

Making North Korea Policy and
the US-DPRK Quest for Normalization

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Introduction

The making of foreign policy in a democratic society like the United States is a highly complex and glacial process. The preamble to the constitution of the United States establishes the basic parameters of foreign policy as being, "... provide for the common defence, promote the general welfare, and security the Blessings of Liberty to ourselves and our Posterity." (NSC 68, April 12, 1950, p. 5.) The U.S. Constitution continues to assign the leading role for this responsibility to the president with the Senate advising and consenting when international treaties are involved. The priorities listed in the constitution's preamble furthermore make it obvious that domestic concerns take precedent over foreign issues. In short, the political leadership of the United States are legally and traditionally bound to giving priority to pursuing US national interests, that is the furthering of domestic priorities before all else.

The continuing general validity of this statement is testimony to the fact that U.S. foreign policy's underlying character is one of continuity much more than that of change. Here we must clarify a widely held misconception about "foreign policy." The term has come to be used indiscriminately, spreading the false impression as to how and who makes "foreign policy." The reality is that governments distinguish between policy per se and its implementation. In the public's mind, however, the two are usually fused. Here foreign policy is used when referring to the priorities and goals that a government strives to achieve with its foreign policy program. Separate but equally important is a governments foreign policy strategy or methods that a government uses to pursue its priorities and goals.

This is also to say that US foreign policy toward East Asia as a whole and the Korean Peninsula in particular is inseparable from promoting the peace, prosperity and stability of the United States.

Let us consider the following scenario to illustrate the above points. More than a half century ago, the United States set forth as its foreign policy toward the Republic of Korea in an NSC Report entitled, "The Position of the United States with Respect to Korea," dated March 16, 1949,"

2. a. Objectives of U.S. policy in Korea as defined by NSC 8:

(1) The broad objectives of U.S. policy with respect to Korea are:

(a) to establish a united, self-governing, and sovereign Korea as soon as possible, independent of foreign control and eligible for membership in the UN;

(b) to ensure that the government so established shall be fully representative of the freely expressed will of the Korean people;

(c) to assist the Korean people in establishing a sound economy and educational system as essential bases of an independent and democratic state.

A more immediate objective is the withdrawal of remaining U.S. occupation forces from Korea as early as practicable consistent with the foregoing objectives

(2) In NSC 8 it was concluded that 'it should be the effort of the U.S. Government through all proper means to effect a settlement of the Korean problem which would enable the U.S. to withdraw from Korea as soon as possible with the minimum of bad effects.'

After discussion of various factors affecting the then current situation and consideration of options for achieving the “policy,” this NSC report conclusions:

- a. The broad objectives of the U.S. with respect to Korea should continue to be those set forth in paragraph 2.a above.
- b. In pursuance of those objectives the U.S. should continue to give political support and economic, technical, military and other assistance to the Government of the Republic of Korea.
- c. Preparation should be made for the withdrawal of remaining U.S. occupation forces from Korea, such withdrawal to be completed on or about June 30, 1949, subject to consultation with the UN Commission on Korea and the Korean Government and assuming the completion by that date of the transfer of military equipment and supplies in accordance with paragraph 3-d below.

The above citation was selected to substantiate two points made above: first that continuity best characterizes US foreign policy, and secondly, that there is a clear and firm distinction between “foreign policy priorities and goals” and “implementation of foreign policy” to achieve those goals. As for continuity of policy, the commitment of the United States to the defense of the Republic of Korea remains a fundamental principle of US foreign policy today as was true more than a half century ago. Similarly, the United States remains committed to the promotion of a democratic and prosperous Republic of Korea now as it did long ago. Also, the United States continues to prefer dialogue and reconciliation as the primary avenue to Korea’s unification but is prepared to assist militarily as needed to sustain the Republic of Korea’s independence and the freedom of its people. Obviously some of these goals have yet to be achieved, but the policy commitment to achieving these goals is continuous.

As we know from history, the withdrawal of U.S. “occupation forces” from the Republic of Korea weakened Seoul’s ability to counter North Korean leader Kim Il Sung’s attack of June 25, 1950. We will subsequently review some of the reasons for this failure and the consequences these had regarding U.S. policy toward the Korean Peninsula and East Asia as a whole.

The final point of this introductory discussion is the fact that U.S. foreign policy toward the Korean Peninsula cannot be correctly and comprehensively understood when viewed in a strictly bilateral context. The Korean Peninsula is the geographic and strategic center of East Asia. Imperial Japan’s recognition of this fact led it to fight two wars, the Sino-Japanese War of 1894-95 and the Russo-Japanese War of 1904-05, to ensure that no foreign power except itself occupied the peninsula. After Japan’s defeat in 1945, the Korean Peninsula became the venue for what could have been the first nuclear world war, the Korean War of 1950-53. That war and its related consequences have yet to be resolved. If anything, the situation on the Korean Peninsula has become increasingly uncertain and potentially dangerous because of the continuing rivalry between the two Koreas and North Korea’s pursuit of a nuclear arsenal. Given the Korean Peninsula’s strategic significance and geographical location, a second Korean War would disrupt not

just North and South Korea, the world's four superpowers (United States, Russia, China and Japan) but also the global economy while greatly increasing the risk of a global nuclear holocaust.

Thus the preservation of peace and stability on the Korean Peninsula as well as the region's prosperity remains a fundamental goal of US foreign policy toward East Asia. Despite more than twenty years of intense effort by all the concern nations, ranging from the bilateral US-North Korea nuclear negotiations of 1993-94 and the Six Party Talks of 2002-2008, progress toward durable solutions to the Korea Peninsula's problems remains elusive.

