinced Trump to Scrap the Iran Deal."

³⁷¹ Josh Delk, "Corker: Trump's 'unpredictability' helps him in negotiations," *The Hill*, January 1, 2018, <http://thehill.com/blogs/blog-briefing-room/370531-corker-trumps-unpredictability-is-working>.

³⁷² Sean Hannity, "Trump: America has to be 'less predictable,' Obama an 'unbelievable divider,'" *Fox News*, November 3, 2015, <http://www.foxnews.com/transcript/2015/11/03/trump-america-has-to-be-less-predictable-obama-unbelievable-divider.html>.

³⁷³ Michael H. Fuchs, "Trump's Doctrine of Unpredictability," *Democracy Journal*, January 26, 2018, <https://democracyjournal.org/arguments/trumps-doctrine-of-unpredictability/>.

³⁷⁴ Donald Trump, "Transcript: Donald Trump on His Foreign Policy Views," interview by Maggie Haberman and David E. Sanger, *New York Times*, March 26, 2016, accessed May 12, 2018, <https://www.nytimes.com/2016/03/27/us/politics/donald-trump-transcript.html>.

³⁷⁵ Peter Beinart, "Trump Doesn't Seem to Buy His Own National Security Strategy," *The Atlantic*, December 19, 2017, accessed May 12, 2018, <https://www.theatlantic.com/international/archive/2017/12/nss-trump-principled-realism/548741/>.

that President Trump’s “foreign policy of unpredictability” comes off to foreign audiences as “something [adversaries] can take advantage of rather than something to be feared.”³⁷⁶ As such, this foreign policy of unpredictability can be effective against adversaries, but also harmful to our friends. While focusing on the ambiguous can help President Trump perceive and project uncertainty, it can also undermine deterrence by casting doubt on US credibility and commitment to allies.

The composition of President Trump’s inner circle may also influence how the Trump Administration perceives uncertainty. As demonstrated by the interaction between President Bush and CIA Director George Tenet, speakers have a tendency of conforming to the opinions of their audience. In a group setting, this kind of behavior can “reduce the amount of uncertainty that individuals perceive” and result in “groupthink.”³⁷⁷ This is especially concerning given President Trump’s newly-instated Secretary of State Mike Pompeo and National Security Advisor John Bolton. Since both are conservative, are trusted by the President, and share the President’s views on a number of subjects, Pompeo and Bolton may contribute to “groupthink” by telling President Trump exactly what he wants to hear. Moreover, when high-level individuals are removed from their positions on the basis of loyalty, such individuals may be less inclined to disagree. On the other hand, President Trump seems more inclined to listen to those he feels he can trust. Therefore, certain individuals, such as Pompeo and Bolton, may be trusted enough to voice dissenting opinions without severe repercussions. With President Trump’s decision to withdraw from the Iran Nuclear Deal, Bolton’s influence is already clear. While foreign policy experts are concerned that President Trump’s withdrawal from the deal could harm US credibility in negotiations with North Korea, Bolton argues the opposite. Bolton claims that a hardline approach will increase credibility by demonstrating to Kim Jong-un that President Trump “won’t accept terms that allow for Kim to eventually restart a nuclear program.”³⁷⁸ Bolton claims that the withdrawal will serve to “establish positions of strength for the United States” and send a message to North Korea: “the President wants a real deal.”³⁷⁹ At the time of the announcement, Pompeo was flying to North Korea to discuss North Korea’s commitment to denuclearization and to prepare for Trump-Kim summit. Even though Pompeo’s interactions

³⁷⁶ Fuchs, “Trump’s Doctrine of Unpredictability.”

³⁷⁷ DeWees, “The Psychology of Perceiving Uncertainty.”

³⁷⁸ Bennett, “How Talks with North Korea Convinced Trump to Scrap the Iran Deal.”

³⁷⁹ Ibid.

with North Korea may give him a different policy perspective than Bolton, it is clear that both Pompeo and Bolton are highly trusted by the President. With this in mind, the conditions that make “groupthink” possible also make it more difficult to perceive uncertainty within the Trump Administration.

DeWees argues that the best way for leaders to deal with uncertainty is to “seek to replace the uncertainty we perceive with knowledge of objective truth.”³⁸⁰ In other words, leaders need to be willing to look past existing perceptions and embrace uncertainty. They have to be willing to consider different perceptions and interpretations of messages to move steadily closer to the truth. To do so, such leaders must first be able to perceive uncertainty. President Trump’s ambitious personality drives him to combat ambiguity by delivering on promises. While this makes President Trump seem less capable of perceiving uncertainty, preferring the known over the unknown, his desire for an “unpredictable” foreign policy strategy may suggest he is actually more open to ambiguous situations. Unpredictability can increase uncertainty, but also destabilize structures that rely on credible commitments, such as deterrence. Since loyal members of President Trump’s inner circle, namely Pompeo and Bolton, already share similar perspectives to President Trump, it is possible for “groupthink” to exist in the President’s inner circle, restricting perceptions of uncertainty and leading to premature conclusions based on pre-existing perceptions. Based on President Trump’s personality and the composition of his inner circle, the Trump Administration will struggle to perceive uncertainty and may fail to properly send and interpret messages until it embraces the uncertainty surrounding North Korea.

9.6. North Korea’s Smoke and Signals

North Korea has skillfully manipulated uncertainty and used signaling behavior to formulate perceptions on its own terms. Outside audiences have little access to information about North Korea. Everything from military capabilities to the daily life of citizens seems to be shrouded in mystery. What we do know is based on the information that North Korea chooses to release to public audiences. In the past, North Korea has manipulated uncertainty by feeding perceptions that increased its bargaining power and extracted significant concessions from the US and others. North Korea is able to do this because of the exclusive control it maintains over the formation of perceptions about itself.

³⁸⁰ DeWees, “The Psychology of Perceiving Uncertainty.”

