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The Kim-Trump Summit: “Do We Do Pearl Harbors?”

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY: It is too soon to declare that peace is at hand in Korea. Donald Trump must exercise caution. He must study relevant history, his adversary’s negotiation pattern of deception, and the past follies of American leaders. It is essential that he maintain a viable military option and economic sanctions until strictly verifiable denuclearization has been accomplished.

UPDATE, 6 May 2018: It appears Kim has just released three American citizens being held hostage in North Korea, showing his eagerness to negotiate with Trump.

On April 18, 2007, Israel’s Mossad briefed the Bush White House about North Korea’s secret building of a nuclear reactor in Syria. The Israelis wanted to take it out, but the NSC was divided. Should the US join the Israelis? Stop them? Do it alone? Use diplomacy? Defense Secretary Robert Gates recalled President Reagan’s condemnation of Israel’s June 7, 1981 bombing of the French-built Osirak reactor in Iraq. “I am aware of no precedent for American surprise attacks against a sovereign state...We don’t do Pearl Harbors,” he argued.

Gates missed the mark a bit. Reagan condemned Israel’s 1981 surprise attack in public, but when his NSA, Richard Allen, gave him the news, he quipped, “Boys will be boys.”

1983: Reagan’s “Urgent Fury”

North Korea’s Kim Il-sung had no doubt that Washington had plotted the Osirak bombing with Israel. To him, Reagan was the most dangerous president since Harry Truman, whose 1950 military intervention had prevented Kim’s war from unifying the Korean peninsula under communist rule. Kim’s brinkmanship brought Chinese

infantry and Russian pilots into the conflict and almost pushed the world to the abyss of nuclear war. Fortunately, Truman refused to use nuclear weapons.

When in October 1983 the US invaded the tiny communist Caribbean island of Grenada, a trove of unearthed documents revealed Pyongyang's top-secret agreement to provide free and robust economic and military aid (\$35 million) to Grenada – larger than Cuba's and second only to Russia's. Yasser Arafat also planned to send his PLO operatives there, as he had to Nicaragua.

If Reagan had bothered with tiny Grenada, who might be next? Scholar Benjamin Young shows that a paranoid Kim, well aware that 27,000 American troops were still deployed in South Korea, feared the US might turn its attentions to North Korea. To Kim, only nuclear weapons could keep the Americans at bay. Young demonstrates that Reagan's "Operation Urgent Fury" in Grenada was a factor in Kim's 1985 decision to establish a Ministry of Atomic Energy [MAE]. While playing Russia against China, Kim was able to convince the Kremlin to provide his regime with a small nuclear reactor.

1994: Bill Clinton's and America's missed chance

In 1994, President Bill Clinton learned that Pyongyang had withdrawn from the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty [NPT] barring non-nuclear states from acquiring nuclear weapons and was reprocessing the North Korean reactor's fuel rods into plutonium for nuclear weapons. "I was determined to prevent North Korea from developing a nuclear arsenal, even at the risk of war," Clinton recalled.

Much as Trump was to do 23 years later, Clinton first used economic sanctions, the deployment of two naval carrier groups, joint US-South Korean military exercises, and the deployment of Patriot missiles in South Korea to encourage Kim's nuclear divestment. US Defense Secretary William Perry urged military force, but Clinton held back on the basis of "a sobering estimate" of the staggering losses on both sides if war broke out. Thus, America missed an opportunity to deal with the North Korean menace when it was still relatively small.

Instead, Clinton sent a special envoy to Pyongyang – Jimmy Carter. Champagne corks likely popped in Pyongyang at that appointment, as Carter had proposed during his 1976 presidential campaign that the US withdraw its combat forces from South Korea. Smiling and grandfatherly, Kim labored hard to dispel the image of a Stalinist maniac whose war had cost 54,260 American lives and who sadistically quelled dissent in his Orwellian realm.

Kim died of a heart attack on July 8, 1994. It was left to his son, Kim Jong-il, to follow his father's path to a negotiated "Agreed Framework" with Clinton. Plutonium production was to cease in return for an easing of US sanctions and provision to

North Korea of 500,000 tons per year of fuel oil. Only years later did US intelligence discover that Pyongyang had secretly begun enriching uranium.

In Clinton's second term, Secretary of State Madeleine Albright's department dominated the decision-making process vis-à-vis North Korea. Before the presidential elections, Clinton sent Albright to Pyongyang to meet with Kim. When she admonished the dictator for proliferating missile technology to Syria and Iran, Kim was frank, admitting his country's desperate need for foreign currency. "Since we export to get money, if you guarantee compensation, it will be suspended," he said.

