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The "Sins" of American foreign policy illustrated in the North Korean nuclear crisis

Abstract
This study applies four alleged "sins" of American foreign policy – ignorance, lack of empathy, quick resort to military action, and arrogance – to America's failed policy regarding the North Korean nuclear program. While that failure cannot be attributed directly to the sins, there is evidence that an approach not characterized by them might lead to better results.

Keywords: *foreign policy sins, North Korea, American foreign policy, nuclear weapons*

1. Introduction

The American scholar Loch Johnson developed the idea of the seven "sins" of American foreign policy in an article published in 2003 and a book published in 2007 (Johnson & Caruson 2003; Johnson 2007). The sins include ignorance, a lack of empathy, the dominance of the President in the making of foreign policy, excessive emphasis on military solutions, arrogance, unilateralism, and isolationism. These sins have "cost [the United States] the friendship and support of many allies abroad, and as a result, have impaired the ability of the United States to advance its own international interests" (Johnson 2007, p. xiv).

While the context for Johnson's work was the widespread global disapproval of the Bush administration's policies after 9/11, he argues that the sins were also manifested by earlier Presidents. Given the more than seventy-years of America's global activism, it is easy to identify particular

instances in which American policy illustrates one or more of the sins. A better way to consider them is to look at the same issue over a number of years and a number of administrations to see if the sins are manifested over time. Moreover, a decade has passed since Johnson published his book, so there is a need to see if the sins are still present in the post-George W. Bush years. These are the purposes of this study. It will examine the North Korean nuclear issue, i.e., the development of its nuclear weapons and the means to deliver them. These activities threaten American allies South Korea and Japan, endanger regional security, and call into question the global non-proliferation regime. As a result, the issue has been important for nearly thirty years and challenged five U.S. Presidents – the first Bush, Clinton, the second Bush, Obama, and Trump. As such, it provides a good case to apply the alleged sins of American foreign policy. This article will do so, applying four of the seven sins – ignorance of the world, lack of empathy, an emphasis on military solutions, and arrogance. It will ignore presidential imperialism, because that sin concerns more the process of policymaking than the content of policy, and the twin sins of isolationism and unilateralism that, in different ways, reflect an American indifference to international issues and global opinion. These are clearly not present: it has been dealt with by five Presidents and the U.S. has periodically employed multilateral diplomacy and multilateral sanctions to deal with it.

2. An introduction to the North Korean nuclear issue

The North Korean nuclear program dates from the 1960s when it asked the Soviet Union for help in building the bomb. The Soviets did build several small research reactors but never provided the technology for building a nuclear weapon. The North began to work on its own nuclear program in the 1970s, beginning construction of the Yongbyong nuclear reactor in 1979 and completing it in early 1986. These efforts heightened U.S. and international concern about North Korea's nuclear ambitions and American intelligence agencies concluded in the mid-1980s that North Korea was working on a nuclear weapons program. Under pressure from the Soviet Union and with a promise of four civilian nuclear reactors, North Korea signed the Nuclear Non-Proliferation agreement in 1985, although it did not sign a necessary follow-up safeguards agreement until

early 1992. By that time, North Korea's strategic situation had deteriorated dramatically. South Korea's economic growth continued to outpace that of the North and the U.S. continued to place that country under its nuclear umbrella. Pyongyang was also increasingly isolated. The Soviet Union had collapsed and the successor regime was reducing support for Pyongyang and reaching out to South Korea. China continued to provide support, but its economic reforms required that it, too, reach out to South Korea and the United States.

Given these strategic changes, the North appears to have decided to pursue a nuclear weapons program more energetically. The Yongbyong facility was shut down for lengthy periods in 1989, 1990, and 1991, probably, in the view of U.S. intelligence officials, to withdraw fuel rods from the reactor in order to process the spent fuel and develop nuclear weapons. When inspectors from the International Atomic Energy Agency examined North Korean facilities, they found discrepancies between what they found and what North Korea had declared. The North also restricted IAEA access to certain nuclear facilities, leading the IAEA to refer the case to the UN Security Council in February 1993 for possible application of sanctions. That threat led North Korea to announce its intention to withdraw from the Non-Proliferation Treaty and the beginning of the "first North Korean nuclear crisis" (Wit, Poneman & Galluci 2005, pp. 2–4; "Arms Control Association" 2018; "Timeline on North Korea's Nuclear Program" 2014).