While democracies value openness and transparency, autocracies consider such concepts to be highly dangerous to regime stability and the power of the ruling party. Thus, restrictive autocratic regimes are less vulnerable to audience costs not just because citizens have little influence over government proceedings, but also because sources of dissent are highly suppressed. As a result, autocracies like North Korea exert almost exclusive control over the formulation of perceptions that is produced by their country. News and media outlets function as mouthpieces for the regime, conveying approved messages for the international community to receive. This exercise of control, along with the uncertainty surrounding the regime, is what allows North Korea to directly influence perceptions of its military capabilities and increase its bargaining power. Primary media sources include, *Rodong Sinmun*, the official newspaper of the Central Committee of the Workers' Party of Korea, and the *Korean Central News Agency* (KCNA), the state news agency of North Korea. Through these trusted media channels, Kim Jong-un's regime seeks to formulate perceptions within the US and the international community. More importantly, its messages highlight how North Korea perceives itself relative to the international community. Therefore, the following analysis, based on news released in November 2017, at the height of tensions between the US and North Korea, indicates some common themes regarding North Korea's perceptions of itself, the United States, and the international sphere.

North Korea claims to be "a full-fledged nuclear weapons state and ICBM possessor," who is fully justified in its pursuit of nuclear weapons.³⁸¹ Despite international condemnation, North Korea believes that nuclear weapons are "essential for its national identity and security, and for achieving power and prestige on the international stage."³⁸² The regime also argues that its pursuit of nuclear weapons is driven by US "nuclear blackmail," a sentiment that has persisted since the Korean War.³⁸³ Today, North Korea continues to believe that the US presents an existential threat to North Korean sovereignty. By referring to its nuclear weapons as a "nuclear deterrent force," North Korea implies that its nuclear weapons development is only meant for defensive purposes, allegedly against the US. Through various nuclear and missile tests, North Korea has demonstrated its military capabilities through "costly signaling." Though experts can

³⁸¹ "U.S. Can Never Break Korean People's Will: Swiss Bodies," *Rodong Sinmun*, November 14, 2017, accessed May 10, 2018, http://www.rodong.rep.kp/en/index.php?strPageID=SF01_02_01&newsID=2017-11-14-0010.

³⁸² Terry, "North Korea's Strategic Goals and Policy towards the United States and South Korea," 68.

³⁸³ Edward Friedman, "Nuclear Blackmail and the End of the Korean War," *Modern China* 1, no. 1 (Jan 1975): 75.

confirm some aspects of these tests, the majority of analysis regarding North Korea's military capabilities is still speculative. Despite North Korea's claims that it can launch a nuclear-capable ICBM that reaches the continental US, American audiences are still skeptical of the perceived effectiveness of North Korea's nuclear capabilities.³⁸⁴ This may be partly due to the fact that North Korea is an autocracy, and signals less clearly and credibly than democracies do.³⁸⁵ Furthermore, North Korea has warned that any US attack or invasion of North Korea would be a mistake: "Those war maniacs should clearly understand that they can never invade the DPRK."³⁸⁶ Though it is unclear whether North Korea really has the military capabilities to carry out a nuclear strike, it certainly has the political will to try, stating "The U.S. can never break the will of the Korean people."³⁸⁷ North Korea conveys the message that its nuclear weapons program is intended to be used against the US, creating perceptions that justify its nuclear weapons program. As evidenced through public statements and signaling behavior, North Korea seeks to formulate perceptions that it has adequate military capabilities and political will to successfully deter the US.

One element of this strategy is North Korea's development of the US "enemy image." In North Korea's perspective, the US is the source of aggression and instability within the international system. Therefore, North Korea's "enemy image" perceives the US to be a "war-monger," interventionist state who abuses its power and position within the international community. North Korea argues, "Situations which seriously affect world peace and security are caused by the U.S. who is abusing its privileged position as a 'permanent member state of the UNSC' as a political means for implementing its strategy of world dominance."³⁸⁸ Joint military operations between the US and South Korea, as well as the deployment of THAAD to the Korean Peninsula, serve as evidence of this strategy. Following joint military exercises between the US, Japan, and South Korea in response to "threats from the north," *KCNA* reported that such exercises "[create an] environment and conditions unfavorable for holding dialogue," implying that military exercises decrease the chances of negotiations.³⁸⁹ *Rodong Sinmun* also published

³⁸⁴ "North Korea says new missile puts all of US in striking range," *BBC News*.

³⁸⁵ Fearon, "Domestic Political Audiences and the Escalation of International Disputes," 577.

³⁸⁶ "U.S. Can Never Break Korean People's Will: Swiss Bodies," *Rodong Sinmun*.

³⁸⁷ *Ibid*.

³⁸⁸ "DPRK's Stand on Reform of UNSC Clarified," *Rodong Sinmun*, November 14, 2017.

³⁸⁹ "'Denuclearization of North' Can Not Be Condition for Dialogue: Federation of Koreans in U.S.," *KCNA*, November 16, 2017.

articles asserting that the US is deploying THAAD to South Korea for self-serving reasons, most specifically “to contain big powers bordering the Korean peninsula and gain its unchallenged position in Asia-Pacific.”³⁹⁰ Following President Trump’s address to the UN general assembly, North Korea appealed to the UN Secretary-General in a letter that was later published on *KCNA*. The letter read:

The U.S. flung the words of "total destruction" of a sovereign state at the UN General Assembly, the world largest official forum of diplomacy, and is now running amok for war exercises by introducing nuclear war equipment in and around the Korean peninsula. This goes to prove that the U.S. itself is a chief offender of the escalation of tension and undermining of peace.³⁹¹

These comments suggest that North Korea perceives itself to be a legitimate, internationally-recognized state who engages responsibly with the international community, unlike the US. By appealing to the UN, it appears that North Korea is attempting to project its “enemy image” of the US to an international scale. The UN serves as a powerful source of legitimacy, designating the norms and standards which govern the international community. With this in mind, North Korea formulates perceptions that it behaves in compliance with the UN, while the US clearly does not. In appeals to the UNSC and to the UN Secretary-General, North Korea has been highly critical of the role of the US:

The fundamental principles of international relations on equality of sovereignty and mutual respect stipulated in the UN Charter are being wantonly violated and sovereign states are being openly subjected to interference, military invasion and massacre in the international arena.³⁹²

Despite this fact, the UN Security Council, whose mission is to ensure the world peace and security, keeps turning a blind eye to the nuclear war exercises of the U.S. which is hell-bent on bringing a catastrophic disaster to humanity, thereby giving rise to a serious concern on the double standard of the UNSC.³⁹³

By accusing the US of behavior contrary to the principles and standards condoned by the UN, North Korea seeks to rally international support against the US. As long as the US serves as

³⁹⁰ “Rodong Sinmun Dismisses U.S.-S. Korea Military Nexus Aggressive,” *KCNA*, November 16, 2017.