While U.S. foreign policy goals toward the Korean Peninsula have been relatively consistent, Washington's efforts to achieve these goals has vacillated with each change of presidential administration since 1988 when the United States first initiated its effort, in conjunction with the Republic of Korea, to pursue the normalization of relations with Pyongyang. Thus far the only success has been the avoidance of war. Here we will examine the domestic dynamics of US foreign policy implementation in the hope of determining what domestic factors account for this persistent vacillation.

Foreign Policy Making Process

The aging political science axiom that "national interests define foreign policy" remains valid," but what and who determine how policy is implemented?

Leading the foreign policy making process are members of his Cabinet and their staffs. Increasingly in recent years this has come to include the president's personal political advisers, the professional staff of the National Security Council (NSC), and the secretaries and ranking officials of the Departments of State, Defense, Commerce and Homeland Security.

A wide circle of others beyond the president's administration contribute significantly to policy formulation and implementation. By far the most influential are the members of Congress, their staffs and ranking political officials of the Democratic and Republican Parties. Special interest groups of private citizens such as businessmen, veterans groups, Korean-American Christian organizations, among others, lobby both the White House and Congress for inclusion of their agenda in foreign policy decisions. Equally influential are the "public diplomacy" programs of the United States allies and friends. Regarding the Republic of Korea, these encompass the Asia Foundation, Council on Foreign Relations, Korea Economic Institute of America, the Korea Society and the Korea Foundation to name but a few. So-called "think tanks," centered largely in Washington, D.C. and including the Brookings Institute, Center for Strategic and International Studies (CSIS), Heritage Foundation, International Institute of Economics (IIE), National Research Bureau (NBR), US Institute of Peace (USIP). Less directly but nevertheless significantly influencing the foreign policy process are Korea focused research centers at major academic institutions. Financial support for these centers comes almost exclusively from the Republic of Korea government and private Korean commercial firms. Weaving these diverse groups into the foreign policy making process is the mass media. Leading examples of this are the *New York Times*, CNN News, Voice of America and

complimentary publications about the Republic of Korea distributed as part of the Republic of Korea's official public diplomacy programs.

This separation between goals and implementation is clearly manifested in the foreign policy making process. Determining goals is foremost a political process that usually begins during a presidential campaign and take form in the presidential candidates' speeches and political party platforms. If elected to the presidency, the particular candidate's foreign policy priorities come under even closer scrutiny. The foreign relations committees of the Senate and House usually will initiate the process with public hearings. Their involvement is justified because of the Senate's role in confirming the president's ambassadorial appointments and the House will determine whether funding of related programs is justifiable. Congress' preference for open deliberations encourages "lobbying" by groups of private citizens with so-called "special interests" in setting the foreign policy agenda of a new administration.

Meanwhile, White House and National Security Council staff will seek advice and additional information from the Departments of State, Defense and possibly other agencies. At the same time congressional staff and others will share with the mass media the president's foreign policy preferences. Various agencies of government bring to the attention of the National Security Council (NSC) foreign policy issues meriting the president's attention. This internal foreign policy review process produces a series of "principles meetings," gatherings of the Secretaries or their designated representatives of the most concerned government agencies. These meetings yield a set of recommendations presented to the NSC.

Here we need to clarify some broadly held misconceptions about the roles of the NSC and State Department in foreign policy formulation. Neither determines foreign policy. The NSC is the president's secretariat responsible for compiling memoranda that summarize the recommendations of cabinet members. Once the President has reviewed these "action memoranda" and designated a preferred course of action, the NSC assigns responsibility for implementing the president's decision to the department best equipped for the task. For the most part, either the State or Defense Departments will be "tasked" to carry out the president's decision.

Over the past four decades since 1970, the US Senate has used its constitutional authority to "advise and consent" regarding treaties and, even more importantly, senior presidential appointments to play a central role in determining foreign policy priorities and tactics. The US Congress similarly has used its power of the budget to achieve similar results. Members of the Senate Foreign Affairs and Defense Affairs committees and the House Committees on International and Defense Affairs play especially potent roles in the foreign policy formulation and implementation processes.

Continuity and Change in Foreign Policy

One might assume that such a complex process involving so many players would yield frequent and substantial changes in U.S. foreign policy. A brief review of US foreign policy toward East Asia since the Korea War suggests otherwise. A detailed review in this short paper

is out of the question. However, key shifts in policy can be identified and assessed regarding the degree of change they represent.

In the case of East Asia, there have been at least four major shifts in US policy toward East Asia beginning with the Korean War (1950-53) followed by the Nixon Doctrine of 1970-72, the first Bush Administration's engagement of North Korea which began in 1988, and the Obama Administration's "pivot toward East Asia."

The Korean War- Genesis of Current US Policy Toward East Asia

Until Kim Il Sung's attack into the Republic of Korea on June 25, 1950, the Truman Administration was largely preoccupied with Soviet expansion into Eastern and Southern Europe. The Truman Doctrine initiated a two pronged strategy to blunt this expansion: collective security and containment. The first gave rise to the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) and the later, a concept first developed by George Kennan while ambassador to Moscow, called for "containing communism" using a medley of methods that ranged from diplomatic non-recognition and economic sanctions aimed at foes and economic and military aid for preferred allies and friends, i.e. Greece and Turkey. Collective security and containment proved quite effective in blunting Soviet leader Joseph Stalin's imperial ambitions.

Preoccupied by the Soviet Union and Europe, the Truman Administration invested relatively marginal attention and resources in East Asia. This changed abruptly in the spring of 1950 when the Truman Administration and the State Department came under intense criticism for having "lost China to communism." Republicans, centered in Congress' "China Bloc" and assertively supported by Christian missionary organizations and conservative elements of the mass media, attacked President Truman and the State Department's so-called "China Hands." While Truman was accused of being indifferent toward the Republic of China's leader Chiang Kai-shek, powerful members of Congress alleged that US diplomats responsible for policy toward China had aided in the raise of Mao Xe-deng and the People's Republic of China which he established on October 1, 1949.

