After the Chenoan: Engagement or Containment? What is the most effective approach for the United States Foreign Policy when considering North Korea’s nuclear ambitions?

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Abstract

This paper is concerned with assessing the best US Foreign Policy approach to North Korea and its nuclear programme. It will be argued that the US Administration of George W. Bush failed in its policy approach to North Korea and contributed to the severe escalation of the nuclear threat to the Korean Peninsula. In addition, the paper will examine two central policy approaches, Engagement and Containment, and will determine that a form of engagement, termed “Hawk Engagement”, should be the obvious approach to stopping North Korean nuclear development. An emphasis is placed on the importance of understanding the rhetoric, discourse and circumstances of the North Korean regime, which in turn will help to inform the policy decision-making process in Washington.
**Introduction**

The main reason for this paper is to assess the issues that the United States faces when considering the best approach in tackling North Korea (also referred to as the Democratic Peoples Republic of Korea, DPRK). The relationship between the two countries over the past 20 years has produced varied results for both sides and there is no doubt that the problem of how to deal with North Korea is no easy task. Research into US Foreign Policy approaches has been limited to two main policy areas, Engagement or Containment, this has resulted in a sizeable debate between academics about which policy is the best way to proceed. The two leaders in this area Victor Cha and David Kang (2003, 2004a, 2004b), have written extensively on this subject and both advocate their own views on what is best: Engagement or Containment? However, having read their debates and others surrounding them, there is still no clear answer as to what should happen next.

This paper will argue three main points. Firstly, that US Foreign Policy in the last ten years has been completely ineffective in dealing with the nuclear security threat posed by the DPRK. Secondly, that policies of Containment only serve to alienate and heighten the threat posed by the DPRK and thirdly, that now, more than ever, a coherent, progressive and pragmatic foreign policy approach is called for. The Obama Administration should monopolise on the failure of the Bush Jnr Administration (Cumings 2004; Wit, Poneman and Gallucci 2004; Fuqua 2007; Wit 2007; Bluth 2005, 2010) and use this to push forward with regional support in order to gain what it ultimately wants: A denuclearised North Korea. This paper will bring together the main issues surrounding these arguments through three chapters:

Chapter 1 will look at the main failings of the Bush Jnr Administration and determine why it failed and how it compares to the dealings of other US administrations. This section will contribute to the argument that Containment is flawed and is a dangerous policy to pursue. Chapter 2 will embark on a discussion about North Korean behaviour on the diplomatic and world stage. An effort to understand the rhetoric, discourse and policy goals of the DPRK will be made. It will be argued that if the US understands these crucial points then it may have more success. Chapter 3 will build on the previous two chapters and examine Cha’s Hawk Engagement strategy more closely. It will be argued that in order for Obama to move forward with a coherent policy strategy, it must work with its regional allies through which a process can be indentified that will ultimately lead to the demands of both sides being satisfied. There will also be a discussion that one policy strategy is not enough, and that the
US needs to plan for the long term and develop a strategy of reunification with its allies in the region.

What follows is a brief summary of events of the last twenty years, which sets out the more recent problems for US foreign policy, followed by a literature review. This will attempt to show an appreciation of the arguments put forward by academics and criticise their approaches to the North Korean Nuclear issue. The final part of this section will set out how policy will be analysed in each section of this paper.

The Agreed Framework

The signing of the Agreed Framework in October 1994 was seen as a critical turning point in the future of US-DPRK relations. It was the culmination of a policy of engagement followed by two successive US administrations, G.H.W. Bush and Clinton. It was perceived by President Bush Snr that with the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991:

‘The US policy of isolating Pyongyang – which had been in place for three decades following the Korean War – could not alone prevent North Korea from going nuclear... The theory was that by engaging Pyongyang, it might be possible to persuade the North to join the community of nations and to refrain from building nuclear weapons.’ (Wit, Poneman and Gallucci 2004: 6-7).

Indeed, between 1989-1993 the US had a good response for its new policy and a number of meetings took place between the two nations, which began to ease fears over the nuclear situation. With the succession of Kim Jong-il from his father Kim II-Sung, in 1994, the economic situation in North Korea was beginning to worsen, especially with the loss of funding from the USSR and with the PRC (People’s Republic of China) establishing trade links with South Korea, North Korea urgently needed a new benefactor. ‘Pyongyang chose Washington as the guarantor of its security and the supplier of economic assistance.’ (Park 1998: 3). The agreement to allow IAEA (International Atomic Energy Agency) inspectors into the country in 1992 certainly shows a North Korea wanting to cooperate, but the inspections do not go well and in 1993, after reports from the inspectors that their attempts to inspect the Yongbyon nuclear facility were repeatedly blocked, North Korea threatened to withdraw from the NPT (Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty).
This presented quite a challenge to the new Clinton Administration, ‘North Korea’s
pronouncement – its first authoritative response to the March 25th IAEA deadline for special
inspections – was a bombshell.’ (Wit, Poneman and Gallucci 2004: 26). Clinton effectively
had little choice but to give up on the military option and pursue engagement to avoid any
further escalation of the situation (French, 2005: 198). In the months that followed,
unprecedented attempts were made to reach an agreement with North Korea and stop its
withdrawal from the NPT; the culmination of this was the Agreed Framework, brokered by
Robert Gallucci. Central to this was ‘freezing the North Korean nuclear program’ (McVadon
2010: 143) which would ultimately lead through to a:

‘series of steps…to North Korea proving it had no nuclear weapons or nuclear weapons
program and to the United States normalizing ties with the North and proving it with light-water
nuclear reactors that could make energy but not weapons.’ (Cha and Kang 2003: 239).

9/11, the Axis of Evil, the Breakdown of the Agreed Framework and the War on Terror

The period between October 1994 and January 2002 saw what could be described ‘as a Cold
Peace’ (Wit, Poneman and Gallucci, 2004: 372) between Washington and Pyongyang. The
turning point leading to the breakdown of the Agreed Framework was the 9/11 attacks and
the 2002 State of the Union Address where President Bush Jnr labelled North Korea as a
member of the ‘Axis of Evil’, along with fellow US-appointed members Iran and Iraq. Along
with the Iraq war and this labelling, North Korea viewed it as an excuse ‘to go nuclear but
also raise genuine security concerns about the role of the United States in the world’ (Shen

US security concerns were confirmed with the DPRK’s admission that they had been secretly
developing a Highly Enriched Uranium (HEU) Program. This signalled the end of the Agreed
Framework and brought about an eight year period of difficult diplomatic tension,
negotiation, brinkmanship and serious challenges to the US’s superpower role.

The 9/11 attacks and the ensuing War on Terror severely damaged the progress made by the
Clinton Administration. The US also saw a huge wave of anti-Bush and anti-US sentiment
from around the world, which was not helped by the severely unpopular Iraq War. Chapter 1
will develop these ideas and how it affected the North Korean relationship during its analysis of the Bush Administration.

The last five years have also seen some dramatic changes in the geopolitical landscape, with a resurgent China establishing itself as a global force to be reckoned with. It is certain that this will ensure there will be no denuclearisation without the support of China. All of this has served to play into North Korea’s hands in terms of strengthening its bargaining position and what it could gain from the US. Chapter 2 will investigate further into this, looking particularly at North Korean negotiating and diplomatic techniques.

2010: A Year to Forget?

Last year relations between the US and DPRK sunk to a new low. A number of military actions carried out by North Korea forced the Korean peninsula into an extremely volatile situation. For the Obama Administration in Washington, these events presented more questions and pressure about how to deal with the North Korean nuclear problem.

The first major incident occurred on March 26th 2010 with the sinking of the South Korean warship, the Chenoan (the namesake of this paper), which after a ‘subsequent investigation by international experts concluded that a North Korean torpedo, fired from a midget submarine, had sunk the Chenoan.’ (Bluth 2010: 237). Not since the 2006 test firing of the Taepodong-2 missile had an act as serious as this taken place. This had major international ramifications and provoked serious criticism of the DPRK and its actions.

