

US Domestic Politics' Impact on Policy Toward
the Korean Peninsula

by

C. Kenneth Quinones
Dean of Research
Akita International University - Japan

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Introduction

The United States (US) and the Democratic People's Republic of Korea (DPRK) have pursued normalization of their relationship for two decades, but with disappointing results. They remain adversaries, a reality that threatens peace and stability in northeast Asia. This is perplexing given the relative quickness of US-People's Republic of China (PRC) normalization in the 1970's. The US and USSR also normalized relations during the 1980's, a process that ended with the USSR's collapse. But the repeated efforts of Republic of Korea (ROK) and the US since 1988 have fallen short of erasing animosity and rivalry with the DPRK. Why?

Conventional wisdom blames the DPRK's failure to respect international norms of conduct and to fulfill its international commitments, which the DPRK's conduct substantiates. Nevertheless, the US and the international community chose to pursue normalization and reconciliation with the PRC and USSR despite similar misconduct such as the 1979 invasion of Afghanistan and 1989 *Tiananmen* Incident. The PRC, like the DPRK, is ruled by an authoritarian regime. Critics of normalization with the DPRK point to its development of nuclear weapons and ballistic missiles, but the PRC and Russia are expanding similar arsenals.

Here we look beyond conventional wisdom to focus on the impact of US domestic politics on US policy toward East Asia and the Korean Peninsula since the Korean War. Why so long ago? Continuity characterizes US foreign policy goals and strategy toward the DPRK until 1987, followed by vacillation in strategy that persists. The role of partisan politics is closely examined to explain these developments. Analysis will trace three key shifts in US East Asia policy: containment of the PRC and DPRK which began with the Korean War (1950-53), engagement of the PRC in the 1970's, and the ROK-US shift to engagement of the DPRK since 1987. The Bush Administration between 2001 and 2008 vacillated between containment and engagement of the DPRK, which can also be said of the Obama Administration between 2009 and 2012.

The DPRK since at least 1988 has consistently pursued a two track policy aimed at normalizing relations with its primary adversaries, the US and ROK, while enhancing its ability to deter foreign attack. A comparison of its efforts with its adversaries suggests that the DPRK has been more successful in pursuing its goals. Since 1990 it has normalized relations with an impressive number of former foe, repaired relations with the PRC and Russia, joined international organizations while simultaneously improving its military capabilities. Sadly, the people of the DPRK have paid an enormous price in human agony for their government's success.

Differences in domestic politics between the US and the DPRK largely account for differences in their policy formulation and implementation. The DPRK's single minded political ideology, *Juche*, intertwines national goals with loyalty to the authoritarian regime which disallows any criticism of the leadership's goals and policies.¹ This makes for unwavering consistency in the pursuit of foreign policy. The democratic nature of the US government makes foreign policy formulation and implementation a much more complex and glacial process. The brevity of this study limits our focus to the US. Hopefully the study might contribute to the refinement of US policy and promote progress toward a policy that will achieve a durable peace

on the Korean Peninsula. Until then, the possibility of a second Korean War will continue to haunt the region.

Making US East Asia Policy

The axiom that “national interests define foreign policy” remains valid,” but what and who determines policy priorities and how they are to be achieved? The US constitution’s preamble defines the nation’s basic foreign policy goals as, “... provide for the common defense, promote the general welfare, and security the Blessings of Liberty to ourselves and our Posterity.”² Clearly domestic concerns supersede foreign issues, which legally commits US political leaders to defining US national interests accordingly.

The term “foreign policy” has acquired various definitions which require clarification. All governments distinguish between policy *per se* and its implementation, but these are often fused in the public’s mind. Actually “foreign policy” refers to two separate processes: formulation and implementation. The first consists of defining goals and setting priorities, and the second strategies and methods. While continuity characterizes US foreign policy goals, strategies and methods are adapted to changing domestic political and international conditions.

The president has primary responsibility for foreign policy formulation, but since the end of World War II, the US Congress has played an increasingly influential role in foreign policy formulation. The Senate asserts its influence by using its constitutional authority to “advise and consent” regarding treaties, but more importantly when confirming or rejecting the president’s appointments to senior policy positions. The House of Representatives similarly uses its power of the budget to shape policy implementation. The Department of Defense’s role in foreign policy has also increased significantly while that of the Department of State has been diminished.

Genesis of Contemporary US East Asia Policy

US foreign policy toward East Asia, particularly the Korean Peninsula, since 1949 has and remains inseparable from the US domestic priorities of promoting the peace, prosperity and stability of the United States. Viewed from Washington, peace and prosperity in East Asia are intertwined with US peace and prosperity. These goals enjoy bipartisan support. Another core feature is the recognition that the Korean Peninsula is the strategic and geographic center of East Asia. Whatever happens there affects the entire region. Thus since the Korean War US political leaders have sustained a huge US financial and military commitment to maintain a leading US role in East Asia. This encompasses an extensive diplomatic and commercial network of relations intended to promote peace vital to sustain the region’s prosperity which benefits US prosperity through trade. The fact that East Asia is the world’s economically most dynamic region makes it even more important for the US to maintain its leading role in the region, a fact that the Obama Administration has recognized by giving the region preference over Europe and the Middle East. Also required is a network of mutual defense treaties with the Japan, ROK, Australia and other nations in the region designed to deter a second Korean War and discourage territorial disputes from erupting into armed clashes.