The Truman Administration scrambled to respond. An intense internal review of foreign policy culminated in the April 12, 1950 "A Report to the National Security Council, NSC 68." The foreign policy priorities and strategies outlined in this document became the basis for US foreign policy toward the Soviet Union and its allies, which then included the People's Republic of China (PRC) and the Democratic People's Republic of Korea (DPRK).

Essentially it was recommended to President Truman that he extend the concepts of collective security and containment to East Asia. While priority would still be given to Europe, the US would expand its economic and military assistance programs beyond the Republics of China and Korea to Japan and the Philippines. (NSC 68, p. 29). The US would also establish and maintain military bases in the Western Pacific to that,

If war should begin in 1950, the United States and its allies will have the military capability of conducting defensive operations to provide a reasonable measure of

projection to the Western Hemisphere, bases in the Western Pacific and essential military lines of communication; ...

Despite the caution about the possibility that war might begin in 1950, NSC 68 realistically projected that it would take two to three years to build military forces in East Asia sufficient to “deter war,” or stabilize the situation. (NSC 68, p. 32). Given the urgency of the situation and the persistent assertiveness of the Soviet Union, NSC 68 determined, “...we have no alternative but to increase our atomic capability as rapidly as other considerations make appropriate.” (p. 38). This would eventually mean the forward deployment of nuclear weapons on Okinawa.

NSC 68 redefines Japan as an ally, “In the process of building up (military) strength, it may be desirable for the free nations ... to conclude separate arrangements with Japan, Western Germany and Austria which would enlist the energies and resources for these countries in support of the free world.” (NSC 68, p. 47). Again NSC 68 warns, “If war breaks out in 1950 or in the next few years, the United States and its allies, apart from a powerful atomic blow, will be compelled to conduct delaying actions, while building up their strength for a general offensive.” (NSC 68, p. 48). Later the study adds (NSC 68, p. 49),

Its (Soviet) atomic capabilities together with its successes in the Far East (i.e. People’s Republic of China), have led to an increasing confidence on its part and to an increasing nervousness in Western Europe and the rest of the free world. ... There are, however, ominous signs of further deterioration in the Far East.

In the event that the Soviet Union were to initiate war East Asia, “The ability of the United States to launch effective offensive operations is now limited to attack with atomic weapons.” (NSC 68, p. 53) A surprise attack by the United States is ruled out because the American people would consider the “shock of responsibility for a surprise attack would be morally corrosive” (NSC 68, 53).

NSC 68 concludes with a lengthy list of recommendations and cautions to the president. Not surprisingly these include mention of the need to reduce Federal expenditures for “purposes other than defense and foreign assistance ...” and “Increased taxes.” In other words, the bottom line was that whatever course of action the president decided upon, he had to choose between security the “common defense,” as called for in the constitution, or press Congress to alter its spending priorities and increase taxes. (NSC 68, p. 57). At the time, according to NSC 68 (p. 58), the United States was already “devoting about 22% of the gross national product (4255 billion in 1949) to military expenditures (6%), foreign assistance (2%) ... In the event of an emergency, the US could devote upward of 50% of its GNP ...” (NSC 68, p. 58).

For NSC 68, the bottom line was, “The risk of war with the U.S.S.R. is sufficient to warrant, in common prudence, timely and adequate preparation by the United States.” Just two months later, Kim Il Sung, with Joseph Stalin’s encouragement and support, attacked the Republic of Korea. Republicans in the US Congress berated the Truman Administration for its lack of ability to counter the attack. These critics pointed to the withdrawal of US combat troops from the Republic of Korea by May 10, 1949, one year before Kim Il Sung’s attack.

Naturally the Truman Administration became the focus of intense partisan criticism just as had been the case for the “lose of China” a few months earlier. But the storm exceeded all expectation in terms of intensity and duration. President Truman was able to escape Washington, DC at the end of his term in 1952 when his Republican successor, the enormously popular World War II hero General Dwight D. Eisenhower, was swept into the presidency by a landslide vote.

Much less fortunate, however, were America’s professional diplomats, the Foreign Service officers who had served in China during and immediately after World War II. Senator Robert A. Taft (Republican of Ohio) alleged, “The pro-Communist group in the State Department ... promoted at every opportunity the Communist cause in China.” (“China Hands, www.usdiplomacy.org.) Many career diplomats and others became the victims of a political “witch hunt” launched by Senator Joseph McCarthy (Republican – Wisconsin) who alleged falsely that the State Department had become a safe haven for “communists” and their “sympathizers.” (Ideological Foundations of the Cold War, www.trumanlibrary.org, “Leadership and Conflict,” www.usdiplomacy.org. “China Hands,”

Also caught up in the political witch hunt were those who had advised Democratic Presidents Roosevelt and Truman at the end of World War II. When President Eisenhower nominated career diplomat Chip Bohlen to replace George Kennan, another career diplomat, as US ambassador to the Soviet Union, the Republican White House was stunned by the intensity of Republican criticism of Bolen. The Republican members of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee berated Bolen, claiming his misguided advice to Roosevelt had contributed to the betraying of Republic of China leader Chiang Kai-shek at the 1945 Yalta Conference. Bolton was eventually confirmed as ambassador but the attacks on him severely eroded his effectiveness as ambassador. (H.W. Brands Jr., “The Ghost of Yalta.” *Foreign Service Journal* (April 1986) 17-21)).