The second incident occurred in late November 2010 where the North shelled the South Korean, Yeongpyeong Island, near the disputed maritime border resulting in a number of civilian and military casualties.

The North describes both incidents ‘as retaliation (for a harmless South Korean military exercise), there is no gainsaying its responsibility for one of the most serious incidents since the end of the Korean War in 1953.’ (The Economist 2010: 18). All of this comes with the revelation earlier in November by the US nuclear scientist Dr. Siegfried Hecker that the North has a fully functional, state of the art, ‘uranium enrichment facilities in the Yongbyon nuclear complex [which] appear to have been unknown to foreign governments.’ (Parry 2010: 34).
The fact the facility was unknown shows the strength of resolve from the regime to become a nuclear state. The deliberate refusal to cooperate with international norms and launch a succession of unprovoked attacks against its neighbour shows that the US really needs to rethink its approach towards the DPRK. As Bluth comments ‘recent events suggest the need for a complete reconsideration of the US-led international approach to North Korea, which until now has focused rather narrowly on the nuclear weapons program.’ (Bluth 2010: 237).

Chapter 3 will investigate the need for a new approach from the Obama administration in more depth. However it should be said now, that more than ever with the supposedly planned succession from Kim Jong-il to Kim Jong-Un, questions about how the younger Kim will view the nuclear ambitions that his father so vehemently champions, come into the fore, particularly as it is unknown how much sway the military has in the country. If 2010 was anything to go by, it is obvious that the North’s threatening behaviour will continue and worsen if left unchecked, which means a new approach is needed now.

It is obvious that there is no clear way forward for Obama and his advisors. In the last ten years, media and political discourse has shaped the US populace into assuming that North Korea is a doomed state, determined to destroy its enemies by any means possible, and is led by a deplorable and ‘evil’ dictator. Despite the latter point probably having an element of truth about it, Bush’s 2002 State of the Union address where the term ‘Axis of Evil’ was coined, in which North Korea was included, has hardly help shape an informed public opinion. It is with all of this that Obama must now contend.

**Previous Research:**

To begin, it would be best to examine more general theories surrounding the debate over containment and engagement. The purpose of this is to show that there are very few alternatives left to the US in terms of its foreign policy approach to the DPRK.

There is a large amount of literature that has been written on coercive diplomacy, which naturally due to the problems of the North Korean nuclear issue, is an approach that lends a lot of plausibility to foreign policy. Jakobsen (1998) defines Coercive Diplomacy as follows:
Coercive diplomacy relies on threats of punishment and/or limited force short of full-scale military operations to persuade an actor to stop and/or undo an action he is already embarked upon’ (Jakobsen 1998: 1).

The US and other Western states have employed this approach in a number of conflicts since the end of the Cold War. However, the surprising fact about its common use is that it quite often fails and has led in a number of cases to the escalation of a conflict (Jakobsen 1998; Art, 2003). The example of the eventual use of a full ground invasion in Kuwait to forcibly oust the occupying Iraqi army is a clear sign that coercive diplomacy failed. Again, if we look at the events currently unfolding in Libya, where arguably the use of coercive diplomacy through air strikes is being used, much like in Bosnia, it is not achieving the desired results (for Gaddafi to relinquish power) that NATO and its allies hoped for when they began the campaign.

There is a clear link with the use of coercive diplomacy and other forms of threat-based foreign policy approaches. Jakobsen comments that coercive diplomacy is a sub branch of what Lawrence Freedman calls ‘strategic coercion’ (Jakobsen 1998: 11). There are a number of alternatives that states can pursue when assessing their desired foreign policy outcomes and ‘vary considerably from case to case’ (Art 2009: 131). Strategic coercion is the umbrella term describing four threat-based approaches: deterrence, compellence, blackmail and coercive diplomacy (Jakobsen 1998; Art 2009). The use of threats against the DPRK and other rogue states has been a common approach favoured by the US and more recently the use of deterrence and containment, which have been more common than coercive diplomacy. The problem with coercive diplomacy is that it relies on the opponent state backing down. If this fails, then the state engaged in this policy will either have to back down and lose face or escalate the conflict. This leads us to determine that ‘Efforts to engage in coercive diplomacy therefore rest heavily upon skill at understanding the nature of the conflict…relying more on diplomatic communication rather than military signals alone.’ (Lauren, Craig and George 2007: 218). In the case of the DPRK pursuing such a policy, as the Clinton Administration did in the beginning of the diplomatic conflict of 1992-1994, it was understandable yet fruitless in resolving the situation as Clinton soon discovered.

The favourable attitude that Western states have for coercive diplomacy can be explained through Schultz’s idea of information flows. Information flows between democracies and allies are regular and observable as Schultz (2001) explains:
‘What foreign decision makers learn from observing the internal communication within…states supplements the information that is conveyed by the external communication of diplomacy and threats…thus…crisis behaviour and outcomes differ systematically between democratic and nondemocratic political systems.’ (Schultz 2001: 57-58).

Clinton opted for coercive diplomacy due to the amount of information he held at the time, however he was dealing with a nondemocratic state, so the amount of internal transparency was limited. He was in a position of “asymmetric information” – ‘A condition of incomplete and asymmetric information arises whenever at least one state had information that others cannot observe regarding the factors which determine its evaluation for war.’ (Schultz 2001: 4). This means that threats are made on the basis of the best knowledge held at the time, and with a regime such as the one in North Korea, any pre-emption or provocation could escalate the conflict further towards an undesired outcome. This shows why other approaches are necessary and should be considered. Having understood this, it is now best to turn to the two areas of theory that this paper is concerned with.

The two main areas of theory put forward by academia on the subject of North Korea are theories of engagement and theories of containment. In terms of North Korea, there seems to be no other area of theory that appears to have been discussed (apart from the one brief exception outlined above). A possible reason for this is the fact that North Korea is a relic of the Cold War, during which the US followed a rigorous policy of containment towards the USSR and its allies, in order to maintain the balance of power and control of the numbers of nuclear weapons.

Containment theory is strongly advocated by those favouring a more aggressive approach. Kang comments:

‘Since 1953 North Korea has faced both a determined South Korean military and, more importantly, US military deployments that at their height comprised 100,000 troops…The peninsula has been stable for fifty years because deterrence has been clear and unambiguous.’ (Kang 2003: 304).

Kang is a champion of containment and deterrence policy, and has placed much emphasis on why he believes it to be the right way forward in this area. From publications such as ‘International Relations Theory and the Second Korean War’ (2003) to his co-authored book,
‘Nuclear North Korea: A Debate on Engagement Strategies’ (2003), Kang systematically sets out his case for containment and explains that ‘although tension is high, the balance of power has been stable’ (Cha and Kang 2003: 55). He continues explaining that US deterrence has meant that ‘both sides have moved cautiously and have avoided major military mobilisations that could spiral out of control…The US deterrent made a North Korean attack useless.’ (Kang 2003: 319).

Essentially, the containment and deterrence approach that Kang so avidly champions can be likened to American realism. Sigal (1998) explains that states that wish to pursue nuclear ambitions, like North Korea, are a threat to the national security of the region and the US, therefore a suitable deterrent must exist in order to avoid such a situation: ‘Domestic structures do not matter; the balance of power governs behaviour.’ (Sigal 1998: 247). However, Sigal is cautious in his description of how realism can be applied. Realists, he says, do not believe in ‘cooperation among rival nations, but they do consider it improbable and precarious. In practice, noncooperation is a premise, not a hypothesis, for many realists.’ (Sigal 1998: 247). Despite this being the case, the Agreed Framework was the first clear evidence that deterrence and the threat of war would not work in the DPRK’s case, and that the Clinton Administration was ‘[convinced]…to abandon the crime-and-punishment approach for good and to engage in sustained diplomatic give-and-take instead.’ (Sigal 1998: 248). The evidence put forward here shows some weakness in Kang’s argument.