Obviously US foreign policy toward the Korean Peninsula can only be understood in a multilateral context, a reality that dates from the Korean War when the peninsula almost became the venue for the superpowers' first nuclear clash. Unfortunately the situation on the Korean Peninsula remains precarious, particularly because the two Koreas' persistent rivalry and the DPRK's pursuit of a nuclear arsenal. A second Korean War's consequences would adversely affect not just the Korean peninsula and neighboring countries, but would disrupt the global economy while also greatly increasing the risk of a global nuclear holocaust.

The essence of contemporary US East Asia and ROK policy traces back more than a half century to an NSC Report entitled, "The Position of the United States with Respect to Korea," dated March 16, 1949," which states:

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."³

The NSC report determined:

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. ... the U.S. should continue to give political support and economic, technical, military and other assistance to ... 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 substantiate the continuity of key US commitments to the ROK's defense, promotion of a democratic and prosperous ROK, and Korea's unification.

Until Kim Il Sung's June 1950 attack on the ROK, the Truman Administration was preoccupied with USSR expansion in Europe. The Truman Doctrine's two pronged strategy to blunt this expansion accented collective security and containment. The first gave rise to the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) and the later, a concept developed by US Ambassador to Moscow George Kennan, called for "containing communism" using diplomatic non-recognition and economic sanctions aimed at isolating foes, and economic and military aid to assist allies and friends. Consequently the Truman Administration invested marginal

resources to East Asia, but this changed abruptly in 1950 after the Truman Administration and the State Department came under intense criticism for having “lost China to communism.” Republicans in Congress’ “China Bloc,” supported by the so-called “China Lobby” of Christian missionary organizations and the conservative mass media, i.e. Henry Luce and his popular magazines *Life and Time*, attacked Truman and the State Department’s so-called “China Hands,” accusing them of indifference toward the Republic of China’s (ROC, Taiwan) leader Chiang Kai-shek. US diplomats responsible for policy toward China were alleged to have aided in the raise of Mao Zedong and the PRC which he established on October 1, 1949.⁴

The Truman Administration scrambled to respond. An internal review of foreign policy culminated in the April 12, 1950, “A Report to the National Security Council, NSC 68.” It outlined priorities and strategies that became the basis for US policy toward the USSR and its allies including the PRC and the DPRK. It recommended the extension of collective security and containment to East Asia. Europe remained top priority, but economic and military aid would be provided to the ROC and ROK, plus Japan and the Philippines. It stated,

*If war should begin in 1950, the US and its allies will have the military capability of conducting defensive operations to provide a reasonable measure of protection to the Western Hemisphere ...*⁵ (emphasis added)

NSC 68 projected that it would take two to three years to build military forces in East Asia sufficient to “deter war,” or to stabilize the situation.⁶ Given the situation’s urgency and the USSR’s persistent assertiveness, NSC 68 determined, “...we have no alternative but to increase our *atomic capability ...*,”⁷ (emphasis added) which eventually meant the forward deployment of nuclear weapons on Okinawa; a US occupied and ruled territory until 1972. Japan was redefined as an ally because, “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.”⁸ Again NSC 68 warns, “*If war breaks out in 1950* or in the next few years, the US 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.”⁹ If the USSR initiated war in East Asia, “The ability of the US to launch effective offensive operations is now limited to attack with *atomic weapons*.” A surprise attack by the US was ruled out because the American people would consider the “shock of responsibility for a surprise attack ... morally corrosive.”¹⁰

NSC 68 recommends that the president reduce Federal expenditures for “purposes other than defense and foreign assistance ...” and increase taxes, which would require Congressional action.¹¹ According to NSC 68, the US was “devoting about 22% of the GNP (\$425 billion in 1949) to military expenditures, foreign assistance (2%) ... In the event of an emergency, the US could devote upward of 50% of its GNP ...” The NSC advised, “The risk of war with the U.S.S.R. is sufficient to warrant, ... timely and adequate preparation by the United States.”¹² Two months later, Kim Il Sung, with Joseph Stalin’s encouragement, attacked the ROK.

Congress’ Republicans, already irate over the “lose of China,” berated the Truman Administration for its alleged failure to defend the ROK, pointing to the US troop withdrawal from the ROK in 1949. The political consequences affected US policy toward East Asia and its

makers for decades. The immediate impact was the Republican victory in the 1952 election which swept World War II General Dwight D. Eisenhower into the White House on a platform that called for quickly ending the Korean War despite ROK President Syngman Rhee's resolute opposition. A more enduring consequence was the conviction that the USSR was engaged in a global conspiracy to undermine the "free world" by establishing a universal communist dictatorship that embraced the PRC, DPRK and North Vietnamese governments. "McCarthyism" was the third major result.