Ignored at the time were some key facts. In the case of Korea, the withdrawal of the US Occupation Forces was directed by the UN General Assembly Resolution dated December 12, 1947. It read in part, “... that the occupying Powers (US and USSR) withdraw their occupation forces from Korea as early as practicable.” (*A Report to the President by the National Security Council on the Position of the U.S. with Respect to Korea*. March 22, 1949. p. 7). The US NSC directed that the withdrawal take place only after the US military commanders had deemed the action would not have adverse consequences. It was the Republican’s second most favored general, Douglas MacArthur, who, as Commander-in-Chief, Far East,

...reported that the establishment of Korean security forces within the current program is substantially complete and that the state of training and combat readiness of these forces is such as to justify a complete withdrawal of U.S. occupation forces, and has expressed the opinion that troop withdrawal from Korea at this time (1949) would not adversely affect the U.S. position in Japan. (*Position of the U.S. with Respect to Korea*. March 22, 1949. P. 16)

Also ignored during the rush of events after the Korean War’s start were the politics that had hampered Truman Administration efforts to gain Congressional approval of economic and military assistance for the Republic of Korea. According to an Administration report entitled,

“United States Policy for Military Aid to Korea,” (page 13), private US veterans organizations such as the American Legion, American Veterans Committee, AMVETS, Catholic War Veterans and Jewish War Veterans as well as the labor unions AFL and CIO supported the Administration’s mutual defense assistance proposals for South Korea.

(This is a section of a longer report attributed to Senator Clinton P. Anderson, Chairman of the Democratic Senatorial Campaign Committee entitled, “The Truth About Korea. The undated report was compiled after June 25, 1950 and apparently was prepared to counter Republican criticism of the Truman Administration’s policy to Korea prior to the 1952 US presidential election.)

The Democratic position paper reported that on August 18, 1949, as the Truman Administration was preparing to withdraw its “occupation forces” from South Korea, in the 80th Congress House of Representatives 238 Congressmen voted for the administration’s military assistance request and 122 against. While 27 Democrats opposed the bill, 94 of 145 Republican Congressmen opposed assistance to South Korea. In the Senate, the bill passed by a vote of 55 to 24 with 35 Democrats and 20 Republicans voting for and 9 Democrats and 15 Republicans against.

Republican opposition to aid for South Korea intensified. Finally on January 19, 1950, the House of Representatives rejected the aid package for South Korea by a vote of 191 for and 192 against. Of the “nays,” 130 of the 192 were Republicans. The House Foreign Affairs Committee then attached the Korean aid package to an aid package for the Republic of China (Taiwan). Finally on February 9, 1950, the bill passed the House by a vote of 239 to 137 with 203 Democrats voting “yea” while 99 Republicans voted “nay.” (*Ibid.* page. 9-11).

Once the Korean War had begun only five months later, the political posturing in Congress abruptly ended. Instead, most Republican members of Congress reversed their positions and joined the chorus of criticism that faulted the Truman Administration for having been ill prepared to counter the Soviet supported North Korean attack. The Truman Administration defended itself by pointing out that South Korea was unable economically to rapidly build up its military forces without substantial aid from the United States and, at the same time any effort to further enlarge the Truman Administration’s economic and military aid programs to South Korea would prove futile because (*Ibid.* p. 12)

- a. US fiscal and military resources were already committed to containing Soviet expansion in Europe and the Middle East, plus
- b. any increase in the Truman Administration’s aid programs would have required increases in US income taxes, something the Republicans were expected to oppose.

US domestic politics, not American benevolence, compelled the Truman Administration to turn to the United Nations for assistance to save the Republic of Korea from North Korea. The United Nations Security Council (UNSC) quickly approved the establishment of the United Nations Command (UNC) to oversee the defense of South Korea. Fifty three of the UN’s 59 members pledged aid to the ROK. Australia, Canada, France, Great Britain, the Netherlands, New Zealand, Thailand and Turkey joined the United States in rushing soldiers, ships and aircraft to Seoul’s defense.

The United States was preoccupied with blunting Soviet expansion into Western and southern Europe until the start of the Korean War. The Truman Administration had initiated a new policy of expanding its policy of containment to East Asia beginning in 1949. Republican members of Congress, however, slowed and complicated the administration's efforts to assist the Republic of China (Taiwan) and Republic of Korea to assist in improving their defense capabilities and economic development programs. By late 1949, however, Mao Ze-deng was victorious in China's civil war and established the People's Republic of China on October 1, 1950. At the same time the DPRK's Kim Il Sung convinced both Mao and Stalin that his plan to reunify Korea using military force would succeed.

The Korean War had a profound and enduring impact on US foreign policy toward East Asia. As a matter of fact, many essential features of US East Asia policy initiated immediately after the Korean War remain in effect today, specifically the strategies of containment and deterrence. The strategy of containment, first formulated by George Kennan while ambassador to the Soviet Union, integrated economic sanctions with diplomatic efforts to isolate selected nations from normal international diplomacy and commercial activity for the purpose of "containing" designated nation's influence on US allies and friends. Containment was also designed to weaken a foe's economy and thus its military capability.

The diplomatic strategy of containment was teamed with the military strategies of collective security and deterrence. Collective security involved the formation of multilateral and bilateral defense treaties between the United States and key allies. The classic example of this is NATO. Integrated into the alliance system were programs of military and economic aid such as the Marshall Plan that contributed to Western Europe's post World War II reconstruction. Deterrence was a total effort designed to convince a foe that the combined strength of the United States and its allies could lead to all aggressor's inevitable defeat. It teamed up conventional military forces with nuclear weapons. As part of deterrence, the United States projected a "nuclear umbrella" over its allies which meant that the United States would promptly and decisively counter with nuclear weapons any foe's nuclear attack on a US ally.