³⁹¹ “Letter to UN Secretary-General,” *KCNA*, November 16, 2017.

³⁹² “DPRK’s Stand on Reform of UNSC Clarified,” *Rodong Sinmun*.

³⁹³ “Letter to UN Secretary-General,” *KCNA*.

a permanent member of the UNSC, North Korea will continue to perceive the UN as inherently biased in favor of the US. Nevertheless, the Trump Administration must be careful not to engage in behavior that could validate North Korea's perceptions. Increased focus on military capabilities and inflammatory language from President Trump could serve to reinforce North Korea's perception that the US is the aggressor. President Trump's announcement that he intends to withdraw from the Iran Nuclear Deal may also strengthen perceptions that the US cannot be trusted to follow through on commitments.³⁹⁴ Therefore, the Trump Administration must be aware of its "enemy image" and be careful not to engage in actions that support North Korea's rhetoric.

Finally, besides the US, North Korea is also highly critical of US allies, including South Korea and Australia. By calling South Korean leaders "traitors" and "puppets," North Korea condemns South Korea's perceived subservience to the power of the US. North Korean media sources are also careful to point out cases of South Korean resistance to US policies. For example, *Rodong Sinmun* reported an expedition of South Korean citizens to stage an anti-Trump, anti-US demonstration in the United Kingdom (UK) on November 9, 2017. According to this article, the expedition was made to condemn President Trump's visit to South Korea and his "war moves," and "many citizens expressed support for the demonstration."³⁹⁵ By pointing out cases of South Korean resistance against the US, North Korea seeks to widen the rift between the US and South Korea by appealing to anti-US factions. Formulating anti-American perceptions within South Korea could even bring the two countries closer together. North Korean media also attempts to humiliate those who criticize the regime and blindly support Western "war-mongering." Following the Australian Prime Minister Malcolm Turnbull's comments on North Korea as a "criminal organization," North Korea's Vice Foreign Minister Choe Hui-chol fired back, stating:

It is not surprising that the prime minister is being ridiculed in the neighboring countries as "a paper cat hiding behind a paper tiger labelled Trump", "Trump's mouthpiece" and "a second class Western citizen" who would be shy to be the second in groveling to Trump... The Australian prime minister had better mind the business within his own country rather than being a marionette of the U.S.³⁹⁶

³⁹⁴ Bennett, "How Talks with North Korea Convinced Trump to Scrap the Iran Deal."

³⁹⁵ "S. Korean Expedition Stages Anti-Trump, Anti-U.S. Demo in UK," *Rodong Sinmun*, November 14, 2017.

³⁹⁶ "DPRK Vice FM Blasts Australian PM's Insult to DPRK," *KCNA*, November 16, 2017.

Through these scathing comments, North Korea's media outlets highlight pieces of news that encourage desired perceptions, while criticizing those who disagree. By targeting the US, humiliating its allies, and appealing to the UN for support, North Korea seeks to actively formulate perceptions that protect its interests. These perceptions clearly indicate how North Korea perceives itself and the messages it wants to convey to the international community, particularly regarding its nuclear weapons program and the "enemy image" of the US. However, North Korea's language towards South Korea and the US has softened since North Korea participated in the 2018 Olympics, convened its historic summit with South Korea, and offered to meet with President Trump. Although North Korea's public criticism of the US has subsided for the time being, this does not immediately change North Korea's perceptions of the US. Both parties must continue to make a conscious effort to understand the others' perceptions without being too distracted by pre-existing impressions. Even though there is a chance that the US and North Korea's "enemy images" are incorrect and diplomacy may be successful, the Trump Administration must be able to anticipate uncertainty and understand the key messages North Korea is trying to send.

9.7. Chapter Conclusion

The Trump Administration has distinguished itself from previous administrations in a number of ways. This could be in President Trump's favor, given that leaders assess the credibility of an adversary based on the balance of capabilities and the interests at stake at a particular time.³⁹⁷ Since President Trump is entirely new to government, the credibility of his threats, promises, and actions is not contingent on his predecessors. The Trump Administration has the power to build or break US credibility. In doing so, effective deterrence will depend upon the relative power and interests of the US and North Korea. More specifically, psychologists would argue that credible deterrence actually relies on perceptions of power and interests. The Trump Administration has used public communications, policy and strategy documents, and "costly signals" to formulate honest perceptions of its military capabilities and political will. Despite efforts to create strong perceptions of the US-South Korea alliance structure, President Trump may have undermined these perceptions by suspending joint military exercises with South Korea. As evidenced by the Iraq War, the US must be careful not to rely too heavily on

³⁹⁷ Press, *Calculating Credibility*, 8-9.

“enemy images” when interpreting messages, as this could lead to misperceptions and poor decision-making. Since there is already a substantial “enemy image” of North Korea, the Trump Administration must be careful not to fall victim to the same trap.

On the other hand, state leaders will work hard to preserve their own credibility.³⁹⁸ In this way, state leaders may choose to prioritize consistent behavior, even if other states will not assess threat credibility according to that metric. President Trump’s desire to demonstrate his credibility by following through on commitments also blinds him to potential sources of uncertainty. In contrast, President Trump’s “unpredictable” approach to foreign policy may increase his ability to detect uncertainty, but also undermine “predictable” aspects of foreign policy that rely on credibility, such as deterrence. Moreover, President Trump’s inner circle may limit perceptions of uncertainty by reinforcing existing “enemy images” and contributing to “groupthink.” Therefore, if the Trump Administration is unable to detect uncertainty, then it will be unable to understand enemy perceptions and accurately interpret messages. This is especially important when considering North Korea’s perceptions of itself relative to others in the international community. North Korea uses similar, but more extreme methods to shape US perceptions of its military capabilities and political will. However, North Korea perceives the US to be the primary aggressor of the international community. Despite the “enemy images” on both sides, an understanding of North Korea’s perceptions will allow the US to formulate perceptions and create messages that ensure deterrence is effective.

³⁹⁸ Ibid, 10.