The very fact that the US maintains a military presence on the Korean Peninsula is enough for Kang to be convinced that with a continued US effort to force international sanctions through the UN, containment will maintain the status quo and deter the DPRK from any military action. Indeed, there is some support for Kang from other academics. Baldwin advocates a similar approach to Kang and argues in his article ‘The Power of Positive Sanctions’ (1971) that constructive sanctions will achieve the desired result and maintain the balance of power. In Baldwin’s work he frames the idea that Nation A (for the sake of argument the US) needs to promise Nation B (the DPRK) rewards in order to achieve its policy goals (Baldwin 1971: 23), ‘A nation using promises need not expect compliance, but it has an incentive to do so. The point is that A’s responsibilities and planning processes are different when he uses promises rather than threats.’ (Baldwin 1971: 28). This makes for an interesting analysis of the North Korean situation. However, many would baulk at the idea of offering promises to the regime of the DPRK, not least the US. Indeed, Baldwin
acknowledges this fact but he supports his hypothesis with the fact that threats and negative sanctions only serve to alienate the aggressor state and preserve the tough stance of the Nation A (the US). Kang argues that ‘clearly America has reason to mistrust the North. But North Korea also mistrusts the U.S.’ (2003: 320), Baldwin would explain this by saying that the threatening way in which the US conducts its foreign policy towards the DPRK particularly during the Bush Jnr Administration (Rozman 2007), which has yielded few results, is enough evidence to try positive sanctions.

‘B’s immediate reaction to sticks usually differs from his immediate reaction to carrots. Whereas fear, anxiety, and resistance are typical responses to threats, the typical responses to promises are hope, reassurance, and attraction.’ (Baldwin 1971: 32).

Basically, Baldwin says the policy of containment can still be successful whilst maintaining a US deterrent on the peninsula, as long as positive sanctions are pursued.

However, there are limits to this. Firstly, the DPRK is already an isolated state and containment policy succeeds in furthering its isolation. Isolation does not mean that will it stop its threatening behaviour and developing its nuclear capabilities either: ‘The US policy of isolating Pyongyang – which had been in place for three decades following the Korean War – could not alone prevent North Korean from going nuclear’ (Wit, Poneman and Gallucci 2004: 6-7), especially when there is a heavy US military presence on the Peninsula. The DPRK feels threatened and its nuclear ambitions are its own security against forced regime collapse. The nuclear program is ‘designed to do many things: disrupt, distract, garner attention, provide for regime survival, and a means for ensuring leverage.’ (Fuqua 2007: 10).

Secondly, positive sanctions might appear to work as they are achieving the desired results, but there is a problem with this much like the problem with using negative sanctions. Whilst negative sanctions can serve only to alienate an aggressor state and therefore make it more dangerous, the risk of positive sanctions is that making promises to such an unpredictable regime are completely unjustified and could be construed as rewarding bad behaviour. Indeed, despite Baldwin’s convincing argument, it seems a little naïve to assume that cases like the DPRK would change its behaviour, considering the dire economic situation it is in and that once one promise is made and accepted, there is no guarantee that it will be reciprocated. This notion is supported by Drezner (2000): ‘senders proferring carrots must be wary of not receiving the demanded concession after making payment, and receivers must be wary of making concessions before they have received the carrot.’ (Drezner 2000: 193).
Bailey (1994) also argues that sanctions, negative and positive, are likely to fail due to the possibility of China circumventing them; she advocates a much more aggressive approach, ‘North Korea has eaten all of the carrots. Now it is time for the stick’ (Bailey 1994: 277), but there are also limits to this argument as discussed below.

This leads us to engagement theory and Victor Cha. Cha’s main argument is for a type of engagement he calls ‘Hawk Engagement’. Effectively, this is the practice of negotiating with a rival to agree terms of cooperation, which benefit both sides, and should the rival refuse or break their terms then a more aggressive approach is justified, such as containment. Cha explains this as ‘containment-plus-engagement’ (Cha 2002: 43). He argues that an outright policy of containment as Kang advocates, only serves to aggravate tense rival situations:

‘coercion or isolation strategies are not appealing as complements to basic deterrence/defense postures toward the DPRK. Noncommunication, threats, and intimidation only exacerbate preemptive/preventive situations by increasing the North’s sense of vulnerability…On the other hand, engagement (i.e., containment-plus-engagement) ameliorates preemptive/preventive situations.’ (Cha 2002: 68).

This certainly appeals to Baldwin’s suggestion that negative sanctions are unproductive, and that the offer of conditioned promises would result in a more successful outcome. It also renders Bailey’s (1994) assertion unjustified, as a more aggressive threatening approach by pre-empting bad behaviour through the reactivation of ‘Team Spirit’ (1994: 282) would only exacerbate tensions.

There is a fair amount of evidence from previous attempts to negotiate with North Korea that engagement works (Sigal 1998). It has been argued by Shen that the DPRK’s ‘nuclear wherewithal [is] merely a bargaining chip.’ (Shen 2009: 176). There is truth in this assertion as can be seen from the success of the Agreed Framework, which was in place for just short of ten years, and then the later success from the agreement of the DPRK to the six-party talks. It is clear that the regime was and still is in dire need of economic support which the US can give, and has given in past agreements, and so by engaging with the leadership on this in exchange for a deal on its nuclear programme, there is clearly enough past evidence to show that engagement works (Michishita 2009).

Analysis surrounding engagement toward North Korea is quite often perceived as appeasement, ‘The North Koreans may perceive US openness as a sign of weakness that can
be exploited’ (Davies 2007a: 479). However, many agree with Cha and that engagement should be the policy to follow (Fuqua 2007; Wit, Poneman and Gallucci 2004). Wit (2007) also comments that engagement and a policy of negotiation would benefit US foreign policy interests, a notion also supported by Scalapino (1998). Although all of these academics support engagement theory, they do not identify with Cha’s Hawk version of engagement. This is where the claims of engagement as appeasement are justified and highlight the limits of following a policy that relies on reciprocal agreements. Hawk Engagement would serve to show that negotiation would work, as long as it is backed up by conditions and not unconditional promises.

Referring to the previous point, Cha calls his approach - Hawk Engagement - and argues that it must be just that. Leaders must remain ‘hawkish’ otherwise they will be characterised as ‘doves’, which can have devastating affects on their re-election chances, ‘Historically…it has been argued that a number of leaders have been deselected from power for cooperating with a rival state…Kim Dae-Jung’s “Sunshine Policy” toward North Korea speeded his removal from power.’ (Colaresi 2004: 555). Baldwin’s positive sanction argument seems to lose momentum here as well, due to the fact that it relies on a rival state upholding a promise on the condition of a reward. North Korea’s withdrawal from the Agreed Framework and the NPT shows there is little evidence that it will keep its side of a bargain. For Colaresi, unconditioned engagement would have devastating affects on leaders who are dovish, ‘it is likely that leaders will be punished politically for overcooperating/undercompeting within a rivalry. More hawkish elites may be able to pry dovish leaders out of power if they give more than they get in an international compromise with a rival.’ (Colaresi 2004: 566). This is further supported by Drezner’s work on economic inducements. Using his analysis from the 1980s onwards, it is clear to see that inducements whether as a form of positive sanction or as part of an agreement resulting from pursuing an engagement strategy, do not always have the desired effects:

‘The United States greased the wheels of the Camp David accords by promising billions in aid to Egypt and Israel. Frequently, however, carrots are spurned…The Reagan administration’s attempt to trade arms for hostages with Iran did not produce substantial concessions…Pakistan refused US offers of aid in return for not conducting nuclear tests…’ (Drezner 2000: 188-189).
This strengthens the position of Cha’s argument for a different type of approach even further. Hawk Engagement is the most plausible approach left to the US in order for it to achieve its goals.