The Eisenhower and subsequent Democratic Kennedy and Johnson Administrations were locked into a policy of strident containment against its foes in East Asia. A major reason for this rigidity and longevity was "McCarthyism" which singled out the State Department and its career diplomats, i.e. Foreign Service officers, who had served in China during and immediately after World War II. Senator Robert A. Taft (R. - Ohio) alleged, "The pro-Communist group in the State Department ... promoted at every opportunity the Communist cause in China."¹³ Senator Joseph McCarthy (R. - Wisconsin) intensified the "witch hunt" with groundless allegations that the State Department was staffed with "communists" and their "sympathizers."¹⁴ When Eisenhower nominated career diplomat Chip Bohlen to replace George Kennan as US ambassador to the USSR, he was stunned by the intensity of Senate Foreign Relations Committee's Republican members who accused Bohlen of misguiding former President Roosevelt at the 1945 Yalta Conference with the USSR and betraying ROC leader Chiang Kai-shek. Bohlen was eventually confirmed but the allegations severely handicapped his effectiveness as ambassador.¹⁵

McCarthyism demoralized the State Department. Its professional staff, wishing to avoid allegations of being "soft on communism," hesitated to recommend innovative policies, diminishing the department's role in foreign policy. Increasing numbers of ambassadorial appointments went to campaign supporters based more on political allegiance than foreign policy expertise. Appointments of NSC senior staff were similarly politicized, enabling the White House to micro-manage the State Department and foreign policy. A consequence was continuity of containment toward East Asia, at least until a Republican champion of anti-communism during the McCarthy era, Richard Nixon, became president in 1969.

Ignored at the time were the reasons for the withdrawal of US Occupation Forces from the ROK in May 1949. The UN General Assembly in a December 12, 1947 resolution, mandated, that "... the occupying Powers (US and USSR) withdraw their occupation forces from Korea as early as practicable."¹⁶ The NSC directed that the withdrawal take place only after US military commanders determined this would not have adverse consequences. Republican favored "Supreme Commander, Far East" General Douglas MacArthur,

...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.¹⁷

Also ignored were the domestic politics that hampered the Truman Administration's efforts to provide economic and military assistance for the ROK. According to an Administration report entitled, "United States Policy for Military Aid to Korea,"¹⁸ private US

veteran's organizations such as the American Legion, American Veterans Committee, AMVETS, Catholic War Veterans and Jewish War Veterans and the labor unions AFL and CIO supported the Administration's mutual defense assistance proposals for the ROK. This information is from a Democratic Party report which recorded that on August 18, 1949, as the Truman Administration was preparing to withdraw its "occupation forces," the 80th Congress House of Representatives voted 238 for and 122 against military assistance for the ROK. While 27 Democrats opposed the bill, 94 of 145 Republicans opposed it. In the Senate, a similar bill passed 55 to 24 with 35 Democrats and 20 Republicans voting for and 9 Democrats and 15 Republicans against. Republican opposition intensified when the bill's two versions were being merged. On January 19, 1950, the House rejected the ROK aid package 191 for and 192 against with 130 Republicans voting "nay." After the House Foreign Affairs Committee attached the Korean aid package to an aid package for the ROC, the bill passed on February 9, 1950, by a vote of 239 to 137 with 203 Democrats voting "yea" and 99 Republicans voting "nay."¹⁹ The delayed passage prevented the aid from benefitting the ROK before the Korean War's start, clearly more a consequence of Republican partisan politics than any shortcoming on the Truman Administration's part.

Political posturing abruptly ended once the war erupted. Instead Republicans clamored that the Truman Administration had failed the ROK. The Administration countered that the ROK had lacked the economic ability to rapidly build its military forces without US aid, explaining that US fiscal and military resources were already committed to containing USSR expansion in Europe, and that any increase in aid programs would have required increases in taxes, something the Republicans opposed.²⁰

Truman was determined to thwart Republican allegations that he had also lost Korea to communism. US domestic politics, not benevolence, compelled him to turn to the UN to defend the ROK. The UN Security Council (UNSC) quickly approved establishment of the United Nations Command (UNC) to oversee the ROK's defense. Fifty two of the UN's 59 members joined the US in rushing soldiers, war ships and aircraft to Seoul's defense. This eliminated the need for the Truman Administration to win Congressional approval of a declaration of war. Instead, the US commitment became an international "police action." Even today the UN flag flies over US military presence in the ROK. The Korean War had a profound and enduring impact on US foreign policy. It compelled the White House and Congress to pay greater attention to East Asia. But the Republican purge of foreign policy experts restrained many professional diplomats from breaking with conventional wisdom and pressing for refinement of policy. Consequently much of US policy toward East Asia remained unaltered despite changing international circumstances until 1969.

From Containment to Engagement

Democratic Presidents Kennedy and Johnson left US policies toward Japan, the two Koreas, the People's Republic of China (PRC) and ROC largely unchanged while pursuing with increasing vigor and military force the containment of communism in Southeast Asia, i.e. the Vietnam War. US military aid for the ROK, the Philippines, ROC, South Vietnam and Thailand inadvertently fostered military dictatorships which contradicted the US bipartisan supported policy of promoting democracy to counter the authoritarian regimes of the USSR and PRC. By

1970, the people of US' East Asia allies were increasingly displeased with this reality, but before the US could respond, containment had to be revised.