Chapter 10: Legitimacy

Finally, it is important to consider the role of legitimacy in deterrence strategies. Unlike legitimacy, military capabilities, political will, and perceptions have a clear and direct influence on the outcomes of deterrence. Without military capabilities, deterrence would not be possible. If not for political will, then states would have no incentive to follow through on promises and threats. Finally, target states must be able to perceive the threat for deterrence to be possible. So what does legitimacy contribute to deterrence that these other conditions do not?

By definition, legitimacy means, “conformity to the law or to rules” or “ability to be defended with logic or justification.”³⁹⁹ Conforming to rules or logic can increase legitimacy while also influencing perceptions of credibility. At a foundational level, societies require order to function. To participate in society, individuals must subscribe to specified rules and norms of behavior. When such rules are violated, individuals can face punishment by formal means, such as jail time, or informal means, such as persecution by others. Individuals follow the rules to be considered legitimate members of that society. If an individual can be trusted to consistently follow the rules and respect norms of behavior, then that individual is perceived to be more believable and trustworthy, thus increasing their credibility. But when an individual wants to engage in behavior that pushes the boundaries of those rules and norms, it needs to be able to explain why. Such exceptions are only supported when it makes logical sense. Otherwise, the action will not be considered legitimate and will decrease their perceived credibility. At its core, legitimacy is a tool for validation, proving to domestic and international audiences that a certain action is either legal, justifiable, or both. A state leader may have the legal authority to engage in deterrence and risk going to war, but will still seek to convince domestic and international audiences of the legitimacy of its decision. Furthermore, states who crave the legitimizing support of international institutions will attempt to maintain compliance with norms and standards while justifying their actions to the international community. This conception of legitimacy determines whether deterrence and the accompanying risk of military conflict is in compliance with rules, norms, and standards, or is otherwise justified in that situation.

³⁹⁹ *Oxford Dictionary*, “legitimacy,” accessed May 10, 2018, <https://en.oxforddictionaries.com/definition/legitimacy>.

In political philosophy, legitimacy concerns the relationship between the state's government and the general public. For a government, political regime, or system of governance to be considered legitimate, it must be approved and accepted by the general public.⁴⁰⁰ Maintaining legitimacy requires the general public to keep faith in governments, social order, rulers and leaders, or in rule of law.⁴⁰¹ If the general public loses this faith, then they could overthrow the government, no longer accepting it as legitimate. Therefore, governments must actively engage with the citizenry to ensure this faith remains strong. To maintain popular support, "every regime seeks to justify its reign" to its citizenry and to the international community.⁴⁰² This includes explaining and justifying government decisions, especially those that have clear implications for the general public. Governments cannot be expected to explain the entire decision-making process for every policy it makes. This is especially true in cases regarding national security, where publicly disclosing such information could give the adversary an advantage. Nevertheless, in cases where the general public will surely be affected, state leaders need to be able to justify their actions. If the general public agrees with their leaders and supports the intended action, then the government and their actions will be perceived to be legitimate. For example, President Bush was able to rally public opinion by perpetuating the "enemy image" of Saddam Hussein and claiming Iraq presented an imminent threat to US national security through their possession of WMD. Polls suggest that from August 2002 to early March 2003, surveyed Americans who supported military intervention hovered between 52% and 59%.⁴⁰³ By the time Operation Iraqi Freedom was actually launched on March 19, 2003, support for military intervention had surged to 72%.⁴⁰⁴ Within the first few days of fighting, public approval continue to rise another 13%.⁴⁰⁵ This shows that in the lead up to the Iraq War, the Bush Administration was able to convince the public that Iraq posed a valid threat to US national security and military intervention was necessary to combat this threat. Though the

⁴⁰⁰Joachim Blatter, *Encyclopedia Britannica*, "Legitimacy," accessed April 13, 2018, <https://www.britannica.com/topic/legitimacy>.

⁴⁰¹*Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, "Political Legitimacy," last modified April 24, 2017, accessed April 13, 2018, <https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/legitimacy/#DesNorConLeg>.

⁴⁰² Blatter, "Legitimacy."

⁴⁰³ Caroline Smith and James M. Lindsay, "Rally 'Round the Flag: Opinion in the United States before and after the Iraq War," *Brookings Institute*, June 1, 2003, <https://www.brookings.edu/articles/rally-round-the-flag-opinion-in-the-united-states-before-and-after-the-iraq-war/>.

⁴⁰⁴ Ibid.

⁴⁰⁵ Ibid.

invasion of Iraq is still considered legally ambiguous, by rallying public opinion in favor of military intervention, President Bush was able to ensure the legitimacy of his actions.

Beyond the domestic arena, international law and its related institutions play a central role in legitimizing state behaviors. Within law and criminology, there are two basic forms of deterrence: general and specific. General deterrence relies upon institutions, such as laws and court systems, to create guidelines and “distinguish between acceptable and unacceptable behavior.”⁴⁰⁶ These institutions are meant to create a “general social climate” which governs behavior according to certain norms and standards out of fear for potential punishment. Specific deterrence is directed at specific crimes or social problems which are deemed especially harmful to the community. Such measures are meant to “deter deviant or unlawful behavior” while creating punishments that are tailored to the specific offense. In some cases, incapacitation is considered a form of specific deterrence by removing offenders from society and taking away their means to commit future offenses.⁴⁰⁷ Thus, the general focus of deterrence within law and criminology is meant to ensure members of society continue to obey the law out of fear of future punishment.

State behaviors are governed by international institutions, such as the UN. The UN has the power to administer treaties, pass resolutions, and levy sanctions. Through such actions, the United Nations practices both general and specific deterrence by setting international norms and standards and targeting sources of instability. For example, by opening the NPT for signature in 1968, the UN practiced general deterrence by setting a precedent against nuclear weapons development and proliferation. Under this treaty, nuclear weapon states must pursue non-proliferation policies and safeguard information regarding the manufacture of nuclear weapons. In turn, non-nuclear weapon states must never receive nuclear weapons or pursue nuclear arms development.⁴⁰⁸ Furthermore, when North Korea began developing nuclear weapons, the UN attempted to punish this “unacceptable behavior” through sanctions. The UN serves as a legitimizing force within the global community, determining which actions and behaviors are considered legitimate and which are not.

⁴⁰⁶ Australian Institute of Criminology, “Understanding Deterrence,” AICrime Reduction Matters, no. 7 (2004): 1.

⁴⁰⁷ “Incapacitation [Sentencing] Law and Legal Definition,” USLegal.com, last modified 2016, accessed March 23, 2018, <https://definitions.uslegal.com/i/incapacitation-sentencing/>.