There is perhaps one final area that is worth comment. Kang, having been a fierce backer of containment strategies, appears to change his mind in his 2004 co-authored article with Cha, ‘A Debate on North Korea’ and begins to explain his reasoning for engagement:

‘if one looks at the North’s economic and political behaviour in a broader more historical context, rather than fixating only on military deployments, there is a story of slow, plodding reform to be told. As a result…engagement works with the North. It sends the right signals to the insecure regime that the United States, South Korea, and Japan are interested in trading the North’s proliferation threat for a path of economic reform and integration.’ (Cha and Kang 2004a: 232).

This highlights obvious inconsistency in his work and further discredits the case for containment which appears, from Kang’s own admittance, to be too military based. It also strengthens Sigal’s point that traditional American realism will not work in the case of the DPRK.

Having discussed the two competing theories of US Foreign Policy approaches, and the arguments for or against them, it is clear that Cha’s theory of Hawk Engagement is the better of the two, as it has elements of both approaches and this will be argued as such throughout this paper. Colaresi comments ‘that two leaders sitting on opposite ends of a rivalry are most likely to cooperate with each other when they are relatively secure that cooperation will be reciprocated.’ (Colaresi 2004: 567). Thus endorsing the ‘containment-plus-engagement’ (hereafter referred to as Hawk Engagement) approach.

Analysis of Theory

There are a number of points that must be taken into account when assessing the best policy approach that should be pursued by the Administration in Washington. The fractious relationship between the DPRK and the US stretches back over fifty years. However, this paper will concentrate on the rapidly changing relationship over the last two decades, with particular interest paid to the last ten years. There have been many developments in the
relations between the DPRK and the US over the last twenty years, not all of which have been beneficial for either side in leading them closer to achieving their individual goals. Despite this, one thing remains constant: The secretive, reactive and aggressive nature of the North Korean regime has not changed and indeed has become more erratic over the last two years. This makes the policy decision making process much more difficult, as there is no clear indication on how the DPRK may react.

This point highlights the limitations of previous policy approaches, particularly the one followed by the Bush Jnr Administration. In this paper, there will be a strong focus on the failure of the 2001-2009 Washington Administration to achieve its foreign policy goals in the DPRK. This will serve to underline the necessity for policy continuity across future Administrations, and the need for US Presidents’ and their advisors to understand the coercive and threatening behaviour of the North Korean regime.

In terms of policy analysis, the paper will look at the successes and failures of policy preference. The main criteria for judging this will be the degree of reciprocity received by either side during negotiations and after agreements were signed. Other criteria that will be used to assess policy success or failure will be the global geopolitical climate surrounding the background to many of the decisions taken by the Bush Jnr Administration. The impact that 9/11 and the ensuing War on Terror had on US foreign policy, severely affected the approach taken towards the DPRK and ultimately brought about a prolonged series of provocations and threats from both sides.

Analysis of individual policy preferences themselves, rather than the background leading to the decisions, will also be investigated. Theories of containment were present in US foreign policy for the entirety of the Cold War and were credited for having a strong degree of success, however the collapse of the USSR changed all that. The DPRK became more isolated as China and Russia deserted it, and so its drive to acquire nuclear weapons became its sole method to gain a seat at the negotiating table with the US. This has prompted the US to reconsider its approach that containment alone would not work. The analysis of containment and deterrence pursued by the Bush Jnr Administration shows this and emphasises the need of Washington to try something different; in this case, engagement.

The method through which policy is analysed will compliment the theoretical framework of the paper and will help to expand the argument of the need for a new approach.
assesssment of the decision-making processes behind policy-making preferences, the factors that surround them and analysis of the approaches themselves, will further help to clarify the arguments made throughout each section of the paper.

1. The Failure of the Bush Administration

The accession of George W Bush to the Presidency in the US was at a time when relations with the DPRK were relatively uneventful. Despite the likelihood that a Republican President would not see the benefits in policies such as the Agreed Framework, the administration opted to continue dialogue with the regime. The major turning point in Bush-era relations with the DPRK and indeed the rest of the world was the simultaneous attacks on the World Trade Centre and the Pentagon by Al-Qaeda on September 11th 2001. The ensuing ‘Axis of Evil’ speech and the DPRK’s inclusion at the State of the Union Address in January 2002, pushed relations further to the edge of confrontation. The result of anti-DPRK discourse emanating from Washington, led to the breakdown in the Agreed Framework and the first and only withdrawal of a state from the NPT. What had taken so long for the Clinton Administration to achieve had taken a matter of months for the Bush Administration to destroy.

The policy post 9/11 and for much of his first term followed by the Bush administration, was one of rigid containment and sanctions. It was argued that this was justified considering the revelation of the Highly Enriched Uranium (HEU) processing plant, which had been developed in secret and directly violated terms of the 1994 agreement (Laney and Shaplen 2003). This policy was nothing new, it had already been seen against Iraq and there had been a similar push for sanctions with Iran. Cumings (2009) comments that:

‘Bush broke the precious piece of pottery called the 1994 Framework Agreement, according to which the United States had agreed to supply fuel oil and build light-water reactors in exchange for North Korea’s cessation of nuclear weapons development.’ (Cumings 2009: 288)

This reinforces Sigal’s point again that the American realist doctrine does not work. Deterrence hadn’t achieved anything in fifty years so why would it now? One possible answer to this is that Bush and fellow members of his administration (notably Vice President Dick Cheney) were committed neo-conservatives and that ‘one school saw the only situation
of the nuclear crisis as sanctions to pressure North Korea into a deal or...capitulation.’ (Rozman 2007: 2).

The other issue at stake here is the principle of pre-emption. The Global War on Terror was characterised by pre-empting terrorist attacks through the use of intelligence sharing and military superiority. The way in which the Iraq War was handled is a clear-cut case of a pre-emptive doctrine in action, as the US and its allies invaded in order to be one step ahead of Saddam Hussein and his alleged development of nuclear weapons. Cumings argues that ‘preemption [sic] is “anticipatory self-defense”, that is, the right of the United States to attack a country that it thinks could attack it first.’ (Cumings 2004: 99). In the case of the DPRK this is simply absurd. There is very little chance that its missile capabilities have reached the point where the US is under threat. However, from the point that President Bush’s gaze turned to the peninsula, he was committed to regime change justified through pre-emption.

This represented a serious problem for the region, if the US did invade then the ensuing war could be catastrophic with General Gary Luck estimating that it could cost ‘one million and one trillion. That is the cost of going to war...one million casualties and one trillion dollars’ (Cha and Kang 2003: 6). The threats and name calling coming from Washington, (at one point is was reported that Bush had been ‘hurling various insults at Kim Jong II (“pygmy”), and telling Washington insider Bob Woodward that he “loathed” Kim and wanted to topple his regime.’ (Cumings 2009: 289), hardly give a reassuring picture of the policy making process in the White House. Bluth comments further on this:

‘putting aside the fact that Bush’s approach to North Korea substituted name-calling...it failed by not providing a coherent basis of policy...precipitating the end of the 1994 “agreed framework”...This kind of approach...entails significant risks, insofar as it advocates total economic sanctions in to bring about regime change – an objective unlikely to be achieved, given China’s refusal to cut off support for North Korea.’ (Bluth 2010: 239).

The Bush Administration failed in its policy approach towards North Korea for four main reasons. Firstly, it failed because it reverted back to a previous policy of deterrence and containment that had been in place since the Armistice was signed in 1953. Secondly, it failed to grasp that the DPRK had been on the receiving end of hard line Washington rhetoric for half a century, and that no matter how many threats were made, the DPRK knew Washington would not and could not invade (Cumings 2009). Thirdly, the DPRK was not
going to stop developing its nuclear capabilities unless significant reassurances were made that its demands for economic and national security were met. Fourthly, it failed to recognise the need for a multilateral solution (Moltz and Quinones 2004).