President Richard Nixon and his National Security Adviser Henry Kissinger have received credit for this shift, but PRC leader Zhou Enlai initiated it. In January 1969, the Polish government secretly conveyed to Kissinger a PRC invitation to dispatch a representative to Beijing for “exploring possibilities of rapprochement ...”²¹ Nixon advised caution but sanctioned the invitation, and the Chinese confirmed that the invitation was for a representative of “ministerial rank or a special Presidential envoy ...”²²

Three years later Nixon visited Beijing and in negotiations with PRC Prime Minister Zhou Enlai agreed to pursue diplomatic negotiations. Nixon directed the Secretary of State to replace containment with a policy designed to normalize bilateral US-PRC relations. In a February 9, 1972 memorandum, Secretary of State William Rogers summarized the new policy as, “finding ways to reduce tensions in East Asia, particularly in the Korean peninsula, the Taiwan Strait and the South China Sea.”²³ Effort to isolate the PRC would be replaced with “creating a basis for PRC cooperation on international issues ...” replacing the economic embargo with direct trade, and conducting cultural, scientific and academic exchanges. This defined the essence of the new strategy of engagement. As for the PRC's goals, Rogers listed:

- improve relations with the US as a psychological weapon against the USSR and Japan, while securing 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 that contained terms “at least mildly favorable” to the DPRK while encouraging Pyongyang to lean toward Beijing rather than Moscow, and
- encourage US military withdrawal from China's periphery.

A White House memorandum of conversation dated February 28, 1972, and written by Winston Lord, the future Assistant Secretary of State for East Asia and Pacific Affairs during the Bush '41 and early Clinton Administrations, recorded the final discussion between Nixon and 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.²⁴ (Emphasis added.)

Nixon was cautioning the Chinese leadership about possible Congressional opposition to the new direction in US-PRC relations, while also confirming the Congress' influence on US policy. He later elaborated;²⁵

...there are some political factions at home which take the line of some of the nations abroad (i.e. ROC and ROK) 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, and the ROK by surprise but angered and confused their leaders. Some members of Congress were quick to align themselves with US allies against their president.²⁶ Zhou, referring to the forthcoming "debates in Congress and news reports," expressed confidence that they could be countered effectively and 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 (i.e. Democratic) keeps secrets better than Scott of my own party." This suggests that Nixon was more concerned about rallying the support of his own party than of winning over the Democrats. His political instincts proved correct, but fortunately for all concerned parties, Nixon's successors Republican Ford and Democrat Carter, after Nixon's resignation from the presidency, overcame domestic political opposition. Nevertheless Congressional champions of containment persisted in their criticism of engagement by arguing to maintain containment focused on the DPRK, a matter discussed below.

US engagement of China had profound and enduring global consequences, with the immediate impact in East Asia. As US-PRC relations normalized, Japan rushed to engage the PRC to avoid being shut out of the "China market." ROK dictator Park Chung-hee reacted with anger and distrust. Doubting the US commitment to defend the ROK after the US withdrawal from South Vietnam and US-PRC normalization, Park promulgated the *Yushin* Constitution which declared him president for life. Anti-government demonstrations intensified which eventually lead to his assassination in 1979.²⁷ Also Park's attempt to covertly develop a nuclear arsenal intensified friction with the US, causing Park to discontinue his nuclear weapons program. The ROC leadership, stunned and frustrated, launched a covert nuclear weapons development program but US pressure shut it down. ROC leaders realized that they had no option but to accept the new reality. Intense effort and innovative policies enabled the ROK and ROC to regain their composure which has enabled them to become respected and prosperous member of the international community who now pursue engagement of the PRC.

Vital for the successful shift to engagement was that a Republican president and his Republican political appointee Henry Kissinger initiated the change. Being Republicans shielded them against McCarthyism's legacy of being labeled "soft on communism." Without bipartisan Congressional support the endeavor most likely would have failed. Also contributing to success was Congress' distraction by Nixon's role in the Watergate scandal which focused politics on domestic rather than foreign policy concerns. Some in Congress also realized that engagement of the PRC indirectly helped the US achieve what Nixon called "peace with honor," i.e. the US withdrawal from South Vietnam. The shift also benefitted successful implementation of the Nixon Doctrine which initiated the phased US military withdrawal from Southeast Asia. Possibly contributing to bipartisan Congressional support for these policy changes was the fact that they enabled the US to transfer fiscal resources to domestic priorities.

Within a decade of engagement's commencement, Republican President Ronald Reagan initiated phased engagement toward the USSR. This coincided with the USSR's struggle to

achieve political and economic reforms without undermining the political status quo and communism's credibility. Reagan began with food aid and negotiations aimed at reducing both sides' nuclear arsenals. As the US expanded engagement of the USSR and its allies, NATO followed the US lead. One can argue that this contributed significantly to the demise of the "Iron Curtain" and the "Berlin Wall." By 1989, the Soviet empire was bankrupt and crumbling. Engagement enabled the US and its allies to oversee the peaceful dismantlement of the "communist bloc" and its integration into the international community, a result similar to that of US-PRC engagement.