⁴⁰⁸ “Nuclear Nonproliferation Treaty.” Bureau of International Security and Nonproliferation, U.S. Department of State, accessed May 21, 2018, <https://www.state.gov/t/isn/npt/>.

On the contrary, due to their respect for state sovereignty, the UN is not a “world government.” Namely, it does not have the power to enforce international law. International law is “the body of legal rules, norms, and standards that apply between sovereign states and other entities that are legally recognized as international actors.”⁴⁰⁹ The UN Charter, as well as the treaties and resolutions administered by the UN, all contribute to what the UN recognizes as international law. The UN can use sanctions and rally international opinion to pressure UN members and treaty signatories to comply with international law, but cannot actively intervene and force states to do so. Even though states have the right to withdraw or refuse to sign international treaties, various sources of international pressure will attempt to influence those states to comply. Moreover, what is recognized as international law will vary between states. Beyond what the UN recognizes as international law, UN-member states will also be held liable to the conditions of additional treaties and agreements to which the state is a party to. For example, within the US, all treaties must both be signed by the President and the Senate to be recognized as international law.⁴¹⁰ According to this body of work, the US observes international law based on its obligations to the UN, regional treaties and agreements, and bilateral commitments. By this logic, mutual defense treaties, like the one that exists between the US and South Korea, are also recognized as international law. With respect to international law, legitimacy is important to credibility because it determines who is legally allowed to take certain actions, especially regarding national security. Article 2(4) of the United Nations Charter states:

All Members shall refrain in their international relations from the threat or use of force against the territorial integrity or political independence of any state, or in any other manner inconsistent with the Purposes of the United Nations.⁴¹¹

Technically, the threat or use of force is illegal, making deterrence and war both illegal practices under international law. With respect for state sovereignty, the UN does not have the enforcement mechanisms necessary to prevent states from threatening or attacking one another. Moreover, besides the power to levy sanctions, the UN cannot directly punish states for

⁴⁰⁹ Malcolm Shaw, *Encyclopedia Britannica*, “International law,” accessed May 23, 2018, <https://www.britannica.com/topic/international-law>.

⁴¹⁰ Frederic L. Kirgis, “International Agreements and U.S. Law,” *American Society of International Law Insights* 2, no. 5 (May 27, 1997). <https://www.asil.org/insights/volume/2/issue/5/international-agreements-and-us-law>.

⁴¹¹ United Nations, General Assembly, *Charter of the United Nations*, (June 26, 1945), <http://www.un.org/en/sections/un-charter/introductory-note/index.html>.

noncompliance. Though outright military conflict is readily observed, the exchange of threats is far subtler, and the UN is not privy to that kind of information. In any case, deterrence is far more preferable to war. Since all members of the UNSC are nuclear weapons states, it is unlikely the UN will question the necessity of deterrence policy. Furthermore, Article 51 of the UN Charter states:

Nothing in the present Charter shall impair the inherent right of individual or collective self-defence if an armed attack occurs against a Member of the United Nations, until the Security Council has taken measures necessary to maintain international peace and security.⁴¹²

This means that all UN member states reserve the right to self-defense. An initiating state can deter a target state by implicitly threatening punishment and still be in compliance with the UN Charter. If deterrence fails and the target state chooses to attack, then the initiating state can still deliver the threatened punishment as a means of self-defense. Since the target state is the first to take action, then the target state is in violation of the UN charter, and retaliation from the initiating state would be considered legitimate. Thus, deterrence allows states to exert influence without losing credibility or engaging in illegitimate actions.

Furthermore, extended deterrence practices receive legal support from mutual defense treaties, thus increasing the scope of legitimate behavior. If a state is legally bound to provide mutual defense, it can easily justify taking measures on behalf of another state to improve extended deterrence or even preemptively neutralize a threat. In cases of extended deterrence, a target state may be considering an attack on a third party. Due to alliances, a powerful initiating state may use extended deterrence to protect that third party. Based on available information, the target state forms a perception of how likely the initiating state will intervene on behalf of the third party.⁴¹³ If the target state perceives the alliance is strong, and the combined power of the initiating state and the third party appears to be overwhelming, then the initiating state will be unlikely to launch an attack on the third party. However, if the alliance appears to be weak, then the target state will not be deterred, taking its chances and launching an attack anyways. A treaty makes mutual defense commitments legally binding under international law, thus reinforcing legitimacy. If two allied states regularly make public statements which reiterate the strength of

⁴¹² Ibid.

⁴¹³ Bueno de Mesquita, "Perceptions, Deterrence, and Terrorism," 329.

their alliance and confirm their commitment to mutual defense, it formulates the perception that if one state is attacked, then the other will certainly come to their aid. “Costly signals,” such as joint military drills, can also contribute to this perception. While this strengthens extended deterrence, it also legitimizes military intervention on behalf of another state and risks increasing the chances of conflict. In this way, allied states can demonstrate the legitimacy of deterrence and threat credibility by reassuring less-powerful allies of their commitment to mutual defense.

Even though legitimacy is the least robust of the four criteria for deterrence, both perceived and realized legitimacy influences credibility. Governments rally public support to ensure the legitimacy of the government and its actions. International institutions also determine what is acceptable and unacceptable behavior. International law governs the behavior of states, requiring compliance with the standards dictated by UN resolutions and treaties, regional agreements, and bilateral treaties. In keeping with the UN charter, deterrence is technically a legitimate strategy. Nevertheless, states can also justify extended deterrence as an exercise of the obligations observed in mutual defense treaties. Perceptions of strong alliances supported by a legally-binding treaty also improves credibility without sacrificing legitimacy. Thus, legitimacy and credibility are overlapping concepts which both contribute for stronger deterrence strategies.

10.1. The Case for Nuclear Modernization

As head of state, the President bears the most responsibility in defending the administration’s decisions to the general public. One of these decisions is the distribution of funding across government departments and agencies, as designated within the federal budget. Although the Trump Administration’s proposed Federal Budget for 2019 includes dramatic increases to defense spending, it also requires significant cutbacks for other important areas of government, including the Department of State, US Agency for International Development (USAID) and the Environmental Protection Agency.⁴¹⁴ Since government departments, federally-funded agencies, and members of the general public will surely be affected by this distribution of resources, President Trump must be able to justify his decision to increase defense spending.