The Administration appeared to be so caught up in its excitement to push forward with its doctrines of pre-emption, liberal interventionism and regime change, it appears to have forgotten that none of this was ever going to work. To fully understand this one must look back on the success of both the Bush Snr and Clinton Presidencies. It is clear that when one looks back on these, it can be seen that Bush unequivocally failed to understand the needs of the DPRK and what it wants (Kim J 2009).

The Presidencies of Bush Snr and Clinton marked a sharp change in the containment policy followed by the US. The collapse of the USSR and the end of the Cold War meant that there was a shift in strategy, which ultimately resulted with the removal of the US nuclear deterrent on the Peninsula. Indeed, the DPRK found itself in an increasingly isolated position with the collapse of funding and support from Russia, ‘By the early 1990s North Korea was faced with a significantly altered global reality and 44,500 US troops on the peninsula. The collapse of the USSR had a catastrophic effect on the DPRK’s economy.’ (French 2005: 197). It is this fact that clearly marked the turning point in policy. The DPRK if threatened now with invasion, severe sanctions and nuclear war, would be even more unpredictable in an effort to protect its national security. President Bush Snr’s administration understood this crucial point, whilst his son’s did not. Provocation and pre-emption could only serve to escalate the situation and there were signs of this happening through the uncertain period of 1990-1993. French comments that ‘By 1990 the belief that the threat of war had receded was gone and the fact of North Korea’s nuclear programme, its state of development and ultimate date of deployment were major issues for Washington.’ (French 2005: 195).

Both Bush Snr and Clinton are the only Presidents to successfully achieve anything close to what could be called normal diplomatic relations with North Korea. They decided, Clinton in particular, that a military option was no longer viable or a safe course of action to pursue (French 2005; Cumings 2009) and a policy of engagement was put forward as the most favoured option.

Containment as proved before the USSR collapse and during the George W Bush Presidency, is too fixated on isolating the threat that the DPRK poses and completely ignores the realities the country faces. Kang, in his 2003 article, argues that a military deterrent is more than
enough to contain the nuclear threat to the region. The evidence that can be drawn from the period between 2002-2003 clearly shows the failure of isolation tactics, military threats, economic sanctions or otherwise. ‘During the Clinton administration America effectively gave up the military option again Pyongyang and settled for a strategy of engagement’ (French 2005: 198).

The key to understanding the DPRK’s behaviour that the Bush Administration so badly overlooked is to examine the whole picture. The regime is in serious economic decline and it needs concessions and aid from countries such as the US to guarantee its security. The collapse of the USSR took away this security. The nuclear program ensures this security (Cha and Kang 2003) and acts as a negotiating tactic (Fuqua 2007). If the US could provide this aid, then it could concentrate on stopping the nuclear programme. Engagement satisfies both of these goals and still allows the US to put its priority of nuclear disarmament and non-proliferation at the forefront of the process.

‘American Policy should be geared to US objectives not North Korean objectives. There, all ambiguity disappears, as the US objective is clear: to avoid having nuclear weapons in the hands of the North Koreans’ (Wit, Poneman and Gallucci 2004: 383).

The period leading up to the signing of the Agreed Framework saw a number of bilateral meetings between Washington and the DPRK, and it also signified one of the closest points to the outbreak of war between the two in May 1993. The UN Security Council urged the DPRK to adhere to its responsibilities to the 1992 North-South Denuclearisation Statement and to cooperate with the IAEA (International Atomic Energy Agency) (UN SC/825 1993). This added pressure forced the DPRK into talks with former President Jimmy Carter, acting as an intermediary and Robert Gallucci acting on behalf of the US, leading to the signing of the Agreed Framework in October 1994. It set out a number of guarantees that would satisfy both side’s demands including the all-important economic assistance the regime so badly needed. Although both sides had actively engaged in negotiating an uneasy but ‘Cold Peace’ (Wit, Poneman and Gallucci 2004: 372) it was the closest return to a secure situation for sometime. The Agreed Framework brought an end to the:

‘bureaucratic infighting between hawks and doves…US strategy might best be described as “one of drift punctuated by spasms of zigzagging”, in the words of a State Department official who favoured negotiations with the North.’ (Cumings 2004: 45).
However, the Bush policy of threats, deterrence and containment did not completely jeopardise future possibilities of policy reversal. Indeed, after the 2006 nuclear test, Bush Jnr suddenly reversed his policy to one of engagement which Cumings describes as ‘Bush’s malign neglect — as if by magic — turned to benign engagement, and in February 2007 Washington and Pyongyang worked out yet another denuclearization agreement.’ (Cumings 2009: 289). This is a clear example of how Pyongyang used its nuclear capability to force Washington into talks out of fear for its national security, it also shows that engagement works. It is clear that in the past ‘by rejecting bilateral talks with North Korea and its general approach to the nuclear issue, Washington had considerably reduced the available policy instruments at its disposal’ (Bluth 2005: 99). The six-party talks were an integral part of securing the 2007 agreement, the Bush Administration quickly realised that multilateral talks with the support of China were essential to denuclearising the peninsula. China’s understanding and close relationship with the DPRK certainly helped in this respect, McVadon comments that:

‘a well-connected Chinese interlocutor said that the development of nuclear weapons by North Korea was highly undesirable but understandable (because of the threat from the United States) and not directly threatening to China…[but] demanding North Korea do everything at once, up front, will not work, China warned’ (McVadon 2010: 147-149).

It is clear that through this analysis on the Bush Administration, and contrasting it to those of his father’s and President Clinton, that containment does not work with the DPRK. It is too focused on military and economic sanctions, which cripple the country and force regime change provoking aggressive reactions from the regime. Indeed Huntley (2004) comments further on this: ‘the Bush administration's…approach…[permitted an]…emergence of exactly the kind of threat President Bush pledged in his State of the Union addresses to prevent.’ (Huntley 2004: 84). From the build up to the Agreed Framework, the ensuing 9 years of relative stability and the six-party talks, there is a clear-cut case for following a policy of engagement. The actions of the administration after the nuclear test in 2006 highlighted its failure it also showed the inability of the US to manage its foreign affairs during a sustained period of extreme anti-US and anti-Bush sentiment echoing throughout the world. ‘Bush [found] himself having to manage two very difficult relationships on the Korean peninsula, amid the mammoth task of occupying and stabilising Iraq, and a failed search for Osama bin
Laden.’ (Cumings 2004: 101). There is a lot for President Obama to draw from the mistakes of George W Bush; certainly a more coherent and stable policy must be agreed upon in Washington (Jung 2005; Yeo 2006) with the guarantee of regional support before any attempts at resuming dialogue can begin.

The next chapter will investigate and analyse North Korean negotiating behaviour, discourse and rhetoric, in an effort to understand the key characteristics that are essential for the future policy makers, and the Obama Administration to take into account, when considering its next steps with the DPRK.

2. Understanding North Korea: Negotiating Behaviour, Discourse and Rhetoric

The way the DPRK behaves provokes some very interesting analysis. The purpose of this chapter is to investigate whether the approach employed by the regime is rational and is worth being taken more seriously by the US, in its attempts to encourage it to disarm and halt nuclear development.

The DPRK is all too often characterised as being led by an irrational and insane tyrant (some of which, in terms of abuse to his people might be true). Indeed, the Western media can hardly be blamed for characterising Kim Jong-il and his regime as such, due to the sporadic torrent of threatening outbursts that appear from the Korean Central News Agency (KCNA) and the foreign and defense ministries, which hardly help to stop this branding. Perhaps the most famous outburst was that of January 1999 when the DPRK threatened to turn the Korean Peninsula into a ‘Sea of Fire’ (BBC News 1999).

This type of rhetoric hardly serves to help the DPRK’s cause, however as Oh and Hassig argue, there seems to be a similar pattern on behaviour that the regime follows depending on the situation at the time:

‘The regime alternates between a hard line, which is conducted by canceling agreements, issuing threats, and withdrawing from dialogue, and a softer line in which officials agree to resume dialogue – at the price of requiring their interlocutors to modify previous demands and offer additional rewards.’ (Oh and Hassig 2010: 89).

