

CONTENDING AMERICAN VISIONS OF NORTH KOREA

Mission civilisatrice vs. realpolitik

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KOREAN ASSEMBLYMEN VS PELOSI

- Speaker Moon: Selling “Sunshine Policy”
- Pelosi’s profound skepticism over Kim(&Trump)
- Pelosi as a “Neocon”?



KIM YO-JONG VS STATE DEPARTMENT

- How to interpret ROK-US joint military exercise?
- Kim: “hostile”, “aggressive”
- N. Price: “no hostile intent”, “defensive”



INTERPRETATIVE CONFLICTS

1. Source of the North Korean question (Is the North’s **regime’s character** an essential barrier to diplomacy?)
2. Competing interpretations of the security dilemma between the old enemies (Is the US threatening the DPRK **as well**?)
 - Trump era as an **anomaly**: Raising theoretical question in IR & US grand strategy
 - Situating US-DPRK relations in **a broader historical and theoretical context**, i.e., part of the violent encounters between the West and the Rest, to examine discursive causes of their animosity and devise preliminary solutions

CONTENTS

1. A Korean paradox: Unexpected stabilizing effects of an unorthodox US president
2. Two competing visions in US diplomatic history
3. Contrasting approaches to the Korean question
4. The Trump twist: A rare realist gambit toward North Korea
5. A return to normalcy? US-DPRK relations at an “inflection point in history”
6. Conclusion: The ethics of the Trump doctrine

I. Korean paradox

Unexpected stabilizing effects of an unorthodox US president

MAIN QUESTIONS

1. How two competing discourses, the *mission civilisatrice* and *realpolitik*, have historically constructed the problématique of US foreign policy toward DPRK and constituted internal tensions in it?
2. What is the utility of the discourse analysis on the conflict b/w neoconservatism versus the realist view in understanding the trajectory of North Korean policy in the **Trump era**?
3. How can a genuine dialogue between the liberal, “civilized” center and the illiberal, “barbarian” margin be materialized in an **alternative normative setting**—beyond the archaic liberal enmity?

KEY ARGUMENTS (1): AFP TRADITIONS

- Traditional US foreign policy based on **exceptionalism** has divided the globe into two categories, good and evil, and aimed to transform the world in America’s own image.
- American **realism** as a minority line in the US foreign policy group has historically played the role of warning the “imperial overstretch” generated by such an interventionist tendency in America’s civilizing mission.

KEY ARGUMENTS (2): NK VISIONS

- **Civilizing mission:** orthodox view
 - Proliferation of the American system is the goal to get rid of evil regimes pursuing prohibited WMD.
 - Spreading the American standard of civilization, using military forces if necessary, will solve the international problem, leading to the perpetual peace.
- **Realist bargaining:** Trump doctrine
 - Regarding both the US and the DPRK as rational actors or security-maximizers, so that their antagonistic relations are depicted as an amoral negotiating game between the two egoistic state actors.

ANALYTIC FRAMEWORK

- English School & Postcolonial theory
 - standard of civilization
 - rogue state, nuclear orientalism
- Reflexive realism
 - interactive dynamics in security dilemma
 - realist ethics: geopolitical empathy
- Discourse analysis
 - contending interpretative paradigms: hegemonic vs minoritarian
 - Self-Other relations, evilization, liberal enmity



II. TWO COMPETING VISIONS IN US DIPLOMATIC HISTORY

AMERICA'S CIVILIZING MISSION

- Standard of civilization & hierarchical image of the world
- (Christian/)Liberal politics of identity/difference
 - Evilizing Others: *Justus hostis* denied -> regime change
 - Universalist dream: Transforming the world in its own image
- US as a civilizing nation
 - Native American, Filipinos, Latin Americans in pre-20th & Modernization theory, democratic peace in 20th/21st

ROGUE STATE DOCTRINE & NUCLEAR ORIENTALISM

- Post-1989: “standard of civilization”/civilizing mission redux
- US as a world policeman/norm enforcer
- Rogue states as illiberal foes
- GNO(NPT)
 - ordering status hierarchy: NWS vs NNWS
 - securitization: Irrational, evil regimes cannot “deserve” nuclear weapons