All of these aspects of US Cold War foreign policy were extended to East Asia as a direct consequence of the Korean War. Many aspects of containment and collective security have faded over the years, except regarding the Korean Peninsula. Here the cornerstones of US foreign policy toward the Republic of Korea and Japan remain largely unchanged for more than half a century. Japan and the US-Japan mutual defense treaty remain the "cornerstones" of US East Asia policy. The two allies have adjusted their alliance to match changing domestic and international conditions. These include the return of Okinawa to Japanese control and the removal of all tactical nuclear weapons from the region. Yet US military bases in the Japanese home islands remain vital for maintaining the US forward deployment of its conventional, non-nuclear deterrence capabilities in the region. Japan is shouldering a larger portion of the costs vis a vis "burden sharing" agreements and the bilateral expanded defense agreements formulated in the 1990s commit Japan to playing a larger supporting role in the event of a second Korean War.

On the Korean peninsula, containment and deterrence toward North Korea remained unchanged until 1988, but policy toward China underwent changes of global significance beginning in 1969.

The Transition from Containment to Engagement

The intensity of the “lose of China” debates and of “McCarthyism” of the 1950s have haunted ever since US foreign policy toward East Asia. To avoid Republican allegations of being “soft on communism,” the Democratic administrations of Presidents John Kennedy and Lyndon Johnson left US policies toward Japan, the two Koreas, the People’s Republic of China (PRC) and Taiwan (ROC) largely unchanged while pursuing with increasing intensity and armed military force the containment of communism in Southeast Asia, i.e. the Vietnam War. At the same time, US professional diplomats avoided taking any initiatives so as to avoid allegations of harboring “pro-communist” sympathy. One consequence was the reluctance of professionals in the National Security Council and State Department to challenge the emergence of anti-communist military dictatorships in across the region. US military aid and cooperation with the professional military in South Korea, the Philippines, Taiwan, South Vietnam and Thailand inadvertently condoned or fostered the emergence of military dictatorships. This sanctioning of militarism coincided with the bipartisan supported US foreign policy that championed democracy over dictatorship as a counter to the authoritarian regimes in the Soviet Union and PRC. By 1970, the people of these nations became increasingly impatience with this fundamental contradiction in US East Asia foreign policy.

Before the East Asian people’s growing desire for democracy received due attention in Washington, the policy of containment first had to undergo radical revision. This process began in 1969 when the US and PRC took the first hesitant steps away from containment toward diplomatic and commercial engagement.

US President Richard Nixon and his National Security Adviser Henry Kissinger have received most of the credit for this shift in US policy away from “hard” toward “soft” power. Actually it was the PRC and its brilliant leader Zhou Enlai. In January 1969, the Polish government secretly conveyed to Kissinger an invitation to dispatch a representative to Beijing for the purpose of “exploring possibilities of rapprochement with the Chinese.” (President Nixon to National Security Adviser Henry Kissinger, unpublished White House memorandum dated February 4, 1969, www.trumanlibrary.org.) Nixon advised caution but sanctioned the US acceptance of the invitation. After a secret meeting with the Chinese counterparts in Warsaw, Poland, Kissinger reported to Nixon that the Chinese had confirmed the invitation for the US to send a representative of “ministerial rank or a special Presidential envoy to Peking ...” (Unpublished White House memorandum from Kissinger to the president, no date evident. www.trumanlibrary.org.) The process of shifting from containment to engagement had begun.

Three years later President Nixon visited Beijing and, in negotiations with PRC Prime Minister Zhou Enlai, the two governments agreed to pursue diplomatic negotiations. Subsequently President Nixon directed the Secretary of State to replace the US containment policy toward China with one designed to normalize bilateral US-China diplomatic and commercial relations. Secretary of State William Rogers summarized the proposed new US

policy toward China in an unpublished State Department memorandum dated February 9, 1972. As the US first priority for the policy, Rogers listed, “finding ways to reduce tensions in East Asia, particularly in the Korean peninsula, the Taiwan Strait and the South China Sea.” Rather than continuing to “contain” China, efforts to isolate the PRC from the international community would be replaced with a program aimed at “creating a basis for PRC cooperation on international issues ...”, the US economic embargo against the PRC would be phased out to allow direct trade, cultural, scientific and academic exchanges would be encouraged.

As for the PRC’s goals, Rogers listed:

- improve relations with the US as a psychological weapon against the USSR and Japan, while security US recognition of the PRC as the sole legitimate government of China,
- enhance PRC international prestige by normalizing relations with the US,
- put pressure on Taiwan’s (ROC) leadership to negotiate with the PRC,
- arouse Japanese suspicions about US intentions,
- move the US toward a settlement of the Korean situation with that contained terms “at least mildly favorable” to North Korea while also encouraging Pyongyang to lean toward Beijing rather than Moscow,
- further the goal of encouraging US military forces to withdraw from China’s periphery.

A White House memorandum of conversation written by Winston Lord, the future Assistant Secretary of State for East Asia and Pacific Affairs during the Bush ’41 and early Clinton Administrations, dated February 28, 1972, (www.trumanlibrary.org) recorded the final discussion between President Nixon and Prime Minister Zhou. Nixon told his Chinese counterpart,

When I return (to Washington) I will make a brief statement at the airport. The next day I will have to meet with Legislative leaders, up to ten people. Then I will meet with the Cabinet. The meetings with the Legislative leaders and the Cabinet will be private, but whenever I meet with groups that large, I assume they leak, so I will be very discreet with them. (*Ibid.* p. 3)

Here Nixon was both cautioning the Chinese leadership of the possibility that US Congressional leaders may promptly express displeasure with the new direction of US-PRC relations. At the same time, Nixon was recognizing the potent influence of Congressional leaders on US foreign policy. He later elaborated on this, (*Ibid.* p. 4)

...there are some political factions at home (in the US) which take the line of some of the nations abroad (i.e. Taiwan and South Korea) who will try to seize on any statement made by us or made here to demonstrate that the new relationship between China and the United States has broken (US promises to them).