Through this allocation of funding, the Trump Administration continues to prioritize “hard power” capabilities over “soft power.” The Trump Administration claims that the

⁴¹⁴ United States, and Donald Trump. *An American Budget: Budget of the U.S. Government*.

appropriation of funds to the DoD is required to modernize US military capabilities, especially nuclear forces. The NPR echoes this urgency: “In this environment, it is not possible to delay modernization of our nuclear forces if we are to preserve a credible nuclear deterrent.”⁴¹⁵ By this logic, credible deterrence requires modernization, which in turn requires adequate funding. Nevertheless, the Trump Administration must then explain why modernized military capabilities and effective deterrence take precedence over other areas of government.

Given the fact that deterrence, in and of itself, does not require any immediate action, the practice of deterrence is technically legitimate. However, should deterrence fail, and a nuclear attack is launched against the US, the President has the sole authority to launch a retaliatory strike. As Commander-and-Chief of the armed forces, the President is ultimately responsible for deterrence to be effective. As of recently, there is a relevant need for deterrence, as well as other national security endeavors, to be successful. President Trump has justified increased defense expenditures based on the military threats imposed by great powers, such as China and Russia, “rogue regimes,” such as Iran and North Korea, and transnational terrorist organizations, such as al-Qaeda and ISIS.⁴¹⁶ As the most salient threat to national security at this time, the nuclear threat presented by North Korea has become the primary focus of deterrence efforts. North Korea’s growing nuclear weapons and extensive missile capabilities has justified the need for modernized missile defense systems. Moreover, North Korea has explicitly expressed a desire to harm the US. By designating rising powers as “challengers” to US power in various policy documents and public engagements, the Trump Administration has used the “enemy image” to turn domestic public opinion against them. Since North Korea’s aggression towards the US has been a highly publicized affair, the Trump Administration has been required to do rather little to convince the public of the danger North Korea poses to the US. The potential for panic and terror was on full display when an alert warning of an inbound ballistic missile to Hawaii turned out to be a false alarm.⁴¹⁷ By taking advantage of the “enemy image,” heightened tensions between the US and North Korea, and the public fear of a nuclear attack, President Trump is able to justify the heightened expenditures necessary to modernize nuclear capabilities.

⁴¹⁵ U.S. Department of Defense, *Nuclear Posture Review Report*, I.

⁴¹⁶ United States, and Donald Trump, *National Security Strategy of the United States of America*, 25.

⁴¹⁷ Zachary Cohen, “Missile threat alert for Hawaii a false alarm; officials blame employee who pushed ‘wrong button,’” *CNN Politics*, January 14, 2018, <https://edition.cnn.com/2018/01/13/politics/hawaii-missile-threat-false-alarm/index.html>.

Deterrence has been considered a necessary feature of US national security since the Cold War. Since the North Korea nuclear crisis, deterrence and missile defense have become top priorities within national security strategy. North Korea's nuclear weapons program and public threats against the US have made nuclear deterrence more relevant to national security than ever before. Simply put, to meet this challenge, adequate capabilities are required. Therefore, modernization of nuclear deterrence and missile defense capabilities is necessary to ensure national security while developing future responses. Though the US aspires to someday make global nuclear disarmament a reality, this goal will not be realized for quite some time. Secretary of Defense Jim Mattis explains, "nuclear weapons have and will continue to play a critical role in deterring attack and in preventing large-scale conventional warfare between nuclear-armed states for the foreseeable future."⁴¹⁸ Thus, as long as nuclear weapons exist, the US will be required maintain effective deterrence through nuclear capabilities.

10.2. The Legitimizing Power of the UN and US Extended Deterrence

As the de facto hegemonic power, the US commands significant influence within the UN. The US is not only the home of the UN headquarters, but it is also the largest financial contributor, making up 22% of the entire UN budget in 2018.⁴¹⁹ Since the US facilitated the establishment of the UN, the UN's agenda has largely been in line with Western, liberal values, including human rights, democracy promotion, international cooperation, and respect for rule of law. Since its inception, the US has been one of the strongest supporters of the non-proliferation regime. Although the NPT lacks a formal enforcement mechanism, and relies upon its signatories to hold themselves accountable, the US has utilized its role as the perceived hegemonic power to negotiate multilateral agreements and hedge against the proliferation efforts of non-nuclear weapon states, including India, Pakistan, and Israel.⁴²⁰ As a permanent member of the UNSC, the US plays a large role in determining which behaviors are legitimate. Though the US has generally supported UN initiatives and makes significant effort to be perceived as a legitimate member of the international community, the US has also been accused of using its

⁴¹⁸ U.S. Department of Defense, *Nuclear Posture Review Report*, III.

⁴¹⁹ United Nations, Secretariat, *Assessment of Member States' advances to the Working Capital Fund for the biennium 2018-2019 and contributions to the United Nations regular budget for 2018*, ST/ADM/SER.B/973 (December 29, 2017), <http://undocs.org/en/ST/ADM/SER.B/973>.

⁴²⁰ "The Nuclear Nonproliferation Treaty (NPT) at a Glance," Arms Control Association, last modified August 17, 2012, accessed May 21, 2018, <https://www.armscontrol.org/factsheets/nptfact>.

influence to unfairly influence UN proceedings. North Korea has regularly taken such a stance against the US and the UNSC, criticizing the perceived biases against North Korea and in favor of the US. Therefore, US-led multilateral efforts to stop North Korea's nuclear program are perceived to be a product of US influence within the UNSC.

Nevertheless, North Korea, who views itself to be a responsible member of the international community, also values the legitimizing power of the UN. The Kim regime values international recognition and aspires to be recognized as a nuclear weapon state. Though North Korea wants to be treated as a legitimate state, its nuclear proliferation, human rights abuses, and reported humanitarian crisis, directly undermine these efforts.⁴²¹ Due to international sanctions, North Korea has become increasingly isolated within the international community. Though North Korea frequently appeals to the UN against perceived US aggression on the basis of state sovereignty, the UN does not appear to have taken these concerns seriously. Due to the prominent position of the US within the UNSC and North Korea's general noncompliance with UN standards, North Korea is not currently recognized as a legitimate state. However, North Korea's recent talks with South Korea and China, and the tentative summit between North Korea and the US, indicates that there is a chance of progress. Should North Korea choose to denuclearize, sanctions could eventually be lifted, and North Korea could someday rejoin the international community.