This is a clear explanation of a negotiating strategy that does not conform to the international norms that the US and others are used to dealing with. Past experience during the Clinton
Administration should have been enough for Bush to understand that this was the favoured approach of the DPRK.

The first point to understand when looking at the negotiating strategy, is that North Korea is a country that is under threat and is surrounded by its enemies, as well as a heavy US military presence. Being very much a relic of the Cold War, it is no wonder that it feels threatened. Secondly, as mentioned previously, the creation of its nuclear program is not only to serve as a deterrent to the US and others from invading and so protect its national security, but also because ‘North Korea regards its nuclear weapons as its sole geopolitical playing card, to be used as a means for extracting economic and other concessions, not for actual employment.’ (Fuqua 2007: 3).

If we take a deeper look into the North Korean regimes thinking from an analysis of the discourse that comes out through the KCNA, some conclusions can be drawn. In most press releases which refer to the US or South Korea, a similar collection of phrases and words are used to describe them. For example in a recent press release, there is frequent reference to the US as ‘Imperialists’ and the South Korean’s as ‘puppet warmongers’, and that its response will include such actions as ‘merciless counteraction as engulfing Seoul in sea of flames, whereby to smash every move for confrontation with unimaginable strategy and tactics.’ (KCNA 27th February 2011). We must bear in mind that this is the reaction to the annual Joint US-ROK (Republic of Korea) military and naval exercises that have as yet drawn no retaliatory action from the DPRK. It is easy to see from this example and countless others, that the KCNA is not short of aggressive language, but are these just empty threats?

To answer this we must take a look at the events leading up to the Yeongpyeong shelling in November 2010. In essence much of the rhetoric that comes from the regime are empty threats, because they know that if they actually attacked with any meaningful force, not only the US but also it is likely that China (their only long standing ally), Japan and Russia would wade in to a potential conflict as well. However, there have been a number of occasions in the last twenty years that prove an exception to the rule and have succeeded in bringing the US to the negotiating table, in order to stop any further escalation. The most recent of these was the revelation of a fully operational and advanced Uranium Enrichment facility at the Yongbyon nuclear complex, a violation of UN resolution 1874 (Solomon and Entous 2010). A few days later, the North responded to international condemnation by shelling Yeongpyeong Island. This along with the sinking of the Chenoan and the sporadic nuclear and missile tests
of the last two years, are clear examples of brinkmanship and crisis diplomacy.

The use of brinkmanship and crisis diplomacy in the DPRK's negotiating behaviour is a key aspect to forcing the US into discussions (Snyder 1999). It is clear that there is an escalation in violence of each attack until it gets the response it wants. The sinking of the Chenoan is without a doubt the most serious. From the media reports and the odd video that makes it on to YouTube, the economic situation is dire; the DPRK knows that the US knows this, and therefore these attacks can be viewed as attempts by a desperate regime to cling on to survival (Park 1998). However there is more to this, as Snyder concludes ‘Crisis diplomacy, a highly effective characteristic of North Korea’s negotiating style, is derived from North Korea’s structural position as a nation that must force its way to the top of the negotiating agenda with the United States.’ (Snyder 1999: 69). The US obviously cannot ignore such behaviour; its commitment to non-proliferation and the global reduction of nuclear arms is central to its foreign affairs mindset. Perhaps a more chilling side to this is that if the US does not engage with the DPRK and give it economic assistance, it will go down a much more dangerous route by selling its nuclear technology to other aspiring nuclear powers. Indeed it ‘is stoking new fears that Pyongyang could emerge as the new engine for global proliferation.’ (Solomon and Entous 2010: para. 5).

Neo-Conservatives and committed Realists would argue that on past experience, negotiating with the DPRK is simply not at option; why negotiate when their behaviour is so aggressive and unpredictable? Kang (2003) would certainly argue that deterrence has worked for fifty years so why change the approach? The answer to these two questions is obvious, increased isolation and containment would only escalate the chance of a more dangerous nuclear threat from the DPRK due to it being left unchecked; certainly any move to return US nuclear weapons to the peninsula would be seen as a threat to its national security. Kang, in the same article, does give some appreciation to the fact that the DPRK leadership’s foreign policy approach could be a rational one, the ability of the regime to survive for so long points to both ‘Kim Il-Sung and Kim Jong-il [as] very capable leaders. All the evidence points to their ability to make sophisticated decisions and to manage palace, domestic, and international politics with extreme precision.’ (Kang 2003: 311). This is further supported by evidence from the switch in support from Russia (post Cold War) and China, with no aid from Russia and increased emphasis on trade with South Korea from both (Morgan 1998). It is this rationale and determination that means the DPRK should be taken seriously, and that engagement is what it needs and is the path the US should follow.
Snyder (1999) argues that the use of brinkmanship and crisis diplomacy is all part of an overall goal to extract the concessions it wants due to what it stands to lose from the stopping of its nuclear programme (Bennett 2004; Carpenter 2004). Indeed, brinkmanship is not confined to just displays of violence and threats, but is also quite evident at the negotiating table itself (Oh and Hassig 2010). An analysis of the negotiations, which formed the Agreed Framework has been carried out by Snyder and Wit, Poneman and Gallucci (2004) and point to a more deeply thought out North Korean negotiating process, and the effective use of a variety of tactics to get the concessions it wants.

Firstly, Snyder points out that the DPRK negotiator needs to be understood as an individual and what the restraints are on him; US negotiators must recognise him as a:

‘counterpart who must reconcile three worlds: the world of the North Korean ideal represented by the official propaganda line of the DPRK; the real, unarticulated situation in North Korea; and the patiently hostile, mysterious, and even enticing outside world in which the North Korean negotiator must work to represent and defend his country’s national interests.’ (Snyder 1999: 41).

This is a crucial point and highlights the often restricted and rigid way in which the regime operates; the limits on DPRK diplomats are nothing like any other. The usual negotiating norms that Americans are used to are not applicable during such talks forcing the US to think differently. It appears from Snyder’s analysis that American negotiators are too linear in their approach (1999: 62).

Secondly, the tactics employed in these negotiations are aggressive and defensive from the beginning: demands for unilateral concessions, bluffing, threats, manufacturing deadlines and threats to walk away are common. In the negotiations leading up to the signing of the Agreed Framework, there were a number of such tactics including long periods of deadlock and last minute decision changes, which one suspects as Pyongyang stringing the US along until the last minute (Wit, Poneman and Gallucci 2004). These tactics are clearly designed to keep the US on edge and keep the talks firmly in the DPRK’s control, ‘crisis-oriented “guerilla” tactics to foster an atmosphere designed to weaken the opponent’s position and extract concessions’ (Snyder 1999: 44).

The final point is concerned more with the withdrawal from the NPT and breakdown in the Agreed Framework and the six-party talks. The termination of such talks and agreements is
another clear example of the rationale behind North Korean Behaviour. Both Cha and Kang comment on separate occasions (Cha 2002; Cha and Kang 2004a) that one or both countries often provoke these acts. In terms of the 2003 breakdown, this can be attributed to neglect of the framework by the US (by both Clinton and Bush) and by the threatening stance adopted by a post-9/11 US, ‘A North Korea that feels threatened and perceives the US administration to be actively attempting to increase pressure on it is unlikely to trust the United States.’ (Cha and Kang 2004a: 237). Thus we have a return to the status quo where the DPRK is again in a position where it will practice acts of brinkmanship as was seen throughout last year.

There is clear rational thinking behind the DPRK’s foreign policy and the allegations of erratic violence, as the actions of an irrational insane leader cannot be taken seriously. There is a pattern that has emerged over the last twenty years that is completely dictated by the willingness of the US to engage and uphold its end of the agreement. Of course, this is not to say that the DPRK is completely innocent in not honouring its own commitments, as we have seen in the recent past. This pattern relies on the DPRK committing an act of provocation, resulting in international condemnation and increased pressure on the US and the regional powers to intervene. If this does not happen, then the pattern repeats itself until the DPRK gets the attention it craves. There is one obvious and indisputable fact that emerges from this: ‘Pyongyang [has chosen] Washington as the guarantor of its security and the supplier of economic assistance’ (Park 1998: 3).