Nixon’s concerns proved correct. The US-PRC rapprochement not only caught Taiwan (ROC), Japan, South Korea by surprise but angered and confused their leaders. Some members of Congress were quick to align themselves with the same concerns of these US allies. (*Ibid.* p. 6)

PM Zhou referred to the forthcoming “debates in Congress and news reports” and expressed confidence that they could be countered effectively. Zhou then encouraged Nixon to foster bilateral Congressional support for the new US-PRC relationship. Nixon referred to the Democratic (Senator Mansfield) and Republican (Senator Scott) leaders of the Senate and cautioned, “Remember what I said, that Mansfield of the other party (Nixon was a Republican) keeps secrets better than Scott of my own party.” In other words, Nixon appeared more concerned about rallying the support of his own party than of getting the Democrats to support him. Nixon’s political instincts proved correct. The rest is history, as is often stated.

Fortunately for all the concerned parties, and the world as a whole, Nixon’s successors Republican Ford and Democrat Carter, after Nixon’s humiliating resignation from the presidency, overcame intense domestic political opposition. Nevertheless, Congressional champions of containment would persist in their criticism of engagement by arguing for the maintaining of a rigid policy of containment focused on North Korea, a matter to be discussed below.

At the same time, the US adoption of an engagement policy toward China had profound enduring global consequences. As engagement replaced containment toward China and bilateral US-PRC diplomatic and commercial relations were normalized, Japan rushed to adjust its policy toward China so as not to be shut out of the “China market.” South Korea’s dictator Park Chong-hee reacted with anger and distrust. Claiming that the US could no longer be trusted to defend South Korea, Park promulgated the *Yushin* Constitution which declared him president for life. This sparked intensifying anti-government demonstrations that eventually led to his assassination by the director of the Korean Central Intelligence Agency. A second consequence in South Korea was Park’s attempt to covertly develop a nuclear arsenal that inevitably led to friction with the United States. Under sustained US pressure, Park gave up his nuclear ambitions in 1978. The Republic of China (ROC) likewise reacted with keen frustration and intense disbelief and anger. Its leadership also launched a covert nuclear weapons development program that US pressure eventually shut down. Reluctantly, Taiwan’s leaders realized that had no option but to accept the new US-PRC relationship. After intense effort and the implementation of innovative policies, Taiwan regained its composure and today is a respected and prosperous member of the international community that now is also pursuing a policy of engagement toward the PRC.

Probably the main reason for the success of the US shift to engaging China was the fact that the policy was initiated by a Republican president and his Republican political appointee Henry Kissinger. Because of McCarthyism’s legacy, neither a Democratic administration nor career diplomats would have dared proposed much less attempted to implement such a fundamental shift in US foreign policy. Such an effort would surely have failed because of likely intense, possibly even bipartisan Congressional opposition. Also helping the situation was the fact that Nixon’s role in the Watergate scandal distracted Congress and focused its attention on domestic rather than foreign policy concerns. Some in Congress also realized that the engagement of China had indirectly contributed to the US ability to achieve what Nixon declared to be “peace with honor,” that is the end of the US military commitment to the South Vietnam. Within a short period of time, it was China that found it necessary to intervene in Vietnam. As for the United States, because of improving relations with China and the end of the Vietnam

War, it was able to withdraw its forces from Southeast Asia and shift fiscal resources to addressing domestic priorities, something the American people had long urged their government and elected representatives to do.

Also, within a decade, another Republican president Ronald Reagan would similarly and gradually shift US policy toward the Soviet Union from one of containment to engagement. This shift coincided with the Soviet Union's internal political struggle over how to achieve political and economic reforms without undermining the existing authoritarian regime and communist ideology. President Reagan effectively used carefully measured and timed initiatives to engage the USSR beginning with food aid accompanied by negotiations aimed at reducing both sides nuclear arsenals. At the same time, the United States and its allies shifted from containment to engagement in their approach to the so-called "communist bloc," particularly the nations of Eastern Europe. This effort set the stage for the demise of the "Iron Curtain" and the "Berlin Wall." By 1989 the Soviet empire was bankrupt and crumbling. Engagement positioned the United States and its allies to oversee the peaceful dismantling of the "communist bloc" and the integration of its former members into the broader international community, a process very similar to was the United States had done with China in the 1970s.

The Korean Peninsula

The Seoul Olympiad and The Modest Initiative

Another twenty years were to pass before US foreign policy toward East Asia underwent a second round of substantive change. But first the policy of engagement of China encountered intense criticism in the wake of the Chinese government's brutal suppression of the student led pro-Democracy movement in June 1989 that became known as the "Tianan Men" Incident. The Chinese army's crushing of the demonstrators in full view of the international mass media shocked the world. It also ignited in the US Congress a firestorm of calls for punishing the Chinese government by shifting back to a policy of containment anchored in economic sanctions and diplomatic chastisement. But President George H.W. Bush (known as '41) stood firm. The engagement of China endured in part because it was the policy of engagement that had encouraged the Chinese government to pursue policies of gradual opening to the outside world and of economic reforms that adopted some elements of capitalism. Also once again Congress' attention was deflected toward another crisis – the Iraqi invasion of Kuwait. The policy of engagement persisted.