The Korean Peninsula and Engagement's First Round

Another twenty years passed before US policy toward East Asia underwent a second round of substantive change. But first engagement of China encountered intense criticism in the wake of the Chinese government's brutal suppression of the pro-democracy movement in June 1989, the "*Tiananmen*" 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 calls to punish China by reverting to containment using economic sanctions and diplomatic chastisement. But President George H.W. Bush stood firm and engagement endured, partly because of evidence that it was nurturing change in China, particularly capitalistic economic reforms. Also, again Congress' attention was distracted by Iraqi's invasion of Kuwait and the first Gulf War.

Prior to the *Tiananmen* Incident, the Reagan Administration teamed up with ROK President Roh Dae-woo in 1987 to expand engagement to the DPRK. Roh's initiative, referred to as *nord politik*, began in December 1987.²⁸ His predecessor Chun Doo-hwan had adopted a similar strategy of engaging all nations, regardless of their ideology, except the DPRK, to gain their participation in the 1988 Seoul Olympiad. This was a resounding success except that the DPRK's hostility seriously threatened the Olympiad's success. Hoping to defuse the DPRK's frustration after Seoul denied Pyongyang's request to co-host the Seoul Olympiad, Seoul worked with the Reagan Administration extend to the DPRK on July 7, 1988, the so-called "modest initiative." It is important to note that the US since the Korean War had always followed the ROK's lead regarding policy toward the DPRK. The "modest initiative" was a bilateral US-ROK, not a US unilateral initiative which made it more acceptable to the foes of engagement in Seoul and Washington.

So-called "carrots" would induce the DPRK to halt its terrorist attacks on the ROK, as had happened in the 1993 attempt to assassinate the ROK president in Rangoon and the 1987 bombing of a Korean civilian airliner. If Pyongyang renounced the use of terrorism and its conduct conformed to international norms, it would be allowed to purchase "basic human needs," i.e. US food grain, clothing, medicine, and educational materials plus engage exchange in educational, cultural and athletic delegations with the US. Also the US would open the "Beijing channel" to facilitate previously banned diplomatic communication between the US and DPRK. These were major steps away from containment, but the US' multi-layers of economic sanctions (so-called sticks) remained in place, and normal relations were out of the question, but compliance with US and ROK standards could open the way to normal relations. Pyongyang

also had to demonstrate humanitarian sensitivity by allowing the US to search for and to recover the remains of 8,200 US service members who had died in the DPRK during the Korean War.

The DPRK's initial response was encouraging. The Seoul Olympiad was held without incident. South-North dialogue achieved unprecedented progress. The first Bush Administration's announcement that it would withdraw all tactical nuclear weapons from abroad, an initiative aimed at the USSR, sparked the DPRK's positive reaction. Kim Il Sung engaged the ROK in talks that led to the South-North De-nuclearization Declaration of December 1991. The two Koreas then signed "basic agreements" that formed bilateral commissions to negotiate an end to the DPRK's nuclear program, a peace and non-aggression agreement and implementation of bilateral exchanges to promote reconciliation. The DPRK also signed early in 1992 an agreement with the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) to allow the UN organization to conduct inspections of the DPRK's nuclear facilities.²⁹ The Bush Administration responded by hosting in New York in January 1992 the first ever US-DPRK diplomatic dialogue. There were no negotiations at the unprecedented meeting, only an exchange of views about each side's requirements for progress toward normalization.³⁰

Despite persistent claims by some, Democratic President Clinton did not initiate but actually continued his Republican predecessor's engagement of the DPRK, which Seoul actively supported. On January 20, 1993, the day of Clinton's inauguration, the State Department sent an "all posts" cable to US diplomatic missions confirming that US policy toward the DPRK was gradually shifting from containment to engagement, but only officials designated by the Secretary of State were authorized to engage DPRK diplomats in any kind of dialogue.

Abruptly, hopes of continuing reconciliation were dashed in August 1992 when an IAEA inspection suggested that the DPRK had inaccurately reported how much plutonium it had produced. After intense diplomacy failed to gain DPRK cooperation, the IAEA informed the UNSC that the DPRK was in violation of its Treaty on the Non-proliferation of Nuclear Weapons (NPT) commitments. Pyongyang reacted by declaring its intention on March 11, 1993 to withdraw from the NPT, triggering an international crisis. Pyongyang's perceived misconduct undermined ROK and US trust, and halted all dialogue and implementation of their agreements. The US and most IAEA members, including Russia, saw the DPRK's intention to leave the NPT, the first ever by a treaty signer, as a threat to the global effort to halt the spread of nuclear weapons.

The Agreed Framework – Engagement's Second Round

A debate ensued in Washington, Seoul and Tokyo over how to deal with the DPRK. Officials had only 90 days before the withdrawal became effective. They quickly divided into three policy camps: revert to containment, engage the DPRK in negotiations to induce it to remain in the NPT, or attack its nuclear facilities. The latter option was quickly dismissed largely because of concerns in Seoul and Tokyo that an attack would spark a second Korean War. The debate intensified until newly inaugurated ROK President Kim Yong-sam indicated his preference for the US to negotiate with Pyongyang. Tokyo quickly concurred.