TRAGEDY OF US DIPLOMACY

- Teleological, progressivist philosophy
 - Schmittian liberal ontology: just enemy (Clausewitz) ⇔ unjust foe(hostis humanis)
- Effects of evilization
 - 1) depoliticization => theological otherization
 - 2) “irredeemable foe”: liberal pacification as the only option
- Liberal social engineering as “great delusion”
 - trappings of “imperial overstretch” and national revolt

REALIST CHALLENGES : AMERICAN MAVERICKS? (1)

- Realism as “theory of peace”: classical virtues

→ self-restraint, prudence, and respect for other countries’ national interest, facilitating a series of dialogues, negotiation, bargaining, adjustment, and finally compromise

→ when statesmen pursue policies that are rational in realist terms, a more peaceful world resting on the principle of equilibrium or checks and balances can be created ex) Concert of Europe

→ geopolitical instability arises when expansionist impulses formed by non-realpolitik thinking, liberal civilizing mission or religious crusading spirit, come to govern

- Reflexive realism: Conservative *weltanschauung*

→ “like-unit”: international system populated by moral equals + “geopolitics of *empathy*”

→ accepting imperfect world as it is: pursuing *modus vivendi*, lesser evil in precarious universe

→ against progressivist liberal imperialism/grand social engineering project

REALIST CHALLENGES : AMERICAN MAVERICKS? (2)

- Rejecting the notion of US exceptionalism

- Realists as political dissidents against liberal hegemony and “crazy/unnecessary wars”

ex) Kennan & containment, Morgenthau & Vietnam war, Walt/Mearsheimer & Iraq war

- Restraining civilizing mission & constructing stability based on balance of power

- Against nuclear orientalism: “Iran should get the bomb”



III. CONTRASTING APPROACHES TO THE KOREAN QUESTION

GENEALOGY OF CIVILIZING VISION

- Military orientalism: “Indian” image of Koreans
 - War of 1871 (“The Little War with the Heathens”), Korean War
- NK as “posterchild for rogue states” “axis of evil”
 - Ignoring interdependence of security dilemmas
 - Impossibility of rational dialogue: illegitimate counterpart
 - Sanction: Punishing morally inferior pariah beyond the pale of international society (regime of liberal norms: NPT, human rights)
 - Ultimate solutions: Democratic Peace & Regime change

REALIST ALTERNATIVE

- Geopolitical **empathy** ⇔ **dispositional** explanation
 - 1) DPRK as “normal” state under a Hobbesian anarchy
 - 2) Nuclear weapon as a “rational” choice
 - 3) Amoral depiction of US-DPRK bargaining game
 - “shared culpability,” “classic problem of anarchy”

K. WALTZ (2003)

- “If we declare a country to be a part of an “axis of evil,” and if that country is anyway in a perilously weak position, as obviously North Korea is, then we'd have to ask ourselves, if we were the ruler -- no matter how nasty that ruler is -- if we were Kim Jong Il, wouldn't we conclude that, ‘My God, we're likely to be attacked, and since we are weak, **we'll lose unless we have nuclear weapons**, which have proved to be the greatest and, indeed, the only reliable deterrent the world has ever known’?”



J. MEARSHEIMER (2013)

- “North Korea lives in a dangerous neighborhood and it faces powerful and aggressive adversaries like the United States. Since nuclear weapons are the ultimate deterrent, it would **make little sense for North Korea to abandon its nuclear arsenal**. After all, neither China, nor Russia nor the United States is planning to give up its nuclear arsenal, so why should we expect North Korea to give up its nuclear deterrent?”



REALIST MODUS VIVENDI : BALANCE OF TERROR

- “It is unlikely that North Korea will give up its nuclear arsenal... but this does not mean that we should expect strife in the region... **we can live with a nuclear North Korea**, and in fact, that we might prefer this DPRK to the more bellicose one of the past” (Waltz, 2013)



IV. THE TRUMP TWIST

A rare realist gambit toward NK

TRUMP DOCTRINE: REALIST MOMENT?

- Anti-exceptionalism: “You think our country is so innocent?”
- New structural condition = unipolar moment is over
- Jacksonian(/Realist) alternatives
 - Cynical/cyclical view of IR: eternal return of great power competition
 - IR as **poker game or chess**: no hierarchy b/w liberal-illiberal actors
 - pursuing narrow national interest: no desire to be liberal world guardian
 - Strategies of retrenchment & offshore balancing

TRUMP-KIM BROMANCE: 2018-2020 (1)

1. How to define the Other: Westphalian pluralism

- Indifference to political system

“We just like each other. I mean, we have a good relationship. Yeah. It’s a totally different system, to put it mildly. But we like each other. A good relationship.”

- Kim as legitimate/rational partner

“Hamburger meeting”, “Smart cookie,” “he is very talented”

TRUMP-KIM BROMANCE: 2018-2020 (2)

2. *Non*-liberal agenda in negotiation

- NPT-Human rights issues marginalized

① Nuclear talks as “beautiful game of chess”

② Defended Kim on Warmbier case

“He tells me that he didn’t know about it, and I will take him at his word.”

- “This is all about leader versus leader. Man versus man. Me versus Kim”

→ Negotiation b/w moral equals, no hierarchy/demarcation line b/w inside vs outside

→ Not unthinkable “making a deal” with Pyongyang



TRUMP-KIM BROMANCE: 2018-2020 (3)

3. Recognizing the enemy's security concerns

- Agreed with Kim's criticism of "the hostile policies of past US Administrations" and noted that "there were some very militant people on the US side"



- Admitted that the regular "war games" by the KORUS alliance were "provocative"
- Refrained from punishing Pyongyang for its testing of short-range missiles in violation of the past UNSC resolutions, as a gesture to recognize all sovereign state's right to self-defense;

"He's tested short-range missiles. Which, by the way, every country has short-range missiles. There's no country that doesn't have them. Okay? It's not a big deal"

PALACE WAR: TRUMP VS BOLTON

Q: Why fired?

- Mission civilisatrice vs realpolitik
 - Third world security issues: Afghan, Iran, North Korea...
 - "If it was up to John, we'd be in four wars now."
- Question of the "Libyan model"
 - Derailing the Hanoi Summit ⇔ Biegun's Stanford speech
 - Trump's **empathy** to Kim



"We were set back very badly when John Bolton talked about the Libyan model. And he made a mistake. And as soon as he mentioned that, the "Libyan model," what a disaster. Take a look at what happened to Qaddafi, with the Libyan model. And he's using that to make a deal with North Korea? And **I don't blame Kim Jong Un for what he said after that.** And he wanted nothing to do with John Bolton."

V. RETURN TO NORMALCY?

US-DPRK relations at an “inflection point in history”

“THUG” DOCTRINE? LIBERAL ENMITY REDUX

- Tragedy of liberal democracy returned?
 - “America is back” along with millennial battle metaphor
 - “inflection point in history”; “democracy vs authoritarianism”
- Iliberal Other criminalized
 - Kim = “thug,” “murderous dictator,” “tyrant,” “Hitler,”
 - Boundary reconsolidated: “I would not give him all he’s looking for — international recognition as legitimate”
- Liberal agenda reemerged: NPT, Human rights



REALIST MINORITIES : ARMS-CONTROL SCHOOL

- Striking a “realist” bargain with NK

→ Accepting a frustrating fact = nuclear NK

⇔ CVID/FFVD/regime change

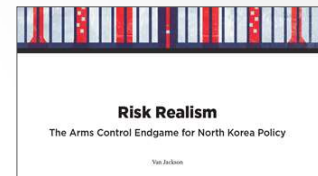
→ “modest” “prudent” “interim” “intermediate” solution = Arms Control

- America’s unilateral concessions

→ announcing stable coexistence, issuing a no nuclear deployment executive order, and declaring an end to the Korean War, to soothe North Korea’s excessive siege mentality and to jumpstart a confidence building process

- Containment & Cold War-style coexistence

→ Any political success in this tragic world of sinners is “at best approximated through the ever temporary balancing of interests and the ever precarious settlement of conflicts” (Morgenthau, 1952)



VI. THE ETHICS OF THE TRUMP DOCTRINE

TRUMP DOCTRINE & THE “REST”



- Trump's presidency as “a missed opportunity”
- Trumpism's resonance with realism
 - Against *mission civilisatrice*: No war initiated in his term (first case since Carter)
 - Searching for the “legitimate enmity” in the Rest
- Our question today
 - Reflecting on liberal ontological assumptions
 - Return of the civilizing mission with Biden? Cf) Fall of Kabul statement