Prior to the Tianan Men Incident, the Reagan Administration teamed up with South Korean President Roh Dae-woo in 1987 to expanded engagement to US policy toward North Korea.

Clinton and the Agreed Framework

Despite persistent claims in some quarters, President Clinton did not initiate but actually continued his predecessors' extension of engagement to North Korea. On January 20, 1993, the day of Clinton's inauguration, the Department of State set an "all posts" cable to US diplomatic missions around the world confirming that US policy toward North Korea was gradually shifting

from containment to engagement but, nevertheless, only officials designated by the Secretary of State were authorized to engage North Korean diplomats in any form of dialogue.

North Korea then triggered on March 11, 1993 an international crisis when it declared its intention to withdraw from the Treaty on the Non-proliferation of Nuclear Weapons (NPT) at the end of the mandatory 90 day waiting period. Immediately a debate ensued in the capitals of the most concerned nations – Washington, Seoul and Tokyo – over how to deal with the situation. Officials in the three capitals quickly divided themselves into three policy camps: revert to containment of North Korea, engage North Korea in dialogue and negotiations aimed at inducing it to remain in the treaty, or attack its nuclear facilities. Option was dismissed largely because of concerns in Seoul and Tokyo that an armed attack on North Korea would spark a second Korean War. The debate intensified through March into April until South Korea's recently inaugurated President Kim Yong-sam indicated his preference for the United States to engage Pyongyang in negotiations. Tokyo quickly agreed.

The United Nations Security Council and General Assembly resolved the debate in early May by calling on UN members to pursue a diplomatic resolution of the crisis. Washington's champions of engagement sought to seize the opportunity but it was the North Koreans who first offered to engage the United States in negotiations over the nuclear issue. With bipartisan Congressional support (see H.J. RES. 825), plus encouragement from Seoul and Tokyo, not to mention the relief of most members of the United Nations including China and Russia, the first ever US-DPRK diplomatic negotiations began in New York City in early June 1993. It would take eighteen long, tense months to achieve what has come to be known as the "Agreed Framework," the first ever bilateral US-DPRK diplomatic agreement.

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Congressional Champions of Containment

Congress initially greeted the Agreed Framework with restrained optimism and cautious bipartisan support. It passed a Joint Resolution on November 15, 1993, only three weeks after the Agreed Framework had been signed in Geneva, Switzerland, entitled, "Nuclear Nonproliferation in Korea Resolution" (H.J. RES. 292). The resolution urged the president "to induce North Korea to comply fully with its obligations" under the NPT and "bilateral denuclearization agreement with the Republic of Korea ..." Additionally,

The Congress approves and encourages the use by the President of any means necessary and appropriate, including the use of diplomacy, economic sanctions, a blockade, and military force, to prevent:

1. the development or acquisition by North Korea of a nuclear explosive device, or
2. the use by North Korea of such a device against the United States forces in the region or against any ally of the United States.

(H.J. Resolution 292, Section 5.)

The resolution concluded with a directive calling upon the President to keep Congress fully informed or relevant developments.

H.J. Res. 292 only briefly provided the Clinton Administration with bipartisan support for the Agreed Framework. The outcome of the November 1994 Congressional election ended bipartisan Congressional support. When the 104th Congress convened under the Republican leadership of Speaker Newt Gingrich, Congressional foes of engagement began a determined drive to reverse US policy toward North Korea back to containment and confrontation. They did so by passing a series of joint resolutions in the fall of 1995 aimed at restricting funding of the Agreed Framework and setting requirements for the Clinton Administration to achieve with Pyongyang. These included: a joint resolution dated September 5, 1995 (H.J. RES. 83) was followed by a bill entitled “Authorization for Implementation of the Agreed Framework Between the United States and North Korea Act introduced into the Senate on September 25, 1995 (S. 1293), and another joint resolution dated November 10, 1995 (S.J. RES. 29). None opposed the continuation of diplomatic engagement with North Korea and the use of economic and other inducements to nudge Pyongyang toward fulfillment of its obligations under the NPT, the Agreed Framework and the South-North De-nuclearization Accord of December 1992. At the same time, however, each piece of legislation added more preconditions for the Clinton Administration and Pyongyang to fulfill in order to sustain bipartisan support for the Agreed Framework.

All the while, Congressional bipartisan support was slowly crumbling. The US military had always been ambivalent about the Agreed Framework. From the beginning, some, particularly in the United Nations Command (UNC) stationed in Seoul, alleged that the agreement aided the enemy, i.e. the North Korean army by providing fuel for its tanks. This was groundless because the heavy fuel oil that the agreement provided to North Korea was the residue that remained after crude oil had been completely refined. Heavy fuel oil was useful only as a fuel to burn in the boilers of ships and power plants. The allegations, however, were closely listened too and accepted at face value by some in Congress.

South Korean President Kim Yong-sam’s wavering support for the Agreed Framework did not help the situation. He was dismayed when in February 1994 the United States informed the ROK embassy in Seoul that henceforth the United States would discontinue its nearly 45 year policy of following Seoul’s lead regarding all policies matters related to North Korea. Instead, Washington declared that the nuclear issue was a global concern, not one that merely related to the two Koreas. Kim Yong-sam could do little but monitor the negotiations closely until the Agreed Framework was signed. All the while he grumbled to Congress and the American mass media that the Clinton Administration’s implementation of the Agreed Framework was undermining Seoul’s efforts to resume direct dialogue with Pyongyang. (C. Kenneth Quinones, “South Korea’s Approaches to North Korea: A Glacial Process,” in: Kyung-ae Park and Dalchoong Kim, editors, *Korean Security Dynamics in Transition*. New York: Palgrave, 2001. Pp. 19-48).