Since the US and North Korea both value the opinion of the international community, neither state is immediately willing to launch a preemptive strike and effectively start a war. Both parties have claimed to have justifiable reasons for launching an attack. The US reserves the right to nuclear first-use and North Korea views UN sanctions as "an act of war."⁴²² Besides the fact that a nuclear attack would have serious consequences for both the US and North Korea, the state who initiates conflict effectively violates the UN charter and definitively breaks international law. This jeopardizes perceived legitimacy within the international system and leads to widespread condemnation of that state's actions. Despite escalating threats, neither state wants to lose legitimacy by actually initiating a nuclear attack.

⁴²¹ Rebecca Ratcliffe, "North Korea tops list of world's most neglected humanitarian crises," *The Guardian*, January 23, 2018, <https://www.theguardian.com/global-development/2018/jan/23/north-korea-tops-list-most-neglected-humanitarian-crises>.

⁴²² Karimi and Griffiths, "North Korea calls latest UN sanctions 'an act of war.'"

However, it is possible that military force can be justified in defense of an ally. The US maintains mutual defense treaties with South Korea and Japan. Both states have been targeted by North Korea's aggression and rely upon the deterrent capabilities of the US. By law, the US is required to help these states "to defend themselves against external armed attack" and "strengthen their efforts for collective defense."⁴²³ By maintaining military bases and reaffirming commitment to mutual defense, the US seeks to reassure allies and create the perception of a strong alliance, thus increasing credibility and contributing to effective deterrence. Although military intervention is illegal according to the UN charter, it could be considered legitimate if taken in defense of an allied state. Given its extended deterrence commitments, the US may be able to justify a preemptive strike against North Korea if Japan or North Korea is about to be attacked. On the other hand, such a justification could also be viewed as a convenient excuse to attack North Korea first. Therefore, even in cases where the use of military force could be justifiable, it is difficult to differentiate between "self-defense," "mutual defense," and blatant use of force.

10.3. Chapter Conclusion

Within the international community, legitimacy can be viewed from a legal or a justifiable perspective. States who comply with international laws are treated as legitimate members of the international community. Since the US is perceived to be a legitimate state, its concerns are seen as more credible than those of North Korea. Thus, when the US proposed resolutions against North Korea's nuclear program, the United Nations was generally supportive. Due to nuclear proliferation and humanitarian issues, North Korea is not treated as a legitimate state and is generally ostracized from the international community. As a result, its complaints are largely unheeded. Nevertheless, both states value legitimacy within the international system, preventing either party from hastily launching a nuclear attack. Though deterrence is somewhat legal, and is generally preferable to war, the US and North Korea may use deterrence as a means of justifying a defensive nuclear attack. Extended deterrence commitments also legally oblige the US to support allies, such as South Korea and Japan. Though military intervention is perceived as an infringement on state sovereignty, US military action could be justifiable on the basis of

⁴²³ U.S. Department of State, "Mutual Defense Treaty Between the United States and the Republic of Korea

mutual defense. Regardless of what the Trump Administration or the Kim regime decide to do, their actions will inevitably be judged by the international community. Unless the US or North Korea can justify their behavior and defend the legitimacy of their actions, it is unlikely that either state will take any dramatic actions that defy the status quo.



Chapter 11: Conclusion

When President Trump announced his intention to meet with Kim Jong-un in a summit to discuss denuclearization, it gave hope to a world on edge. Building on the success of North Korea and South Korea's historic meeting, it seemed that for the first time, a peaceful, diplomatic resolution to the nuclear crisis was a tangible possibility. But the road to the Trump-Kim summit was a rocky one, with North Korea threatening to cancel the summit over joint military drills between the US and South Korea, and President Trump cancelling the summit in an official letter to Kim Jong-un, citing "tremendous anger and open hostility" regarding US demands for denuclearization." To add insult to injury, a few hours before President Trump cancelled the summit, North Korea blew up tunnels at the Pyunggye-ri nuclear test site, as "proof of its commitment to end nuclear testing."⁴²⁴ Within a day of its cancellation, the summit was quickly salvaged by US and North Korean diplomatic efforts.

On September 12, 2018, the Trump-Kim summit was finally held to much pomp and circumstance. But after the handshakes and photo opportunities, the joint statement signed by President Trump and Kim Jong-un left international audiences underwhelmed. The four-point joint statement pledged to establish new US-DPRK relations, "build a lasting and stable peace regime on the Korean Peninsula," reaffirm the DPRK's commitment to denuclearization, and recover the remains of American soldiers killed during the Korean War.⁴²⁵ Kim Jong-un's moment in the international spotlight only cost him his pledge "to work toward complete denuclearization of the Korean Peninsula," essentially restating his previous commitments from the Panmunjom Declaration. In exchange, President Trump not only gave Kim Jong-un the recognition he desired, but also decided to suspend joint military exercises between the US and South Korea.⁴²⁶ The joint statement has also been highly criticized for lacking details regarding the timeline and terms of North Korea's "denuclearization" efforts. Nevertheless, others argue

⁴²⁴ David Brunnstrom, Matt Spetalnick, Christine Kim, "Trump cancels summit with North Korea's Kim, warns that military ready," *Reuters*, May 24, 2018, <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-northkorea-missiles/north-korea-blows-up-nuclear-test-site-amid-doubts-over-summit-idUSKCN1IPIRY>.

⁴²⁵ Donald Trump, "Joint Statement of President Donald J. Trump of the United States of America and Chairman Kim Jong Un of the Democratic People's Republic of Korea at the Singapore Summit," *The White House*, June 12, 2018. <https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefings-statements/joint-statement-president-donald-j-trump-united-states-america-chairman-kim-jong-un-democratic-peoples-republic-korea-singapore-summit/>.

⁴²⁶ "Trump to Suspend Military Exercises on Korean Peninsula," *New York Times*, June 11, 2018. <https://www.nytimes.com/2018/06/11/world/asia/trump-kim-live-updates.html>.

that President Trump's attempt to cultivate positive relations with North Korea is historically groundbreaking, and at the very least, a step in the right direction for future US-North Korea relations.