The UNSC and General Assembly resolved the debate in early May by calling on UN members to pursue a diplomatic resolution to the crisis. Washington's advocates of engagement seized the opportunity, but it was the DPRK which first offered to negotiate. With bipartisan Congressional support (see H.J. RES. 825)³¹, encouragement from Seoul and Tokyo, plus most UN members including China and Russia, the first ever US-DPRK diplomatic negotiations began in New York City in early June 1993. After eighteen tense months the "Agreed Framework," the first ever bilateral US-DPRK diplomatic agreement, was signed on October 21, 1994. Although a signed agreement, it was not a treaty. This displeased some Congressional critics of engagement because it denied them the ability to critic the accord.

The accord essentially outlined a process of engagement that required simultaneous steps each side would take toward diplomatic and commercial normalization. Also, in exchange for the DPRK's "freezing" of all nuclear activities, the "suspension" of withdrawal from the NPT and fulfilling commitments under the treaty, the US would organize an international consortium to build the DPRK two light water nuclear reactors (LWR) and supply heavy fuel oil (HFO) to power electricity generating boilers until the LWRs were operational. The Japanese government welcomed the accord but Seoul, the US Congress and the Defense Department were less enthusiastic.

Congress initially greeted the Agreed Framework with cautious bipartisan support by passing on November 15, 1993, three weeks after the Agreed Framework's signing, the, "Nuclear Nonproliferation in Korea Resolution" (H.J. RES. 292). It 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 ..." and;

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. development or acquisition by North Korea of a nuclear explosive device, or
2. the use by North Korea of such a device against the US forces in the region or against any ally of the US. (H.J. Resolution 292, Section 5.)

But the November 1994 Congressional election ended bipartisan Congressional support. When the 104th Congress convened under Republican Speaker Newt Gingrich early in 1995, Congressional foes of engagement launched a drive to return US policy to containment. They passed a series of joint resolutions and bills which included: a House Joint Resolution 83 (H.J. RES 83) dated September 5, 1995, the "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 Senate Joint Resolution 29 (S.J. RES. 29) dated November 10, 1995. None opposed continuation of engagement and the use of economic and other inducements to nudge Pyongyang toward fulfillment of its NPT obligations, the Agreed Framework and the South-North Korea De-nuclearization Accord. Each piece of legislation, however, added hurdles for the Clinton Administration to overcome with Pyongyang to sustain bipartisan support for the agreement's funding.

Thereafter bipartisan support slowly crumbled. The US military had always been ambivalent about the agreement. Ranking officers in the United Nations Command (UNC)

stationed in Seoul groundlessly claimed that the agreement aided the enemy by providing fuel for its tanks and ships. This was a reference to HFO which is the residue remaining after crude oil had been completely refined and which is suitable only to fuel boilers on ships and power plants. President Kim's wavering support for US negotiations with the DPRK had already obstructed progress toward an agreement to the point where the US in February 1994 ended its 45 year old policy of deferring to Seoul regarding policy toward the DPRK. Instead Washington designated the nuclear issue a global concern and seized the initiative in the negotiations. An angry Kim resorted to grumbling to Congress and the US mass media that the Clinton Administration was undermining Seoul's ability to resume direct dialogue with Pyongyang.³² Kim in 1995 succeeded in taking control of the agreement's implementation. Given mounting Congressional reluctance to fund the accord's implementation, the Clinton Administration asked allies to purchase the HFO and to fund construction of the LWRs. Actual implementation of the agreement was handled by the newly formed international organization, the Korean Peninsula Energy Development Organization or KEDO. US funds provided for its administrative costs while funding from allies, particularly Japan, paid for HFO deliveries. The ROK insisted that, in exchange for funding, the LWR reactors had to be of ROK design and the main contractor had to be the ROK's Korea Electric Power Company (KEPCO). The start of construction was delayed significantly until the DPRK accepted Seoul's demands, kindling doubts in Pyongyang about the credibility of US promises.

Meanwhile Pyongyang's misconduct played into the hands of the Agreed Framework's critics in Seoul and Washington. In December 1994, seven weeks after the accord's signing, the DPRK army shot down an unarmed US Army helicopter that had strayed into the DPRK, killing the pilot and capturing his passenger. A US apology resolved the crisis and gained the captured passenger's release. Even worse, in September 1995, a DPRK submarine was found beached on South Korea's northeast coast. Some 30 heavily armed commandoes had infiltrated from it into the ROK. All were killed or captured but the incident inflamed mistrust of the DPRK in Seoul and Washington. The situation was defused after the DPRK apologized to the ROK. These incidents suggest that Pyongyang also had its critics of the Agreed Framework who were intent upon unraveling the accord. By the end of 1995, Kim Yong-sam's displeasure with the agreement and Pyongyang's misconduct stiffened Congressional opposition to the Agreed Framework. Suspicion that the DPRK was constructing a secret underground nuclear facility and was preparing to enrich uranium further eroded bipartisan support for the accord. By August 1997, the DPRK foreign ministry considered the Agreed Framework ineffective.