The challenge for the Obama Administration is to accept this fact and realise the DPRK wants to normalise diplomatic relations (Cha 2009; Wright, 2011), and for the US to recognise its existence as a legitimate state. The latter is unlikely to happen in the near future, but what is apparent is that reacting to the DPRK’s behaviour with the same policy of preemption and increased containment, as Bush Jnr did, will only heed progress. The next chapter will investigate the possibilities of Obama using Hawk Engagement as a policy and will also explain other approaches.

3. What now for Obama? Hawk Engagement and other policy alternatives?

Taking the evidence presented in the last two chapters, we can see that there is a large amount for President Obama and his foreign policy advisors to draw upon when determining their next step in policy with the DPRK. The mistakes of his predecessor should lead Obama in the right direction. However, as yet it is unclear what the Obama foreign policy looks like. At the time of writing, the administration is approaching an election year and at the same
time there are revolutions in North Africa and the Middle East against repressive states, not wholly different from North Korea in terms of despotism. There is still no clear foreign policy line followed by Obama that will give clues to his handling of these revolutions and of the DPRK in the future (Kim J 2009). His task is now made harder by the regaining of the House of Representatives by the Republicans in the November 2010 mid-term elections. Any clear break with policy followed by the Bush Administration will now need much more bipartisan support to clear the House.

The major issue that Obama must now contend with is how he should go about framing his policy; either just nuclear disarmament or nuclear disarmament with eventual regime change. Bush, as is well documented, considered the latter. There is still an argument that this should be the foremost policy goal, but the way it is done is a source for debate. Bluth (2010) certainly advocates this goal through the use of prolonged engagement however, more hard line academics such as Bailey (1994) and Howard (2004), argue that this should be done by force. This issue is further complicated by the succession of Kim Jong-Un and the further problem that this represents. There is every reason to imagine a smooth transition from Kim Jong-il to his son Kim Jong-Un, but there is the danger that the ‘Songun’ or ‘Military First’ policy that Kim Jong-il has implemented will mean that more power might rest with the military than previously thought (Pollack 2009a). This could lead to the much younger and inexperienced Kim being used by a ‘puppet’ by a more experienced hard line DPRK military leadership. This hypothesis certainly lends more support to Howard’s (2004) article, ‘Why not Invade North Korea?’

Despite this fact, there is a clear way for Obama to realise either goal. Cha’s Hawk Engagement theory is the obvious solution in order to do this. Hawk Engagement provides a basis through which concessions and promises are set to a number of conditions with failure to adhere resulting in a harsh penalty - ‘containment-plus-engagement’ (Cha 2002: 43; Lee and Moon 2003). This incorporates ideas from Baldwin’s Positive Sanctions article and shows that with some perseverance, a state will respond better to promises rather than threats. There is some strong evidence in support of the engagement argument (Fuqua 2007; Wit 2007), which comes from the success of former ROK (Republic of Korea) President Kim Dae Jung’s ‘Sunshine Policy’. As Cumings (2004) comments ‘the enormous progress toward reconciliation between North and South Korea, propelled mightily by Kim Dae Jung’s leadership’ (Cumings 2004: 100) was a result of a fresh engagement effort and led to the
leaders from both states meeting in June 2000 (Cha 2002). There were noticeable benefits that resulted from the Sunshine Policy, but ultimately as Colaresi (2004) points out Kim Dae Jung failed to win another term as President. This shows that unconditional engagement factored around promises cannot work if there is to be consistency of policy over a sustained period. Leaders who are ‘dovish’ in their approach with the DPRK, will be seen as unpopular at home. In other words engagement might be considered as appeasement.

Obama cannot afford such unpopularity, particularly with the domestic climate he must deal with and this is why Hawk Engagement should be adopted. The reasons for this are multifaceted: Firstly, it will characterise Obama as a ‘hawk’ playing a ‘doves’ game, secondly, it will show a marked move from the confusion and mixed messages left by Bush and thirdly, it will place the US in stronger position in the region and contribute to a multilateral approach that is key in these negotiations: ‘one major development of a successful policy toward North Korea is a consistently engaged Unites States that develops a coherent strategy toward the region.’ (Cha and Kang 2004a: 254). There is another reason for this as well. The adoption of engagement by ‘hawks’ will help to build a ‘coalition for punishment tomorrow’ (Cha 2002: 71) should the need arise. If other states like China, Russia and Japan support such a policy, the position of the US is secured and the threat that the DPRK potentially poses to the region is further diminished.

It an interesting development, David Kang’s support of containment and deterrence changes in 2003 and he makes a case for his support for engagement. This change shows that containment has failed and is a relic of the Cold War. There are now very few academics that support this doctrine. Kang now supports engagement as a means for regime change, (Cha and Kang 2004b) along with Bluth (2008 2010). This renders assertions of war and invasion (Howard 2004) completely unrealistic, and would certainly alienate an already wary China from being part of any future negotiating process. These are clear building blocks for future cooperation, especially as China realises that ‘the Obama administration is not prepared to repeat past policy mistakes with the North, and that it will not react to every tactical shift in North Korean policy’ (Pollack 2009a: 165).

Despite all of this, there is another problem that has come to the fore in this debate, which is wholly concerned with the internal and domestic situation that the country now faces. As mentioned a number of times in this paper, the issue of the succession and the nature that it might take could change the situation considerably. There is very little known about the day-
to-day running of the country from Pyongyang, but more sceptical academics such as Evans Revere, make a clear case that the increased fiery rhetoric and violent acts over the past 12 months are due to instability at the very centre of the regime (Revere 2010). His argument suggests that it is the internal problems surrounding the succession, failed economic policy and the increased reliance on foreign aid which has caused this flurry of events, rather than a rational policy to get the US to cooperate. The question here for Obama is whether these internal rumblings are part of a rational DPRK policy as is being suggested by the majority of academia, or are they as linked to internal problems as Revere suggests? Sanctions he says, have brought increased pressure on the regime and should be followed up with more, as they bring further internal uncertainty and unrest:

‘the North’s rediscovery of the value of dialogue is no less the result of strong and effective multilateral sanctions, the North’s growing isolation, a badly faltering economy, a failed currency revaluation, serious inflation and uncertainty in the DPRK about its future.’ (Revere 2010: 188).

It would be useful to consider the possible benefits these facts could have on US policy when a decision has been made.

There is no doubt that an invasion, preemptive strategy or any other act of war, would have any support from the region and would probably (with some support of the ROK), be a unilateral US effort. It must also be noted and recognised that there is scope here to foster regime change (if that is the goal), thus bringing down the danger of the nuclear threat through increased isolation and containment. Throughout this paper, it has been argued that containment has not worked and will not work at unilateral level, but what about the possibility of multilateral containment?

The importance of the US working with a multilateral view to its policy is extremely important in this instance, because like engagement, there must be a broad policy agreement in the region in order to meet long-term goals. For Obama to go down the route of multilateral containment, he would need the support of China and Russia in order to impose and regulate sanctions. China provides the DPRK with a good level of diplomatic and foreign aid, so it would have to commit to stopping this in order for this policy to work. Unfortunately, the sheer amount of diplomatic dispute and rivalry between the US and China, would render such a policy completely unworkable, as there is no guarantee of ensuring that
China would stop aiding Pyongyang. Yet again, the argument as argued by Cossa (2009) for containment even at a multilateral level, appears unworkable due to its reliance of agreement and measures of regulations between the US and China.