North Korea's nuclear weapons and missile programs have continued since that time. It first tested a ballistic missile in 1993 and later tests demonstrated improved capabilities. It conducted its first nuclear test in October 2006. More recently, during the rule of Kim Jong Un since 2011, missile and nuclear tests have accelerated. There have been four nuclear tests since 2011, one in 2013, two in 2016, and one in September 2017 (there had been two tests prior to 2011, in 2006 and 2009). Pyongyang claimed that its September 2017 test was of a hydrogen bomb, a claim some international observers deemed plausible. An early 2018 estimate was that North Korea had between ten and twenty nuclear warheads and enough missile fuel to produce thirty to sixty more. Kim Jong Un's regime has also conducted more missile tests than his predecessors, eighty in all, and while there are doubts about the accuracy of the missiles launched, there is no doubt about their increased range: the missile tested in November 2017 could reach anywhere on the American mainland (Albert 2018b; "Arms Control Association" 2018).

3. A summary of American policy

While details about the sins will appear later in the study, it is worthwhile at the outset to provide a brief summary of American policy (Sigal 1998; Wit, Poneman & Galluci 2005; Foreign Affairs Anthology Series 2017; Wampler 2017a; Wampler 2017b; Davenport 2018). For the most part, the U.S. has employed what Leon Sigal has referred to as a "crime and punishment" approach to the North Korean nuclear issue (Sigal 1998, pp. 12–13). That is, because North Korea has not honored its nuclear non-proliferation commitments, it must be forced, not persuaded, to abandon its nuclear program through the exertion of pressure. Pressure has taken many forms. Militarily, the U.S. has long maintained an alliance relationship with the Republic of Korea (South Korea), has placed that country under the American nuclear umbrella and stationed nuclear weapons there during the cold war, has a large military presence, conducts joint exercises with South Korean forces, and has periodically threatened to strike militarily. Economically, the United States has long imposed its own sanctions against North Korea and worked with the United Nations to impose multilateral sanctions. These sanctions have sought to impose asset freezes on leading officials, to isolate Pyongyang economically, to limit its ability to earn foreign currency via trade or remittances from abroad, and to restrict its access to the global banking system. Politically, the United States and North Korea do not have diplomatic relations, and few Americans can travel to the country.

There have been periodic efforts to negotiate with North Korea about its nuclear weapons activities, but these, too, might be considered as part of the crime and punishment approach. That is, the U.S. and its international partners usually insist that North Korea abandon its nuclear activities, e.g., the longstanding American demand has been Complete, Verifiable, and Irreversible Dismantlement (CVID) of its nuclear program, and only then will the U.S. be willing to negotiate political, economic, or security concessions but these often remain vague. This approach was reflected in the Obama administration's policy of "strategic patience," which "essentially demanded that North Koreans recommit to concrete steps towards denuclearization… as a precondition for any future talks" (Mak 2016). This approach effectively ruled out any serious negotiations, but even when negotiations did occur, for example, during the Six Party Talks during the second Bush administration, U.S. negotiating positions reflected the same general attitude. To cite one example, the U.S. proposal

at the July 2004 round of talks was that the first step had to be a North Korean commitment to dismantle all of its nuclear programs, followed by a three month period during which it had to declare all of its nuclear activities and open them to international inspection, after which the U.S. would begin a "discussion" about easing of American sanctions, but any "lasting benefits" would occur only "after the dismantlement of [the DPRK's] nuclear program had been completed" (Chinoy 2009, p. 271).

Needless to say, American policy towards North Korea has been a failure. William Perry, Secretary of Defense in the Clinton administration and long involved with North Korean issues, has described it as "perhaps the most unsuccessful exercise of diplomacy in our country's history" (quoted in Hirsh 2016). Much of the remainder of this study will document the presence of sins in American policy. The conclusion will consider whether their presence is a cause of the failed American policy.

4. The sin of ignorance

Specialists in international affairs lament Americans' limited knowledge about world affairs and global issues. This is certainly true of North Korea. According to a poll conducted in April 2017, only 36% of Americans could locate the country on a map of Asia. Over the course of the next year, US-North Korean relations were much in the news; nonetheless, in April 2018, more than a majority of Americans (56%) had heard only a little or nothing at all about negotiations on North Korea's nuclear program and 10% of the public had never heard of or had no opinion about Kim Jong Un (Quealy 2017; Polling Report 2018).

More importantly, what do those in government responsible for U.S. policy know about North Korea? The answer is "not enough," something that can have consequences for American policy. A former director of the Central Intelligent Agency has argued that "there is no greater threat to world peace than poorly informed leaders and governments" (Richard Helms quoted in Chinoy 2009, p. 86). There are multiple causes of this ignorance. One is that few in the American government have knowledge of North Korea. The fact that there were few diplomatic contacts in the Obama years means that there are few lower-level people in the bureaucracy who have dealt directly with the North Koreans. The absence of expertise at upper levels is an especially significant problem in the Trump administration, because many upper-level positions remain unfilled by

permanent officials or were filled only recently. The Special Representative for North Korea Policy, Joseph Yun, retired in February 2018. Trump did not name an ambassador to Seoul until May 2018, the Under Secretary of State for Arms Control had only been approved in April 2018, and there was only an acting Assistant Secretary of State for East Asia (Sonne & Hudson 2018).

A final reason for official ignorance is that North Korea is a very difficult country to learn about and understand. While the collection of intelligence is always difficult and judgements are never concrete, North Korea is an especially difficult target. Characterized as the "hardest of the hard" by the Central Intelligence Agency, one former analyst identified the difficulties: the regime's "opaqueness, self-imposed isolation, robust counterintelligence practices, and culture of fear and paranoia" served to provide "at best fragmentary information" (Pak 2018). As a result, intelligence uncertainty about DPRK intentions is likely. Famously, few predicted that a weak North Korea would attack the South in 1950. More recently, an official in the Obama administration argued that, "[a]nybody who tells you what North Korea wants is lying, or they're guessing. We don't know what Kim Jong Un has for breakfast, so how can we know what his real end game is?" Although one hopes this has changed, in the years prior to becoming North Korea's leader, the only photo of Kim John Un was as an eleven-year old and the primary source about him was his former sushi chef. The widespread uncertainty about North Korea intentions is present in the Trump administration, where there are debates about whether the North Korean leader is enhancing the country's nuclear arsenal for defensive reasons, in an effort to split the United States from his South Korean and Japanese allies, and/or to assume a more prominent position on the world stage (Rich & Sanger 2017; Cho & Fackler 2009).

5. The sin of a lack of empathy

The Free Dictionary defines empathy as the "ability to identify with or understand the perspective, or motivations of another individual" or society. This ability is something the United States has long lacked; Adlai Stevenson remarked in the 1950s that the technology most needed by the United States and Americans is a hearing aid (Johnson 2007, p. 231). With respect to the North Korean case, there are several manifestations of this way of thinking. One is the loose talk about military action, especially

by members of the current administration, but Americans have long been relatively indifferent to Asian deaths in wars, e.g., using the atomic bombs against Japan in World War II, carpet bombing of North Korean cities during the Korean War, and causing millions of Vietnamese deaths during the Vietnam war. President Donald Trump has stated that if a war does occur in 2018, "If thousands die, they're going to die over there. They're not going to die here" (Klimas 2017). These consequences have not manifested themselves, of course, because the U.S. has not launched military action in Korea since the 1950s, but the mere consideration of such action – by Trump's predecessors as well as the current President – is a manifestation of a lack of empathy.

Perhaps a better example of a lack of empathy is indifference to the consequences of sanctions on the North Korean people. Of course, if this is a sin, it applies to all who have imposed sanctions – the United Nations, the European Union, Japan and South Korea – in addition to the U.S. While many of the sanctions target the nuclear program, itself and/or persons involved with it, others likely have an impact on ordinary people and workers. The United Nations, for example, has imposed limits on exports of a number of products, including coal, seafood, agricultural products and electrical equipment; restricted North Korean fishing rights; placed caps on North Korean oil imports, and the number of North Koreans working abroad. The most significant United States sanctions block entry into the American banking system of any overseas entity that does business with North Korea (Albert 2018a).

The impact of sanctions on North Korea is not completely known, given the difficulty of getting information about that country and the fact that many of the sanctions are of relatively recent vintage. However, it is known that North Korea is a less developed and poorer society than Iraq was in the 1990s, when that country was subject to wide-ranging and devastating sanctions. According to the Central Intelligence Agency, North Korea is one of the world's poorest countries, with an estimated GDP/capita of $1,800 in 2015, i.e., before the imposition of the most severe UN sanctions, and GDP had declined in the years before 2015. More than eighteen million of the country's twenty-five million people lack electricity and it has been estimated that 70% of the population is "food insecure," i.e., regularly hungry (Central Intelligence Agency 2018). Consequently, the country's people face tremendous humanitarian needs. The UN's Human Rights Commissioner, Zeid Ra'ad Al Hussein, told the Security Council in December 2017 that aid programs were "literally a lifeline" for

thirteen million North Koreans, but sanctions "have caused a slowdown in UN ground operations, affecting the delivery of food rations, health kits and other humanitarian aid." Private groups are also struggling. Save the Children has ended its programs in the country, although perhaps only temporarily ("UN warns" 2017; Fitfield 2017).

In another indication of lack of empathy, American officials blamed the victim in their assessments of the impact of sanctions. Then Secretary of State Rex Tillerson blamed the North Korean regime for the suffering of its people: "The regime could feed and care for women, children and ordinary people of North Korea if it chose the welfare of its people over weapons development…" That insensitive comment is similar to one made by one of Tillerson's predecessors, Madeleine Albright, who, when asked about the deaths of thousands of Iraqi children as a result the 1990s sanctions, responded that, "This is a very hard choice, but the price, we think, the price is worth it" (Tillerson quoted in Fitfield 2017; Albright quoted in Reiff, 2003).

6. The sin of precipitous military action

In one sense, the allegation about the sin of quick resort to military action is easy to reject: the United States has not engaged in military action against North Korea since the end of the Korean War in 1953. This is not to say that the U.S. has not considered military action. One scholar has argued that, "No country has been the target of more American nuclear threats than North Korea – at least seven since 1945" (Sigal 1998, p. 20). While some of these threats occurred during the Korean War, others have occurred in the years since. Even before North Korea began its nuclear program in earnest, two American Presidents, Lyndon Johnson and Richard Nixon, contemplated military action in response to North Korean provocations. For Johnson, the issue was the seizure of an intelligence-gathering ship off the Korean coast in January 1968 and the holding of its crew for nearly a year. Many military options were considered including the use of nuclear weapons. The crisis was eventually resolved by negotiations, and the sailors were returned in December 1968. Several months later, the North Koreans shot down a U.S. reconnaissance aircraft, although in this case there were no hostages as all on the plane were killed. By this time, Nixon was President and he, too contemplated a military response, possibly including the use of nuclear weapons, but,

like Johnson, he decided not to do so. The reason for Nixon and, probably, Johnson, was that the military was uneasy about military action; as summarized by one historian, "…constantly you find the military saying, 'But the risks probably still outweigh the potential gains'" (Majumdar 2017; Prados & Cheevers 2014).

Presidents in the more recent era, when North Korea has had a nuclear program, had even more reason for circumspection. Still, some of them, too, considered but then rejected military action. The Clinton administration was the last one that could initiate military action without a likely North Korean nuclear response. It considered two military options in the spring of 1994 after the DPRK threatened to withdraw from the International Atomic Energy Agency, a war with North Korea and a strike at North Korean nuclear facilities. Both entailed great risks, and the administration decided to support the mediation effort of former President Carter instead (Wit, Poneman & Gallucci 2005, pp. 192–220; Sigal 1998, pp. 90–123).

Two recent Presidents have made perhaps the most explicit threats. For George W. Bush, North Korea's nuclear weapons program and support for terrorism placed it in the "axis of evil" along with Iran and Iraq. These governments were warned that the "United States of America will not permit the world's most dangerous regimes to threaten us with the world's most destructive weapons." This was not an idle threat. A 2002 Pentagon planning document on America's nuclear posture contemplated the use of nuclear weapons in certain contingencies: the "United States will continue to make clear that it reserves the right to respond with overwhelming force, including the resort to all of our options, to the use of Weapons of Mass Destruction abroad against the United States, our forces abroad, and friends and allies." North Korea was identified in the appendix as one of the countries targeted in the document ("Text of President Bush's 2002 State of the Union Address" 2002; Chinoy 2009, p. 147). Perhaps the most explicit threat came from President Trump who, in an address to the United Nations in September 2017, said that if North Korea continued its nuclear program, "we will have no choice but to totally destroy" it, adding that Kim Jong Un is "on a suicide mission for himself and for his regime." Trump's National Security Adviser, John Bolton, has also issued explicit threats, telling the *Wall Street Journal* in February 2018 (just before he was named National Security Adviser) that the North Korean weapons program was an "imminent threat" to the United States, and "it is perfectly legitimate for the United States to respond to the current

'necessity' posed by North Korea's nuclear weapons by striking first." At that time, some insiders in the Pentagon estimated that there was a 40% chance of war within a year (Nakamura & Gearan 2017; "John Bolton: 5 things" 2018; Zegart 2018).

That no President has honored these threats is probably due to the risks and likely consequences of war on the Korean Peninsula, something that Secretary of Defense Jim Matttis believes would be "more serious in terms of human suffering than anything we have seen since 1953" (Rawnsley 2017). While few doubt that American and South Korean forces would win the war, the number of casualties would be truly staggering. Any effort to capture and totally secure the North's nuclear sites would require a ground invasion involving more troops than used in Iraq or Afghanistan and the most concentrated exertion of air power since the Vietnam War. Kim would probably not sit idly by if North Korea was attacked, even if the American intent was merely to launch a limited, "bloody nose" strike discussed by some in the Trump administration: "…North Korea is the most consistent country in the world: It always meets pressure with pressure of its own. There is overwhelming, decades-long evidence that North Korea will fight back… There are exactly zero examples of a time North Korea caved into pressure" (Kang 2018). Even if the North Korean response was limited to conventional weapons, the Congressional Reference Service has estimated that more than 300,000 residents of Seoul, only 35 miles (56 kilometers) form the border with North Korea, would die (Dreazen 2018; Narang & Panda 2017; Fitzpatrick 2018).

While one must thus reject the sin of use of military force – at least to date – American policy was typically characterized by other components of hard or coercive power. That is, in the North Korean case, where that country's nuclear weapons now preclude serious thought about military action, this sin might be re-characterized as the early resort to pressure. Elements of pressure include U.S. troops in South Korea, the American nuclear guarantee to the Republic of Korea, and economic sanctions. Another, discussion of regime change, will be discussed below.

7. The sin of arrogance

One manifestation of arrogance identified by Johnson is America's efforts to remake the world, periodically seeking to overthrow foreign governments to do so. It does not appear that the U.S. has employed such

tactics in the North Korean case, although the very nature of covert operations precludes a definitive assessment. This has not stopped discussion about doing so. For example, a retired Defense Department official told a congressional committee in March 1994 that "the only sure way to defuse the North Korean strategic threat is to defuse the regime" (Henry Sokolski quoted in Sigal 2008, p. 240). As with many of the sins detailed in this study, the Trump administration provides good examples. Mike Pompeo, at the time director of the CIA and now Secretary of State, hinted at regime change in a July 2017 meeting, arguing that, while it "would be a great thing to denuclearize the peninsula… the thing that is most dangerous about it is the character of who holds the control over them today… So from the administration's perspective, the most important thing we can do is separate those two… Separate capacity and someone who might well have intent and break those two apart." Bolton argued in December 2017 that, "My proposal would be: Eliminate the regime by reunifying the peninsula under South Korean control" (Pompeo quoted in Watkins 2018; Bolton quoted in Borchers 2018). There has also long been hope that America would not need to take covert action to overthrow the regime, relying instead on the cumulative weight of sanctions. As a senior Defense Department remarked in 1994, long before the imposition of the most serious multilateral sanctions, North Korea was "teetering on the edge of economic collapse" that would soon be followed by a political collapse (Paul Wolfowitz quoted in Hirsh 2016). Later, one reason for the Obama administration's strategic patience approach was its belief that the regime in Pyongyang would soon fall.

Efforts to kill North Korean leaders might be an easier and quicker way to achieve regime change. As one former senior U.S. national security official told *The Atlantic*, "Decapitation does seem to be a way to get out of this problem. If a new North Korean leader could arise who is willing to denuclearize and be somewhat of a normal actor, it might lead us out." While the United States appears not to have tried assassinations, South Korea has, and its failures may serve as cautionary advice for the United States. Two South Korean attempts are known in the West: a failed attempt against Kim Il Sung in March 1946 and a late 1960s effort to train commandoes and have them infiltrate into North Korea to kill the leader. That plot was never implemented and the potential assassins turned on their South Korean commanders and killed them. More recently, Seoul has created a special operations force tasked with killing Kim Jong Un in the event of a pre-emptive war. One suspects that the U.S. is considering

such options, too, but there are significant obstacles, including the extensive security apparatus surrounding North Korean leaders and South Korea's failures, to say nothing about America's failed assassination efforts in Cuba and elsewhere (Rawnsley 2017; Bowden 2017).

Evidence that the United States is probably not actively plotting to overthrow the North Korean regime or kill its leader might lead one to argue that the U.S. has not manifested the sin of arrogance in this case. Yet, the arrogance label might apply in another way. The United States has long argued, correctly, that North Korea often does not adhere to its non-proliferation promises, leading the U.S. to refrain from making any sort of irreversible agreement with it. Implicit here is that the U.S. honors its obligations, yet there is much evidence that it does not – with respect to North Korea and in other circumstances. That is, the United States is arrogantly imposing a double standard on North Korea. Of course, all great powers make commitments they do not honor, but with respect to the issue of nuclear weapons proliferation in general and North Korea in particular, the US has violated many pledges. Kim certainly knows that the U.S. placed tactical nuclear weapons in South Korea beginning in the 1950s, despite the prohibition in the ceasefire ending the Korean War against the introduction on new types of weapons into the Korean Peninsula. These weapons were only removed in 1991 after the end of the Soviet-American cold war (Pincus 2018).

A more relevant example might be America's failure to implement the terms of the 1994 Agreed Framework in which North Korea agreed to significant limits on its nuclear program in return for energy assistance from Washington, light water reactors to replace its nuclear reactors, the easing of sanctions, and promises against Washington's threat or actual use of nuclear weapons. Yet Washington was slow to implement its terms; it seldom delivered the promised fuel oil on time, the consortium designed to build the light water reactors had not begun work by 2002, and little effort was made to end official enmity between the two countries. The North Koreans also violated the terms of the Agreed Framework, but senior US and IAEA officials told the Congress in 1998 that there had been "no fundamental violation of any aspect of the Framework Agreement" by North Korea (Ryan 2017; Sigal 2017).

The North Koreans might also take to heart American actions against other states that had been persuaded or forced to abandon their nuclear programs. Most relevant in this context is Libya. There, President Muammar Gaddafi had given up a fledgling nuclear program in 2003 in return

for implicit American guarantees not to overthrow his regime, i.e., not to do in Libya in the name on counter-proliferation what it had just done in Iraq. The US adhered to that agreement for less than eight years, deciding in 2011 to participate in a military effort seeking to overthrow Gaddafi. The North Koreans understood the implications: according to a 2016 statement from the official news agency, "The Saddam Hussein regime in Iraq and the Gaddafi regime in Libya could not escape the fate of destruction after being deprived of their foundations for nuclear development and giving up nuclear programs of their own accord" (Friedman 2018). All of these examples of American failures to live up to its promises on nuclear weapons has led one leading American analyst to ask, "If you were Kim Jong Un, would you rather pin your survival on a nuclear deterrent of your own or promises from the United States?" (Walt 2018).

The Libya model remains relevant in another way. Despite the DPRK's interpretation of the outcome in Libya, Trump administration officials repeatedly referred to their hopes for a similar disarmament outcome in North Korea. This might be an example of the sin of ignorance or of a lack empathy, i.e., not knowing or anticipating North Korea's reaction to such comparisons, but more likely, it seems, an example of arrogance, i.e., not caring about the North Korean interpretation and/or using the model to threaten it. Trump referred to the Libya case as both a model and a threat, saying he would offer unspecified "protections" not offered to Gaddafi, but also explicitly warning about that element of the Libya model that the North Koreans most fear: regarding the removal of Hussein and Gaddafi from power, "[t]hat model would take place if we don't make a deal, most likely" (Friedman 2018).

8. Conclusions: An approach without the sins?

This study has demonstrated both the failure of America's counter-proliferation policy with North Korea and the presence of some of America's foreign policy sins. This does not mean, of course, that the policy failures were caused by the sins. As Johnson argues, the "sins do not lead ineluctably to failed results… but they often are to blame." This suggests that a better approach might be one without the sins: "America's greatest successes in the world have usually been achieved when the nation's leaders have rejected their temptations." Johnson refers specifically to North Korea, writing – in 2007 – that "Quiet diplomacy and working behind the

scenes with other nations in the region is likely to produce better results than the public berating that… has been America's approach the difficult problem of nuclear weapons' in North Korea" (Johnson 2007, pp. 272, 287). More specifically, Sigal calls for a strategy of diplomatic give and take, one that "combines reassurance with conditional reciprocity, promising inducements on the condition that potential proliferators accept nuclear restraints" (Sigal 1998, p. 4). Such an approach would be a very different one than current American policy, placing greater emphasis on diplomacy, greater interest in knowing and understanding North Korea's negotiating position, and taking for granted the continued existence of the North Korean regime. Critics might argue that this approach is naive, but there is some evidence from the Korean Peninsula that it could work.

One largely forgotten American proliferation success was its ability to prevent South Korea from developing nuclear weapons. That country had begun a clandestine nuclear weapons program in the 1970s. Unlike North Korea, which has justified nuclear weapons in terms of defense against an American attack, ROK President Park Chung-hee was worried about the reliability of the American security guarantees to South Korea. The United States had withdrawn 20,000 troops from South Korea in 1970, had not responded forcefully enough – in Park's view – to North Korean provocations in the late 1960s, and had effectively abandoned its South Vietnamese ally in the early 1970s. Given these concerns, the ROK began working to develop nuclear weapons; initial U.S. intelligence estimates suggested that Seoul could develop a nuclear device by 1980. As American officials became aware of these efforts, they used diplomacy and reassurance to dissuade the South Koreans from developing nuclear weapons. Diplomatically, the U.S. worked with South Korea to persuade it that a nuclear program would harm mutual interests, with France to cancel the sale of a plutonium reprocessing plant, and with Canada, which agreed to sell nuclear reactors only if Seoul did not purchase the reprocessing plant. There were also American efforts to reassure South Korea, including a decision not to reduce American troop levels any further and a decision to provide technical assistance for a peaceful nuclear program. Those actions in 1975–76 effectively ended the South Korean nuclear weapons program (Burr 2017a; Burr 2017b).

Of course, this case occurred more than forty years ago, South Korea is an American ally, and its nuclear weapons program was only in its early stages, realities that are very different in the contemporary North Korean case. Still, some sort of give-and-take-mutual-concession process

might work. Again, critics might argue this is naive, but this is the general approach advocated by Joseph Yun, the State Department official responsible for North Korea until February of 2018. He identifies the concessions that can be made early in any negotiation: North Korea could make a commitment to a permanent moratorium on weapons testing, open its nuclear facilities to IAEA inspections, and provide an accurate accounting of its nuclear activities. As for initial American concessions, it has already granted a longstanding North Korean demand to hold a summit with the North Korean leader; in addition, it might offer humanitarian aid, work to normalize relations via the opening of liaison offices in Washington and Pyongyang and declare that it does not have hostile intent toward Pyongyang. Should these initial steps be successful, then further mutual concessions might take place, e.g., North Korea agreeing to a timeline for ultimate denuclearization and the U.S. agreeing to at least some sanctions relief (Yun 2018).

There is some evidence that this approach might work, because when the United States has offered concessions in the past, North Korea has followed with its own concessions. For example, when the first President Bush decided in late 1991 to withdraw American tactical weapons from the Korean Peninsula and to cancel the planned 1992 US-ROK military exercises, North Korea followed in the next several months by halting plutonium reprocessing, agreeing to a joint declaration with South Korea to denuclearize the Korean Peninsula, and signing an inspection agreement with the IAEA. A similar give-and-take process led to the 1994 Agreed Framework, in which the North Koreans agreed to remain a party to the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Agreement, to freeze their nuclear processing activities, and to eventually seal the reprocessing plant to prevent it from extracting plutonium from its spent fuel rods. In return, the United States agreed to move toward normalized political and economic relations, e.g., by establishing a liaison office in Pyongyang and to lower trade and investment barriers. The U.S. also agreed to participate in an international consortium that would provide North Korea with fuel oil to replace the energy lost with the dismantling of its nuclear facilities and to build two new nuclear reactors in which diversion of plutonium to build nuclear weapons was much more difficult. While the incoming Bush administration had criticized the Agreed Framework early in the administration, it agreed to essentially the same arrangement in February 2007. North Korea agreed to halt shut down the Yongbyong nuclear reactor, readmit international inspectors, and begin work on a list of all its nuclear programs;

the U.S. and other parties to the talks agreed to provide fuel oil and other forms of aid to Pyongyang, with more aid being provided as North Korea met its obligations (Sigal 1998, pp. 257–264; Chinoy 2009, pp. 325–326; "Timeline on North Korea's nuclear program" 2014).

President Trump has initiated a negotiating process, although an unorthodox one, with North Korea. Rather than a gradual step-by-step process in which the two sides traded small concessions to build confidence as recommended above, Trump held a face-to-face meeting with North Korean leader Kim in Singapore on June 12, 2018. The statement following the meeting promised that "the DPRK commits to work toward complete denuclearization of the Korean Peninsula" ("Full text of the U.S.-North Korea agreement signed by Kim, Trump" 2018). While talking with DPRK is better than threatening to destroy it, as Trump had done earlier in his presidency, there is little reason to expect that North Korea will actually relinquish all of its weapons. It has used the phrase "complete denuclearization of the Korean Peninsula" since 1992. Plus, the Singapore agreement has no mention of a timeline for denuclearization nor any mention of verification measures. There are already reports that North Korea continues to build intercontinental missiles and enhance its uranium stockpile, that the U.S. has reneged on Trump's promise to sign an agreement ending the Korean War, and that Trump has grown frustrated with the absence of progress. All this in just two months since the Singapore meeting (Ward 2018; Panda & Narang 2018).

Thus, it seems that the current efforts at negotiating a solution to the problem, like previous ones, will be brief as a result of widespread distrust, the failure of both sides to honor their obligations, and a return by America to a policy characterized by the sins. That is, while there are good arguments in favor of cooperation in 2018, especially in light of the failures of a more coercive policy, the development of North Korea's nuclear program, and the dangers of war, there are also good reasons for caution and no guarantee that it will be successful. That is, an American policy characterized by the sins and a policy that avoids them might both fail to solve the North Korean nuclear problem. As Gary Samore, who worked on proliferation issues in both the Clinton and Obama administrations, has argued, "All of the approaches we've used – first to prevent, then eliminate North Korea's nuclear weapons program have failed. When we've negotiated, it's failed and when we haven't negotiated, it's failed" (Mak 2016). Perhaps this identifies another American "sin," or, at least attitude, that complicates its foreign policy – the idea that all global issues can be solved.

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