The ROK election of Kim Dae-jung to the presidency at the end of 1998 breathed new life into the agreement. Kim was an avid advocate of engagement and promptly moved to quicken the pace of KEDO's LWR construction and ensured steady funding of KEDO's projects. But his efforts came too late to salvage the Agreed Framework. In August 1998, the DPRK launched a long range *Taepodong* ballistic missile over Japan, outraging the Japanese people and angering many in Congress. Japanese support for the agreement and engagement waned as reflected in the Japanese government's imposition of unilateral economic sanctions on Pyongyang.

Soon after the US Congress passed the "North Korea Threat Reduction Act of 1999" (S. 1352) dated July 12, 1999. Republican Chairman of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee

Jesse Helms (R – North Carolina), a powerful opponent of engagement and the Agreed Framework, introduced legislation that disallowed funding for the agreement “until the President determines and reports to” designated Congressional committees that the DPRK is implementing the South-North Joint De-nuclearization Declaration, is taking “demonstrable steps” to pursue dialogue with the ROK, complying with all provisions of the Agreed Framework, “has not diverted” US food aid away from those most in need of it, and “is not seeking to develop or acquire the capability to enrich uranium, ...” The president was also 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.” The legislation’s passage greatly complicated the Clinton Administration’s ability to implement the Agreed Framework.

The election of George W. Bush, an outspoken critic of engagement despite his father’s promotion of it, to the presidency in December 1991 doomed the Agreed Framework. ROK discomfort with it and DPRK misconduct had stiffened Congressional opposition. The ROK’s efforts to salvage the agreement came belatedly and were eroded by Japan’s declining support for it. The Bush Administration’s conviction in October 2002 that the DPRK had “materially breached” the agreement prompted the Administration to declare the accord inoperative. This did not end engagement with the DPRK, but thereafter the second Bush Administration vacillated between containment and engagement. The same can be said of the Obama Administration since 2009. This inconsistency in policy is unlikely to achieve concrete and sustained progress toward US goals of promoting peace on the Korean peninsula by ending North Korea’s nuclear weapons program. On the contrary, it appears to have played into the hands of those in Pyongyang, particularly the military, who are determined to build weapons of mass destruction to defend the DPRK.

Conclusion

Our review of US policy toward East Asia, particularly the Korean Peninsula, since 1949 suggests a number of crucial characteristics about the impact of US domestic politics on policy implementation. US goals have been largely consistent since before the Korean War and have emphasized the promotion of peace, prosperity and stability in the region and on the peninsula. They are also consistent with those outlined in the US Constitution. Meanwhile strategies for achieving these goals only slowly adjusted to changing international circumstances, largely a consequence of partisan Congressional politics. Regarding the Korean War, Republican opposition to military and economic aid for the ROK obstructed the Truman Administration’s efforts to reinforce Seoul’s defense posture, weakening Seoul’s ability to defend itself and compelling the Administration to seek UN assistance. The subsequent political storm known as “McCarthyism” rendered the US government’s professional foreign policy experts impotent, obstructing refinement of US East Asia policy. When this finally began in 1970, it was a result of Chinese initiative combined with support from a Republican president and his political appointee from academia. Nevertheless, partisan politics remained a major concern for Nixon and Kissinger as they transformed US China policy from containment to engagement. A domestic crisis, the Watergate Scandal, distracted critics of engagement long enough to allow Nixon’s successors to complete the shift. All the while, the concepts of collective security and deterrence, reliance on superior nuclear and conventional forces to deter attack on the US and/or its allies, remained unaltered. A second Republican Administration under Ronald Reagan

initiated carefully phased engagement of the USSR and its European allies. The process included negotiations that began the reduction of both superpowers' nuclear arsenals.

ROK presidents Chun Doo-hwan and Roh Dae-woo followed the US lead beginning in 1984 by adopting engagement for dealings with the USSR and its allies, except for the DPRK, to ensure a successful 1998 Seoul Olympiad. The results were remarkable. Not only was the Olympiad a success, South Korea's "*nord politik*," Seoul's version of engagement, enabled the ROK to establish diplomatic and commercial relations with virtually all of the DPRK's allies. By 1989 the ROK had virtually isolated the DPRK. Contributing to Seoul's success was the virtual lack of political opposition to its engagement policies. A primary reason for this was the ROK government's authoritarian nature at the time which enabled it to blunt criticism. Nevertheless, the benefits to the ROK, both its international stature and economic prosperity, were multiple and enduring. US policy toward the DPRK also benefited from Seoul's shift to engagement. At ROK President Roh's behest, the first Bush Administration initiated engagement of the DPRK using the so-called "modest initiative" which set the stage for unprecedented progress in South-North Korean dialogue and opened the door to both Korea's admission to the UN in 1991.

Congress' preoccupation with Iraq's invasion of Kuwait and the 1st Gulf War distracted Washington's foes of engagement sufficiently to allow the first Bush Administration to continue engagement of China while initiating it toward the DPRK. Seoul's support for the latter was critical for minimizing Republican Congressional opposition, and facilitated subsequent Democratic Clinton Administration's continuation of engagement with the DPRK. Thereafter, Republican success in the November 1994 Congressional election, wavering ROK support for the US-DPRK Agreed Framework and the DPRK's misconduct eroded confidence in the accord and stiffened opposition to engagement of the DPRK. The second Bush Administration, responding to Congressional criticism of the Agreed Framework, decided by the end of 2002 to discard the agreement and revert to containment of the DPRK. When this failed to end the DPRK's pursuit of a nuclear arsenal, Bush resorted to a policy that merged elements of containment with engagement. Despite disappointing results, the Obama Administration has continued his predecessor's "mixed" approach, which has been labeled "strategic patience."

One reason for the Obama Administration's policy is ROK President Lee Myung-bak's preference for containment of the DPRK. Wishing to be a good ally, the Obama Administration reverted to the US pre-1994 stance of following Seoul's lead regarding policy toward the DPRK. At the same time, Pyongyang's disregard for UN resolutions rekindled Congressional opposition to engagement with the DPRK. If anything, US policy toward the Korean Peninsula appears to once again be stuck in a rut defined by Congressional disapproval for engagement, on one side, and DPRK misconduct on the other. Most likely any renewed effort to resume progress toward normalization with the DPRK must await the outcome of the 2012 elections in the US and ROK. The election of a pro-engagement administration in the ROK could encourage Washington to break out of its continuing policy rigidity and resume engagement, a strategy has achieved the most beneficial results for the US and its allies since its application to China four decades ago. But obviously, this is a matter that will be determined by partisan politics, not foreign policy experts.

End Notes

¹ *Juche's Role in North Korea's Foreign Policy*," Tae-hwan Kwak and Seung-ho Joo, editors, *North Korea Foreign Policy Under Kim Jong Il*. London: Ashgate, 2009.

² NSC 68, April 12, 1950, p. 5.

³ NSC Report, "The Position of the United States with Respect to Korea," dated March 16, 1949." www.trumanlibrary.gov.

⁴ Ideological Foundations of the Cold War, www.trumanlibrary.org, "Leadership and Conflict," and "China Hands," www.usdiplomacy.org.

⁵ April 12, 1950, "A Report to the National Security Council, NSC 68, p. 29.

⁶ *Ibid.* p. 32.

⁷ *Ibid.* p. 38.

⁸ *Ibid.* p. 47.

⁹ *Ibid.* p.48.

¹⁰ *Ibid.* 53.

¹¹ *Ibid.* p. 57.

¹² *Ibid.* p. 58.

¹³ For the history of McCarthyism's impact on US foreign policy see: Association for Diplomatic Studies and Training of the Foreign Service Institute at the U.S. Department of State, George P. Shultz National Foreign Affairs Training Center: *A Brief History of U.S. Diplomacy, The China Hands, Examples of Excellence – George F. Kennan (1094-2005), Leadership in Conflict, and Years of Confrontation*, www.usdiplomacy.org/history.

¹⁴ Ideological Foundations of the Cold War, www.trumanlibrary.org, "Leadership and Conflict," www.usdiplomacy.org. "China Hands."

¹⁵ H.W. Brands Jr., "The Ghost of Yalta." *Foreign Service Journal* (April 1986) 17-21.

¹⁶ *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.

¹⁷ *Ibid.* p. 16.

¹⁸ "United States Policy for Military Aid to Korea," p. 13. This is a section of a longer report attributed to Senator Clinton P. Anderson, Chairman of the Democratic Senatorial Campaign Committee entitled, and "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.

¹⁹ *Ibid.* page. 9-11.

²⁰ *Ibid.* p. 12.

²¹ Nixon to Kissinger, unpublished White House memorandum dated February 4, 1969, www.nixonlibrary.org.

²² Unpublished and undated White House memorandum from Kissinger to Nixon. www.nixonlibrary.org.

²³ Secretary of State William Rogers, State Department Memorandum, February 9, 1972. www.nixonlibrary.org.

²⁴ Winston Lord, White House Memorandum of Conversation, February 28, 1972. p. 3. www.nixonlibrary.org.

²⁵ *Ibid.* p. 4.

²⁶ *Ibid.* p. 6.

²⁷For background regarding ROK reaction to US-PRC normalization see: Don Oberdorfer, *The Two Koreas – A Contemporary History*, Reading, MA: Addison-Wesley, 1997.

²⁸ Discussion of the Chun Doo-hwan's *nord politik* toward the USSR and its allies, and Roh Dae-woo's engagement of the DPRK see: C. Kenneth Quinones, "North Korea: From Containment to Engagement," in: Dae-sook Suh and Chae-jin Lee, editors, *North Korea After Kim Il Sung*. London: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 1998. Pp. 101-119.

²⁹ 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.

³⁰ Oberdorfer, *op. it.* P. 265.

³¹ The full text of all legislation referred to in this section is available at the Library of Congress web site: www.thomas.loc.gov.

³² Quinones, "South Korea's Approaches to North Korea: A Glacial Process," *op. cit.* Pp. 19-48.