The morning after the summit, President Trump made the following statement on Twitter: "There is no longer a Nuclear Threat from North Korea."⁴²⁷ In comments to the press, President Trump called the nuclear crisis "largely solved."⁴²⁸ Even though the President has the right to be optimistic, the North Korea nuclear crisis is far from over. The President cannot claim that he has achieved his goal of denuclearization when in reality, these efforts have hardly begun. Even though the destruction of the Pyonggye-ri test site was meant to be a positive and symbolic gesture, there is still no confirmation as to what the blast actually destroyed, and which nuclear capabilities North Korea continues to possess. Simply put, the US has no way of knowing whether North Korea is honoring its commitments, and has created few preconditions to ensure that it does so. At this point in time, the US must still assume that North Korea possesses nuclear capabilities and other WMD. Until full CVID can be accomplished, US deterrence will continue to be an applicable strategy towards North Korea.

As argued in this paper, effective deterrence requires consideration of the factors that make threats credible, including military capabilities, political will, perception, and legitimacy. The US clearly has sufficient military capabilities to credibly threaten North Korea. Existing capabilities seek to effectively execute deterrence by punishment and deterrence by denial. However, these capabilities are in desperate need of modernization, making it that much more difficult to achieve "overmatch" among competition from growing powers. With this in mind, the US should continue to prioritize modernization efforts and ensure military capabilities are effective in every scenario. At the same time, military and political leadership cannot focus solely on military strength and disregard the importance of "soft power" in deterrence strategies.

US leadership has strong political will to retaliate in the event of a nuclear strike. President Trump's narcissistic tendencies and charismatic leadership strengthens political will by rallying public support against North Korea. Moreover, President Trump's inner circle reinforces political will through their "hawkish" approaches to foreign policy. On the other hand, such

⁴²⁷ Mark Landler, "The Trump-Kim Summit Was Unprecedented, but the Statement Was Vague," *New York Times*, June 12, 2018, <https://www.nytimes.com/2018/06/12/world/asia/north-korea-summit.html>.

⁴²⁸ Donald Trump, "Remarks by President Trump in Press Gaggle," *The White House*, June 15, 2018, <https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefings-statements/remarks-president-trump-press-gaggle/>.

aggressive rhetoric can also backfire, agitating North Korea and risking the provocation of conflict, which is exactly what deterrence aims to prevent. In the letter to Kim Jong-un initially cancelling the summit, President Trump states, “You talk about your nuclear capabilities, but ours are so massive and powerful that I pray to God they will never have to be used.”⁴²⁹ Though this statement strongly expresses President Trump’s political will to retaliate against a nuclear attack, it also risks unnecessarily incensing North Korea to test this claim. It is possible to take a hardline stance and clearly state objectives without being intentionally provocative. Although Kim Jong-un and President Trump’s personality profiles indicate they may work well together, the Trump Administration needs to be conscious of how language can incite conflict rather than deter it.

The Trump Administration has used public communications, policy and strategy documents, and “costly signals,” to formulate what the US considers to be honest perceptions of its military capabilities and political will. Though the US has a strong, historically-based “enemy image” of North Korea, the US must be careful not to formulate perceptions based exclusively on existing biases. Furthermore, the Trump Administration must be careful not to “miss the forest for the trees.” In attempting to prove his credibility by delivering on various campaign promises, President Trump has been blind to the consequences of his actions. By uprooting “predictable” aspects of foreign policy in pursuit of an “unpredictable” strategy, President Trump risks destabilizing alliances and international structures that rely on credibility, such as extended deterrence. Thus, the Trump Administration needs to stay open to new perceptions of North Korea and avoid jumping to the worst-case scenario. Moreover, the Trump Administration needs to combat “groupthink” in the White House by being open to outside opinions from scholars, experts, and think tanks (regardless of party affiliation) who may have more knowledge and experience on specific issues. Thus, the Trump Administration must be aware of how words and actions influence North Korea’s perceptions, and how these perceptions subsequently influence effective deterrence.

Finally, the legitimizing power of the UN prevents both the US and North Korea from hastily launching a nuclear attack. Since the US is perceived to be a legitimate member of the international community, its concerns are seen as more credible than those of North Korea. Thus,

⁴²⁹ Donald Trump, “Letter to Chairman Kim Jong Un,” *The White House*, May 24, 2018. <https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefings-statements/letter-chairman-kim-jong-un/>.

when the US proposed resolutions against North Korea's nuclear program, the United Nations was generally supportive. Since North Korea is not considered to be a legitimate power due to blatant violations of international law, its complaints against the US are largely unheeded. Nevertheless, both states value legitimacy. Though deterrence is somewhat legal, and is generally preferable to war, the US and North Korea may use deterrence as a means of justifying a defensive nuclear attack. But since the US is also legally obliged to protect its allies, the US could attempt to justify a preemptive strike on the basis of mutual defense. In a general sense, the Trump Administration needs to consider how the international community will judge US actions and how this judgement will reflect on US credibility and legitimacy. Hence, the Trump Administration must balance its hardline approach with softer means of encouraging North Korea's compliance, so as to produce a better outcome for all parties involved.

The North Korea nuclear crisis is an ongoing, volatile, and uniquely complex issue, one that can be examined from numerous angles and encompass countless perspectives. As such, there are inevitably additional elements that are not discussed in this research. By defying conventional wisdom, this case cannot be easily examined through a single lens. Nonetheless, this case study serves to illustrate the complex and intertwined relationship between foreign policy and national security.

This criterion was created to provide a foundational understanding of what makes deterrence successful. Based on this criterion, it appears that US deterrence strategies will ultimately be effective against North Korea. However, there are factors at work that could weaken deterrence capabilities unless adequately addressed. Though overt weaknesses, such as aging capabilities, can be addressed in a tangible way, others are far subtler, requiring nuance, tact, and a sophisticated understanding of the multidimensional issue at hand. Whether President Trump is the man for the job has yet to be determined. In any case, both government and military leadership must work together and do their part to ensure deterrence is successful.

The Trump-Kim summit may be a victory for diplomacy, but despite what President Trump may believe, there will be no quick fixes to the North Korea nuclear problem. The systematic dismantling of a state's nuclear program does not happen overnight. The US and North Korea must both be willing to commit time and energy to bridging the gap between words and action. But until then, the best option is to pursue "peace through strength," and hope that as long as deterrence is necessary, it will continue to be successful.

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