By the end of 1995 Kim Yong-sam had managed to grasp the initiative away from the United States regarding implementation of the Agreed Framework. Given Congress’ increasing reluctance to fund the accord’s implementation, the Clinton Administration was compelled to

turn to allies and friends for funding to purchase heavy fuel oil and to begin construction of two light water nuclear reactors as promised by the US to the DPRK under the Agreed Framework. Actual implementation of the agreement was put in the hands of a newly formed international organization, the Korean Peninsula Energy Development Organization or KEDO. US funds provided for KEDO's administrative costs while Japanese funding allowed heavy oil deliveries to North Korea to continue. South Korea insisted that in exchange for providing substantial funds for the nuclear reactor construction, the reactor should be of South Korean design and the main contractor should be the Korean Electric Power Company (KEPCO). After North Korea reluctantly agreed to this arrangement, the Seoul government intentionally slowed the pace of the Agreed Framework's implementation.

Meanwhile Pyongyang had certainly not helped the situation at all. If anything, some of its actions intensified bilateral distrust and played into the hands of the Agreed Framework's critics in Seoul and Washington. The trouble began very early when in December 1994, merely seven weeks after the Agreed Framework's signing, the North Korean People's Army shot down an unarmed US Army helicopter that had mistakenly flown into North Korea. The pilot died and after some intense negotiations, North Korea allowed his US Army passenger to return to South Korea.

Even worse was the September 1995 incident when a North Korean submarine was found beached on South Korea's northeast coast. It was then learned that some 30 heavily armed North Korean commandoes had infiltrated from the submarine into South Korea. Eventually all were killed or captured but the incident understandably inflamed mistrust of North Korea. The situation was defused only after North Korea, after intense negotiations and heavy US pressure, apologized to South Korea.

Clearly by the end of 1995, the Agreed Framework was encountering stiffening opposition in the US Congress. Subsequent suspicion that North Korea was constructing a secret underground nuclear facility, and was also acquiring equipment needed to enrich uranium further crumbled bipartisan support for the agreement. But South Koreans' election of Kim Dae-jung to the presidency at the end of 1998 breathed new life into the Agreed Framework. Kim Dae-jung was an avid advocate of engagement toward North Korea. He promptly moved to quicken the pace of KEDO's nuclear reactor construction effort in North Korea and ensured a reliable flow of funding to the organization.

But Kim Dae-jung's efforts came too late to salvage the Agreed Framework. In August 1998 North Korea had launched a long range Taepodong ballistic missile over Japan, outraging the Japanese people. Japanese opposition to further funding of the Agreed Framework intensified and caused the Japanese government to set back from engagement and to impose economic sanctions on North Korea.

Soon after, the US Congress passed the "North Korea Threat Reduction Act of 1999" (S. 1352) dated July 12, 1999. Republican Senator Helms, the politically powerful and outspoken opponent of engagement and the Agreed Framework, introduced the legislation. Funding of the Agreed Framework was disallowed "until the President determines and reports to " designated Congressional committees that North Korea is taking steps to implement the 1991 South-North

Joint De-nuclearization Declaration, is taking “demonstrable steps” to pursue dialogue with South Korea, complying with all provisions of the Agreed Framework, “has not diverted” US food aid away from those in most in need of it, and “is not seeking to develop or acquire the capability to enrich uranium, ...” Additionally, the president was required to certify that “the United States has made and is continuing to make significant progress on eliminating the North Korean ballistic missile threat, including its ballistic missile exports.” In short, this legislation put in place numerous obstacles to the Clinton Administration’s ability to effectively implement the Agreed Framework. The bill underwent several revisions but these only added to the hurdles that the Administration would have to overcome in its implementation of the accord.

Pyongyang could not help but take note of the flagging Congressional support for the Agreed Framework. Although KEDO, largely because of South Korean support, was able to continue its construction of the nuclear reactors in North Korea and delivery of heavy fuel oil until the fall of 2002, the Agreed Framework was already doomed.

With the end of the Agreed Framework at the end of 2002 marked the end of the US policy of engagement toward North Korea. The end of food aid was followed by the dismantlement of KEDO and then in May 2005, President George Bush (‘43) sanctioned the unilateral end of the last and most successful initiative under the Agreed Framework: the joint US Army-DPRK People’s Army operations to recover the remains of American soldiers who had died and been left behind in North Korea during the Korean War.

Bipartisan Congressional support for the US-DPRK nuclear negotiations set the stage for the Agreed Framework’s formulation. But from the start, North Korea’s continuing misconduct and South Korea’s vacillating support gradually eroded this bipartisan support. Congress’ critics of engagement were quick to construct legislative hurdles that made increasingly difficult to pursue effective implementation of engagement as provided for by the Agreed Framework. In the end, one would be hard pressed to assert that inherit weaknesses in the Agreed Framework and the policy of engagement account for the continuing inability of the United States and other concerned nations to end North Korea’s nuclear program. Nor can one argue convincingly that the engagement of North Korea as a policy has failed. On the contrary, the US and its allies engagement of China and Russia accomplished profound success in reducing global tensions, ending the Cold War and fostering unprecedented international cooperation. If anything, the shortcomings of the political leaders in Seoul, Washington, and Tokyo, and certainly Pyongyang’s leadership, merit close scrutiny if we are to understand how to more effectively pursue engagement in Northeast Asia to achieve a durable peace on the Korean Peninsula. Already we know that containment most likely would only lead to a second Korean War.

4. Congressional Management of US Policy toward North Korea

US Foreign Policy and Special Interest Groups

Korean-American Groups

- Christian organizations
- Korean-American residents organizations
- South Korean government public diplomacy
- US Korean Study centers

US Veterans groups

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