Kim turned Albright's visit into a means of legitimizing his regime. At a stadium packed with *nomenklatura*, Kim and Albright attended a spectacular cultural performance, the highlight of which was a display of a 1998 Taepo Dong Missile launch over Japan. As the crowd thundered, Kim assured the Secretary of State, "That was our first missile launch – and our last."

Albright returned home without a written agreement, but she had Kim's word. If Clinton went to Pyongyang, she believed, "We could make the missile agreement." Clinton's excuse for not going? "[We] simply couldn't risk being half way around the world when we were so close to peace in the Middle East ... Arafat had implored me not to go."

Peace did not break out in the Middle East. Clinton gave up a military option against North Korea and abandoned tough sanctions, thereby allowing Pyongyang to build two nuclear bombs.

2003: Bush's invasion of Iraq and the "Qaddafi moment"

In 2003, President George W. Bush invaded Iraq based on half-baked evidence that Saddam Hussein had WMD, which, as it turns out, he didn't. Meanwhile, the US ignored Kim Jong-il, who did. Bush's quick Iraq victory had an impact, however. As then US VP Dick Cheney recalls, "Intelligence had indicated the regimes in Syria, Iran and North Korea were nervous since Saddam's regime had been toppled in just three weeks."

Six days after Saddam's capture, Libyan dictator Muammar Qaddafi underwent what Bush called "a Qaddafi moment." The Libyan dictator realized he might be next and decided to turn over all his WMD to the US. At the same time, worried North Korean officials rushed Kim to an impregnable bunker inside a mountain.

North Korea becomes State Department's exclusive turf

This was the time to do what Defense Secretary Donald Rumsfeld had earlier proposed: transfer authority to the Iraqis, quickly withdraw US forces, and focus on

the real threats to American national security, specifically North Korea and Iran. Bush's diplomacy would have had a far greater chance of success if the North Koreans and Iranians had understood that they faced military action if diplomacy failed. But the president, advised by NSA Condoleezza Rice, opted instead for democratic nation-building. Rice, advancing to the position of Secretary of State, insisted North Korea should be Foggy Bottom's exclusive bailiwick.

Bush's innovation was sporadic Six Party Talks – North Korea, the US, China, Japan, South Korea, and Russia – that ultimately proved useless. America, still fighting in Afghanistan, also became bogged down in Iraq's Sunni-Shiite civil war, just as Rumsfeld had feared. Pyongyang soon realized that Bush had given up on the military option for North Korea. Thus, in October 2006, Kim fearlessly exploded one of six previously hidden nuclear bombs.

Once again, the State Department's action plan led to accepting phased steps toward denuclearization. Rightly objecting to this approach were Vice President Cheney and then third Undersecretary of State John Bolton, Trump's present NSA.

2007: Israel's Operation Orchard

In April 2007 came the NSC debate mentioned earlier – what to do about Israel's proposed bombing of the North Korean nuclear reactor being built in Syria. As noted, Gates objected to an attack on the reactor. Cheney, however, supported by Bolton, argued that a US "military strike on the reactor would send an important message not only to the Syrians and North Koreans, but also to the Iranians."

Israel "hadn't asked for a green light," wrote Bush, "and I hadn't given one." But neither had he given a red one. On September 6, 2007, the Israelis destroyed the Syrian reactor. Damascus kept quiet about it and so did Washington, which went public only seven months later. There were no repercussions.

On October 4, 2007, Kim agreed to a "specific timetable" to disclose and disable all his nuclear facilities, for which concession Pyongyang received 950,000 metric tons of oil. But he also wanted North Korea to be removed from the heavily sanctioned list of terrorist states. With the 2008 presidential election looming, Bush acceded to Rice's meeting with Kim's foreign minister. Thereafter, Cheney complained about Rice's "concession after concession to North Korea."

Defending herself and State Department official Christopher Hill to Bush, Rice argued that an oral agreement was a first step. "Mr. President, this is just the way diplomacy works sometimes," she said. "You don't always get a written agreement." Cheney later wrote, "We were supposed to be reassured because the other side had whispered an admission of the declaration's falsehood in Chris Hill's ear." Then, to top it off, Rice convinced Bush to take North Korea off the terrorist list.

2011: Forestalling a “Qaddafi moment” in North Korea

President Barack Obama was elected on November 8, 2008. On December 9, 2009, he, as President Clinton did earlier, sent an envoy, Stephen Bosworth, to Kim. The result was a written agreement, riddled with holes, which Pyongyang proceeded to break after receiving US economic aid.

In 2011, the US participated in the “humanitarian” NATO intervention in Libya, which culminated in the murder of the country’s long-reigning dictator by NATO-backed Libyan rebels. The murder quashed any possibility of a “Qaddafi moment” for Kim in North Korea. If anything, it stiffened his resolve never to give up his WMD – the guarantee of the regime’s survival. Two months later, on December 17, 2011, Kim Jong-il died of a heart attack and the baton passed to his son, Kim Jong-un.

Obama adviser: “Shoot down Israeli planes”

As revealed by Charles Gati in a collection of essays, Obama adviser Zbigniew Brzezinski viewed Israel as holding “apartheid” policies vis-à-vis the Palestinians. Gati does not mention, however, that Brzezinski chaired a US committee (on the board of which Gati served) supporting Islamists in Chechnya. Nor does he report Brzezinski’s alleged advice to Obama to shoot down IAF planes if Israel proceeded with planned bombings of nuclear sites in Iran. “They [Israeli planes] have to fly over our airspace in Iraq,” Brzezinski reportedly said. “Are we just going to sit there and watch?”

On July 14, 2015, Hillary Clinton’s successor, John Kerry, concluded a multilateral Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action [JCPOA] with North Korea’s ally, Iran. The deal involved, among other American concessions, Obama’s releasing of billions of sanctioned dollars to Tehran up front. Trump may expect Kim to propose a similar deal.

Trump must be fully prepared for the summit

Kim’s back is against the wall. Reversing Obama's doctrine of “strategic patience,” Trump has, in concert with Tokyo and Seoul, given the Korean dictator a taste of his own medicine – bellicose rhetoric coupled with an unprecedented military buildup and economic coercion. Using trade incentives, he has even managed to involve Beijing in his coercive diplomacy. Most importantly, Trump’s two surgical strikes on Syria demonstrate that he is willing to enforce red lines on WMD use by rogue regimes.

On April 27, 2018, Kim Jong-un and South Korean President Moon Jae-in pledged “no more war” and “complete denuclearization”, the ceasing of “all hostile acts” and the transforming of “the demilitarized zone into a peace zone”.

But before heralding "a new era of peace," Trump must understand that the Korean War has not yet ended. Given the historical record, Trump must first test Kim's intentions by analyzing his dynasty's well-established pattern of deception. As described by Cheney,

They would make an agreement about their nuclear sites, pocket the benefits and then continue on with their weapons programs. They are masters of brinksmanship [and deception] – creating problems, threatening their neighbors, and expecting to be bribed back into cooperation.

Pyongyang played China off against Russia for decades. It will now use the same technique to play South Korea against America and Japan by insisting on three-party negotiations including Seoul, which would in turn require the inclusion of Tokyo. Trump should insist on one-to-one negotiations.

To some, Kim's pre-summit dealings with Trump have already involved deception. Kim made much, for example, of his own good will in closing the Punggye-ri site, where six nuclear tests took place – but that site had become unusable in any case due to a collapse after the last nuclear blast.

The North Korean-US negotiation must not lead to any phased, tit-for-tat arrangement. Trump must make Kim aware that the military option may yet be used if negotiations fail or if he does not live up to a concluded agreement. There should be no economic relief other than food and medicine delivered directly to the people – no money to the communist elite.

"During every administration, Republican and Democrat," wrote Cheney, there is often a State Department inclination "to make preemptive concessions to bad actors in the hope their behavior will change." It won't. Nor can national security decision-making be effective if monopolized by one government department.

Trump must bring up the issue of Pyongyang's nuclear cooperation with Tehran and insist that the shipping of conventional weapons to Hezbollah and Hamas terrorists and WMD (nerve gas) through Iran must cease.

War with Iran is not inevitable. With a strong reining in of North Korea, Tehran might eventually have a "Qaddafi moment". On May 12, Trump should not tear up the JCPOA but try to negotiate substantial revisions to it. In dealing with North Korea, Trump should – if possible – avoid the Bush and Obama follies of getting embroiled in another war in the Middle East in Iran or Syria.

Trump should also launch a robust public diplomacy campaign explaining the need for nonproliferation in both the Far East and the Middle East. The American people

know that war with North Korea would be horrendous. They must also understand that if the West does not succeed in getting Pyongyang, and thereafter Tehran, to give up nuclear weapons, the world will live under a perpetual nuclear sword of Damocles by rogue regimes. An anarchic world order will arise, with the metastasis of nuclear power not just in the Middle East and northeast Asia, but eventually also the Southern Cone of South America.

America cannot hide behind Israel. It must enforce non-proliferation in cooperation with it. Nor can the president exclude Pearl Harbors when agreements are violated, if that phrase is meant to connote a surgical strike to prevent far greater and more tragic consequences.

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