Obama must surely recognise the merits of Hawk Engagement. The adoption of Cha’s theory in its whole form or a variant of it, would be the surest way to ensure a multilateral strategy. The importance of China in this should not be underestimated, ‘The six-party negotiations, as virtually all member nations have admitted, have already demonstrated the weight and influence of Chinese diplomacy’ (Ponamarev 2010: 19). There is also clear support from the US population for something to be done about the threat the DPRK poses; this would certainly divert attention from the domestic situation for Obama and demonstrate the power of the ‘rally around the flag affect’ (Davies 2007b). Whilst this may be beneficial for Obama, there is no doubt that a return to the six-party talks with a fresh attitude and policy outlook, is what is now badly needed due to the HEU revelations in 2010, ‘the US has no choice but to directly sit down with the North Koreans to try and find new diplomatic tools with which to contain Pyongyang’s nuclear activities’ (Solomon and Entous 2010: para. 26).

There is one other area that must be mentioned, which returns this paper to the regime change debate, that Obama may or may not wish to pursue. Previously regime change had been discussed in terms of containment but not in terms of engagement. Bluth (2010) suggests that engagement is the means through which to achieve regime change, which he claims is the desired US result:

‘The United States and the Republic of Korea should consider setting a framework for a controlled regime transition...Unification is the only viable solution for North Korea because it is the only path toward regime change that has legitimacy, and it is the only way for North Korea to acquire the political leadership, the managerial expertise, and the financial resources that it needs to extricate itself from the parlous state in which it has become entrapped.’ (Bluth 2010: 243).

Regime change achieved through the means of unification, is an ambitious policy for all parties who would be included. However, there is a major problem with Bluth’s policy suggestion. There appears to be a complete disregard for the nuclear issue. Surely, the DPRK’s nuclear capabilities should be tackled first and before there is any policy shift to regime change?
The nuclear problem is without a doubt a more pressing issue and should be treated as such, but it should be seen as ‘one piece of a larger whole’ (Fuqua 2007: XV). In other words, it should be Obama’s primary focus, but with a view to expanding the policy once an agreement on nuclear strategy has been reached. Only after this, should Bluth’s policy suggestion be adopted and only after wide consultation with China and the ROK, who would have to shoulder the majority of the financial and possible humanitarian burden that unification would inevitably bring. In addition, there is no indication that China is prepared to agree to such a policy, although Pollack comments ‘few leaders in Beijing continue to see North Korea as an asset’ (Pollack 2009a: 163). Even Bluth (2010) acknowledges that the chance of China’s agreement is unlikely.

The Obama Administration is in a position that no other administration has been in. It is fortunate in the fact that it can now determine its own policy direction and should make every effort to do so, in order to quash the DPRK’s nuclear ambitions. As part of this, it should make a concerted effort to work with China on the best policy – Hawk Engagement. By employing this policy and making a concerted effort to keep this consistent through the frame of the six-party talks (Cha 2009), the US stands to gain nuclear disarmament along with multilateral support (Pollack 2009b) and resulting in the DPRK achieving the economic assistance it craves (Sigal 2010). From this point onwards, if Obama wins a second term in the White House the regime itself can be tackled.

**Conclusion**

This paper has undertaken a study of US Foreign policy approaches towards the DPRK’s nuclear ambitions. The paper has sought to highlight the issues surrounding the approach taken by the Bush Administration and its predecessors, notably, Clinton’s attempts at coercive diplomacy in the early 1990s - a policy decision that led to the DPRK beating the US at its own game (Drennan 2003). There has also been an effort to understand and investigate new approaches, which it has been argued, should be adopted by the current administration.

Chapter 1 has explored the failures of the Bush Administration and emphasised the problems surrounding containment and sanction led policy, followed for the majority of the last ten years. It is clear from the evidence that Bush and his supporters brought its relationship with the DPRK the closest it has been to the point of war in the last twenty years. Bush succeeded in severely undermining the painstaking effort Gallucci and his fellow advisors put into the
negotiations that led to the Agreed Framework. The fact that neither the US or the DPRK did not keep precisely to the agreement is not a factor here; the issue is what the Agreed Framework represented – the clear success that engagement policy had worked and ended a serious possibility of a devastating nuclear conflict. There is no doubt that Bush was clearly influenced by the events of 9/11 but unfortunately for him, it severely clouded his judgement on the North Korean question and contributed further to his global unpopularity, not least in the ROK and its regional allies.

The importance of understanding the DPRK and its foreign policy behaviour was explored in Chapter 2. For Obama and subsequent administrations, an effort to understand the rhetoric, discourse and provocations made by the DPRK are part of a wider picture to secure the attention of the US. The use of brinkmanship, coercive diplomacy and sweeping threats are all part of this. The DPRK needs the US to survive, with China slowly becoming less interested in its plight; the DPRK’s ability to function and provide the basic needs for its citizens is becoming a hard task for the regime. The nuclear programmes along with its display of fiery rhetoric are the only two ways for the regime to guarantee its survival. Evidence for this is obvious in the negotiations leading to the Agreed Framework through which once the regime had the concessions it wanted, the threat of war or a nuclear attack was severely diminished. The same can also be said for the first round of six party talks. However, this paper has argued that this is not enough. Unconditional engagement, much like the Agreed Framework was turning into, does not necessarily mean the threat will return in the future, as Drezner (2000) so vehemently argues.

Chapter 3 is the most important part of this paper. It brings together all the previous arguments and explains why Hawk Engagement should be the favoured approach towards the DPRK. It seeks to explain that Obama has little option but to try such a policy and that will see him gain in a number of ways from proceeding down this route. Not only will the US be able to pursue what it wants - a denuclearised peninsula, but it will also be able to pursue other eventualities that such a policy preference would garner, namely, regime change (Bluth 2008, 2010). With uncertainty behind who actually runs the regime now and in the future due to its secrecy, this would certainly be an avenue the US could pursue. However, this would only be possible with regional and multilateral support. Hawk Engagement would definitely ensure a good degree of support from China since their advocacy of a constructive engagement policy is well documented. If China is in agreement with the US, then a switch
in policy goals is plausible once the immediate nuclear threat has been dispatched. President Obama has a unique opportunity here to begin a new phase in US-DPRK relations, and make a clear statement that he has recognised the errors of his predecessor and his approach, and is now making a concerted effort to solve the nuclear problem.

To conclude, the DPRK’s nuclear ambitions will only be stopped with a clear change in US policy approaches. The US must also recognise that the DPRK will remain a nuclear state for some time to come and a stalemate between the two will continue to exist as Lankov (2009) argues. Policy continuity is key in order to maintain a strong chance of breaking this stalemate. Hawk Engagement should be the policy that is adopted by Washington and should be recognised that it combines both aspects of engagement and containment. It will lead to the US and its allies being able to set out key principles through which to base the overall policy of denuclearisation (Kim K-S 2009) In other words promises and concessions will be given and threats will no longer be issued unless the DPRK breaks its side of the agreement. The US should understand the DPRK behaves in the way that it does due its desire to be recognised by the US, and given economic support as it can no longer support itself; economic aid is essential to maintain its survival, aid that it can only get from the US (BBC News 2011). The US wants a denuclearised peninsula and the DPRK needs economic aid: Hawk Engagement can achieve both of these.

There are perhaps a couple of further questions that ought to be considered. Firstly, with the unveiling of Kim Jong-Un as the successor to the ailing Kim Jong-il, there is the possibility that the hard line military, which has been at the forefront of the regime for the past twenty years, could capitalise over the younger inexperienced Kim. If so what does this mean for the regime’s nuclear ambitions? Secondly, with the up and coming US Presidential elections, the need for a clear policy approach is now more necessary than ever. If Obama loses and a more right wing Republican wins, there is an increased likelihood of a return to a threats based policy approach. What could this mean for the future of the DPRK and the US’s relationship with the region, particularly China? These questions will only be answered with time, but for now Obama must embark on the path of Hawk Engagement with a belief that he will win a second term and be able to make significant headway in disarming North Korea in the near future.
References:


