CAN THE UNITED STATES CAP NORTH KOREA’S NUCLEAR WEAPON BY USING THE POLICY OF BENIGN-NEGLECT?

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Introduction

The US has been trying to cap North Korea for decades and it has failed. North Korea got the nuclear weapon and proved it by testing it in 2006 as well as in 2009. Over the past years, the United States has used a wide range of policies trying to stop North Korea from producing nuclear weapons. Bill Clinton’s engagement strategy, George W. Bush’s, which might be described as, malign neglect and later aggressive engagement approach all did not result in the cap of North Korea’s nuclear weapons arsenal but further strained the relations between the two. The reason for this worsening resulted from the failure to recognize and work with North Korea’s fundamental goals: security assurance and regime survival. The importance of its nuclear weapons derives from North Korea’s desperate need for these two.

To break the loop of failed policy attempts in dealing with North Korea, the US needs to change its goal and its approach to North Korea. The focus of this paper is to ask whether a new approach, called “benign-neglect policy” can cap North Korean’s nuclear weapons program. Although it is unlikely that the benign-neglect policy will be the ultimate solution to the North Korean nuclear issue, it demonstrates that not all options are exhausted and it could be a small step in the right direction.

Problem: North Korea

North Korea is a failing state that seeks to survive. Chronic food shortage, lack of medical supplies and its focus on its nuclear weapons development\(^1\) tell the story of this rogue state. Famines have become evident in the mid-1990. If the North Korean regime breaks down, instability and great security problems can evolve in the region. Moreover, the neighboring

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countries China and South Korea will greatly suffer from the massive inflow of refugees. However, the leadership does not act to solve the country’s problems. Despite its miserable status, the North Korean regime survives. The longer North Korea survives, the more the nuclear weapons program can advance. Nuclear weapons have become an essential bargaining tool for North Korea in dealing with the US.

Scott Sagan, professor of political science at Stanford University, in his piece “Why Do States Build Nuclear Weapons?: Three Models in Search of a Bomb” reasons that there are three models, namely the security model, the domestic politics model, and the norms model, states seek to acquire nuclear weapons. In the case of North Korea, all three models can be applied. For one, North Korea fears a possible invasion by other countries and its nuclear weapon arsenal deters convincingly. Moreover, the existence of nuclear weapons justifies North Korea’s domestic system “juche”, the need of self-reliance. Finally, North Korea has the intention to be part of the ‘big players’. By threatening with the buildup of nuclear weapons, North Korea is able to bring great powers, which usually would be unwilling to communicate to a discussion table. That makes North Korea very powerful as there are a lot of nations that wish to get so much attention from the most powerful country in the world.

What is North Korea?

It is nearly impossible to gain insight into North Korean domestic politics. North Korea is a totalitarian dictatorship with great restrictions on its subjects through tight controls. The leader Kim Jong-il and few other elites from the Korean Worker’s Party rule the country. Basic human

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rights are not existent including freedom of press or freedom of religion. The father of Kim Jong-il, Kim il-Sung, enforced a state religion or ideology “Juche,” which means self-reliance. Because of this ideology, the North Korean regime refuses foreign assistance.

North Koreans are classified depending on their loyalty to their regime. The three ratings “core”, “wavering”, or “hostile” determine the life of a person including employment opportunities, access to medical care and even access to stores. ³ The situation of people living in North Korea demonstrates that the power is limited to a few people on the top. Since the leader of the regime is not elected but chosen from the same family and because the father Kim Jong-sun and the son Kim Jong-il have similar if not the same leadership style, it is not surprising if the successor Kim Jong-un will keep the tradition of oppression and tyranny. The setting of the regime enables the leaders to rule as he wishes.

The behavior and policy focus of the North Korean regime can shed light on its motivations. North Korea pursues a policy for its nuclear weapons program and embraces a state-centered economic strategy. Kim Jong-il justifies his strong leadership through his military-first policy.⁴ North Korea will not give up its nuclear weapons program unless it is recognized as independent state, receives security assurance, and economic and political assistance for its nuclear program.

**What does North Korea want?**

Moreover, North Korea pursues diplomatic relations with the US. North Korea perceives the United States as the ultimate “partner of choice”\(^5\) because the US as ally would mean that financial assistance, international recognition, and trade would drastically increase while gaining influence in the region. This request of major strategic changes will not be realized unless the US will considerably change its relations to its East Asian allies, which is highly unlikely. Because the US is not willing to give North Korea what it wants, the totalitarian regime perceives its nuclear weapon program as the ultimate leverage and deterrence against the United States. Deterrence is an approach that is widely discussed by international affairs scholars. Thomas Schelling, professor of foreign affairs at the University of Maryland, College Park, describes deterrence as the use of threat of force to restrain an opponent’s action.\(^6\) Considering the threat of force versus the actual use of force, the potential enemy is told that by not acting they will not incur the costs, which protect the status quo. Thus, its nuclear program gives North Korea the power to negotiate with major powers because these powers do not want North Korea to use its nuclear weapons (status quo) and therefore, they are looking to find ways to deal with North Korea’s program.

North Korea remains a dangerous state because no policy succeeded in dealing with the North Korean leadership. North Korea responded with more threats when the United States chose aggressive policies. In addition, North Korea lies in a region that is strategically very important for the United States. Japan remains under the protection umbrella of the United States.

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\(^5\) Ibid., 156
States, South Korea has become a crucial ally in the region and China is a vital trading partner for the United States. Thus, the United States cannot afford an unstable East Asian region.

**Analysis of the “benign-neglect” policy (BNP)**

However, the argument can also be reversed. The United States is greatly concerned about North Korea. But why? North Korea is not in the proximity of the main land of the United States. Its ally South Korea has favored engagement with North Korea over punishment. Admittedly, the development of nuclear weapons is of great concern to the US although they cannot reach US main land yet. North Korea’s actions target to get the attention of the US by any means. Knowing about North Korea’s intentions, the US could approach North Korea and trying to establish normal relations. However, the unpredictability of the leadership is only one of the many concerns of the US why normalization of US-DPRK relations remains almost impossible.

So what would happen if the US erases North Korea from its foreign policy portfolio? According to John Feffer, North Korea would not appreciate being ignored as it has shown when George W. Bush applied the policy of malign neglect when he ignored North Korea until they are ready to disarm. With Bush’s statement to “dismantle nuclear weapons first, talk later,” Bush not only failed to disarm North Korea’s nuclear weapons but also encouraged North Korea’s aggressive behavior. North Korea perceived a threat by this statement because its nuclear weapons are its means of survival.

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8 Ibid.
North Korea takes any action necessary to gain the attention from the United States due to its failing economy, isolated status and political instability. Thus, if the US ignores North Korea, North Korea threatens with its nuclear weapons program. In the past, the US approached North Korea to reach agreements with the oppressive regime, which are later violated by North Korea. Its violation led to North Korea’s further isolation. This circle of policy actions have been made several times in the past decades. The US could cut this circle if it ignores North Korea’s threats with a benign-neglect policy approach. The benign-neglect policy could serve the needed purpose: non-aggressive, passive ignorance.

**Definition**

The benign-neglect policy should consider North Korea’s goals and eliminate all problems from the past: inconsiderate engagement, fruitless sanctions, excessive threats, and inconsistent policies. To deal successfully with North Korea, the United States must understand that North Korea’s nuclear weapons are its survival strategy, which it most likely will not give up. North Korea would perceive the United States as a lesser threat when the United States does not actively threaten a regime change of North Korea. Thus, it might be necessary for the United States to tolerate the current regime type. Moreover, the United States must incorporate regional players into its policy choice so to not upset its allies and because regional players can circumvent benign-neglect, allowing the DPRK to undermine US policy. This situation demands a non-aggressive, almost passive policy by the United States.

In addition, the United States has to learn from its past policy failures. The engagement strategy has not worked because North Korea does not follow agreements well. Moreover, in the past, engaging North Korea meant to demand a lot and give nothing. Sanctions have failed for
North Korea because North Korea responds with more aggressive action and has no intention to fit in the world community. Furthermore, North Korea’s ideology “juche” argues for North Korea’s self-reliance, thus, inflow of goods and assistance is majorly rejected. To wait for a regime collapse would be a policy failure for the United States. The United States may not be able to reverse North Korea’s nuclear program but it is possible to cap its development with the right strategy. A military attack should be completely excluded because of the potential fatalities that could follow. A regime change would upset North Korea’s neighbors.

The benign-neglect policy does not target directly the cap of nuclear weapons but rather a change of North Korea’s behavior, which should result in a self-imposed cap of its arsenal. The US is not able to influence North Korea’s weapons program as the failure of treaties, sanctions, etc showed. North Korea seemed to have the urge to develop nuclear weapons because it perceives the US as a threat. If this threat does not exist anymore, North Korea could identify its nuclear weapons arsenal as unnecessary and caps it by itself.

**Elements of BNP**

Benign-neglect policy consists of three elements:

1. Passive status quo for US policies on North Korea, meaning every established passive policy remains. Passive policies are policies that do not trigger aggressive actions by North Korea (financial assistance, etc).

2. Active policies will be removed by the US including policies that possibly generate aggressive actions such as sanctions which have a tremendous impact on the existence of a state. Statements will be articulated in a neutral manner and not belligerently stated (“axis of evil”). However, the US will stop aggressive actions by North Korea outside of
North Korea which it is part of. (proliferation)

3. The US is open for engagement if North Korea approaches the US with serious and result-oriented suggestions.

The benign-neglect policy will not be publicly discussed because the entire purpose of the policy is to make North Korea a less important issue. Thus, every change of the current policy and situation must be subtle and well-thought so that its intentions stay opaque.

Limits

The benign-neglect policy is a policy that has little severe consequences. The United States only has to take a step back and observe. However, like every policy it has some limiters. First, the application of the benign-neglect policy indicates the United States’ acceptance of North Korea’s nuclear weapons. Second, the usual pro-active stance of the United States will considerably be reduced, which could spark attention of the international community and North Korea. Drawing attention is exactly what the United States tries to avoid. Thus, by changing its attitude towards North Korea, the benign-neglect policy could lose its desired outcome.

Third, to achieve success with North Korea’s nuclear weapons program, allies in the region have to use more of their leverage. China has a tremendous influence on North Korea but it is reluctant to use it. If the United States becomes more passive, countries in the region could become it too. Fourth, by ignoring North Korea, the United States could send a wrong message to its allies, South Korea and Japan. Both countries could interpret the policy in a way that the United States does not have interest in protecting its allies. Fifth, the benign-neglect policy does not target the cap of nuclear weapons directly but assumes that North Korea will change its behavior when it realizes that the United States becomes less threatening. However, the opposite could occur and North Korea increases its nuclear weapons capabilities and poses an even
greater threat to the region and the United States by developing missiles that reach US main land. Sixth, North Korea could be entirely ignorant to the benign-neglect policy because its main objective is self-reliance and not the security assurance of other countries. Seventh, how does the US react towards other hostile countries such as Iran which are in a similar situation? Because of the limited length of this paper, I will leave other “problem countries” to future analysis.

**Special case: US-DPRK relations**

One paramount element of a successful benign-neglect policy is its pretended non-existence. That is why it is difficult if not impossible to find appropriate case studies to discuss the successes and failures of the BNP in the past. Moreover, the United States and North Korea are both unique countries that are hardly comparable to another country in the world. By studying the relations of other countries to North Korea and the United States respectively, their unique standing in international relations will become evident. The description and analysis of their unique standing will further help to analyze potential successes and failure of the benign-neglect policy applied by the US towards North Korea. By showing why other cases cannot explain the BNP, it shows why it could work for the US. These questions will be answered in the following cases:

- How is this case relevant to the study of US-North Korean relations?
- What can we learn from this case in regards to the application of the benign-neglect policy?

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Case study 1: DPRK

The first part of this case study involves the analysis of North Korean relations to two other nations that are involved in North Korean international affairs and nuclear weapons. These two cases will demonstrate the different characteristics of the United States and the opportunities for the US to cap North Korea’s nuclear weapons.

China-North Korea relations

China has been an important player in the region and in the international community in regards to North Korea’s nuclear weapons. China is the main trade partner with North Korea and thus has crucial influence on North Korea and could use this influence on North Korean nuclear weapons policy. However, China’s vicinity to North Korea complicates a simple policy approach.

China is split between two policy options. For one, China wants to diplomatically engage with North Korea because as neighbor China wants the DPRK to be stable. It would have severe consequences if North Korea falls apart.

China is split between a diplomatic approach towards North Korea that first would maintain a relative stable region but could create a nuclear North Korea resulting inevitably in an escalation of East Asia. China also can choose a punitive approach by imposing sanctions but could cause severe responses from North Korea. Analyzing China’s options, none of them appear favorable. If China assists North Korea as it has done in the past in the United Nations Security Council, it basically asks for a nuclear North Korea. The Six-Party talks initiated by China, which was China’s approach to denuclearize North Korea peacefully has become of less
importance because of North Korea’s reluctance to negotiate. If China enforces sanctions, it plays with its own internal security because trouble in North Korea means trouble in China.

Thus, the biggest advantage of the United States is its isolation from the region. North Korean nuclear weapons are not yet able to reach US territory. This has great impact on American implementation of the benign-neglect policy. Foremost, because North Korea is not able to directly threaten US mainland gives US some policy space and time. With policy space, I mean that the US can try out a new policy without fearing an immediate blow back. Moreover, the US has time to pursue a policy that needs time.

Japan-North Korea relations

Japan-North Korea relations give great inside for the benign-neglect policy. Japan is not able to make any progress with North Korea because of Japan’s firm stance in regards to the abduction issue.\(^\text{12}\) However, neither the Six-Party talks nor the abduction issue has led to any progresses demonstrating North Korea’s callousness towards foreign relations, which has important implications for the benign-neglect policy. It proves that North Korea is adamant in its foreign policy stance. Since the benign-neglect policy asks for passive behavior by the US, North Korea could be less resistant in finding a way to communicate with the United States. If the United States does not insist on a certain policy in an aggressive way (as G.W. Bush did with his

\(^\text{12}\) In the 1970s and 1980s, 35 Japanese were abducted by the North Korean secret service for state purposes. Since then, Japan has requested information about the abductees; however, North Korea was secretive about this incident until it admitted the abduction but has not yet released the Japanese. The solution of the abduction issue has become a pre-requisite for the Japan’s rapprochement with North Korea. Japan values this issue to such an extent that Japan impeded the Six-Party talks in 2008. ‘Whenever the talks opened, Japan raised issues completely irrelevant to the talks, deliberately throwing obstacles in their way and making desperate efforts to bring the talks to collapse’,\(^\text{13}\) the North Korean newspaper Minju Joson states. The problem went so far that North Korea requested in December 2008 Japan’s exclusion from the Six-Party talks. Japan’s resistance during the Six-Party talks gives reason to wonder where Japanese priorities are. It seems that the abduction issue has priority over the nuclear issue. Moreover, when the US de-listed DPRK from the list of countries sponsoring terrorism, Japan felt stabbed in the back because it had the perception that the US and Japan both would pursue a hard-line approach towards North Korea.
‘axis of evil’ speech), North Korea will not feel obligated to pursue the opposite strategy. Thus, if the United States does not state its objectives as the BNP implies, North Korea is not able to counteract them.

This leads to another advantage that has the US over Japan in regards to the North Korean issue. The relation to North Korea is of political nature and does not involve any American citizens. That not only gives the United States more leeway in dealing with North Korea, it also puts less pressure (excluding the detrimental effect of a nuclear attack) on solving the North Korean issue by the American population.

The de-listing of North Korea from the list of countries sponsoring terrorism has been a major blow to US-Japan relations, which could have negative consequences in implementing the benign-neglect policy. If the US pursues secret talks with Japan, Japan might be less willing to cooperate, especially if that requires Japan to take a different stance in regards to its foreign policy towards North Korea.

Case study 2: United States

The second part of this case study involves the analysis of the United States’ interaction with three other nations that have some characteristics of North Korea. These three cases will demonstrate the different characteristics of North Korea which will show the absence of similar cases to North Korea. Moreover, this absence will also explain where the opportunities for the American benign-neglect policy lie.

Venezuela-US relations

Although Venezuela itself is hardly comparable to North Korea, their international relations have similarities. Venezuela and North Korea deal with US adversaries such as Cuba,
Iran, Libya, and Syria. Moreover, both countries stated their hatred towards the US although on different accounts. North Korea threatens to ‘wipe out’ the US and Venezuela comments that the US is ‘on the way down’. The Venezuela case is a very similar case to North Korea for the open-stated hatred towards the US.

The relations between Venezuela and the US drastically declined with the attempted overthrow of President Hugo Chavez in 2002. Venezuela and North Korea share their hatred towards the US and do not fear to openly state it. Moreover, both countries interact with each other and are lead by non-democratic leaders. However, although there might be some similarities, Venezuela’s absence of a real threat towards the US excludes Venezuela as an appropriate case to draw conclusions. North Korea is a special case because it has demonstrated nuclear capabilities by testing two nuclear bombs. Moreover, although Hugo Chavez expresses his mischief about the United States, his actions seem more rational than those from the North Korean leader. Moreover, there are established relations between the United States and Venezuela than with North Korea. Thus, Venezuela compared to North Korea seems to be a peaceful state that asks for attention by its leader’s statements. However, opposed to North Korea, Venezuela has not taken any threatening action against the United States.

15 Chavez claimed the involvement of the US for his overthrow. Shortly after his comeback, Chavez started harshly criticizing the US government. In February 2004, Chavez called Bush obscene words for the attempted overthrow in 2002. In the same month, Chavez accused the US to fund opposition groups against his government. In 2008, Chavez threatened to expel the American ambassador, Mr. Duddy, because he stated that there is a surge of cocaine flow in Venezuela. Even with the change of the US administration, Chavez could not stop criticizing the United States. The Venezuelan President accused President Obama in March 2009 to be ignorant because Obama called Chavez an “obstacle in progress.” Recently, Chavez gave a speech in Moscow calling the US government "the greatest terrorist in world history."
This case is useful to study the real threat from North Korea. Considering other countries’ hostility towards the US and their absence of actions emphasizes North Korea’s seriousness. Thus, the importance of a successful strategy is even more important and the benign-neglect policy could be just the right tool to address the East Asian danger.

**Cuba-US relations**

Cuba is a hostile country in the neighborhood that must be watched, especially considering American complacency towards Cuba in the past, which then could have led to fatal consequences. Like North Korea, the Cuban government’s most important goal is to stay in power at all costs. Under Bush, embargos were strictly enforced such as harsh travel restrictions. However, Obama indicated a removal of these restrictions. Nonetheless, both, North Korea and Cuba are resistant to American engagement policies. Obama’s approach was denounced by Cuba as “giving new breath to open and undercover subversion against Cuba.”

North Korea traditionally violates any engagement effort.

Cuba has little similarities with North Korea. It is a small country in the power sphere of the US. Cuba has no nuclear weapons and does not demonstrate a military threat to the US. Cuba is a useful case to study for the US because there is no real existent policy towards Cuba which argues for a neglect policy. However, Obama’s intransparent approach towards Cuba proves that in the case of the absence of communication, the success of a benign-neglect policy is only possible if the US administration conducts a linear policy. It is not useful to upset a government by removing sanctions but then imposing other sanctions. As it is with Cuba, North Korea watches American actions very carefully because it worries about its existential threat. To


succeed in North Korea, the US has to consider its policy towards North Korea and other countries involved very carefully so that its intentions are received in the right way. That means that the United States should reconsider any current policy for North Korea whether those are sanctions, engagement, listings, etc. The gradual adjustment of those policies for North Korea will make the benign-neglect policy straightforward.

**US-Libya relations**

In contrast to the other two cases, Libya had been a nuclear state like North Korea. Libya developed a nuclear program because it sought to counter the perceived threat of Israel’s nuclear program and gain greater influence in the region. After the disclosure of Libya’s nuclear weapons development and the interception of a ship caring nuclear material, the US, along with the international community, applied multilateral sanctions. Libya’s oil-dependent economy suffered greatly due to its isolation by the sanctions, disabling its ability to utilize trade with foreign suppliers. The unemployment rate increased to 25%. After arduous secret talks, Libya finally stopped its program. Its justification for the abandonment of the program included a decrease of external security threats, the danger of nuclear weapons possession, and an ambition for the leadership of the nonproliferation peace movement.

This case shows that North Korea is not only different to non-nuclear cases but also unlike any other nuclear case. As stated in the beginning of this paper North Korea does not react well when pressured; thus, the United States cannot take the same approach as it did with Libya. Another great difference between Libya and North Korea is the multilateral approach. There are countries that are too soft or too harsh in the North Korea issue. China is not keen to work against North Korea and China is the most important trading partner and influence for North

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Korea. Japan is on the other side of the spectrum impeding any progress in finding solutions because past issues must be resolved before any deal will be reached. Therefore, the effectiveness of US policy implications is limited. Another lack of comparison between Libya to North Korea has been the threat perception of Libya which was Israel and not the United States. Thus, the United States has to deal with a country with unique characteristics that can barely be compared to non-nuclear or nuclear states. The United States should perceive this an opportunity to cap North Korea’s nuclear weapons.

Evaluation of the benign-neglect policy

Despite its limiting factors, the benign-neglect policy could have a positive effect for the US involvement with North Korea. The BNP should have the effect to cool down the tension between the two countries so North Korea does not perceive the need to increase its nuclear weapons arsenal. The benign-neglect policy has a very different approach to the existence of North Korea’s nuclear weapons. The US will accept North Korea’s arsenal as this is North Korea’s security and survival assurance. However, the issue “nuclear weapons” should be removed as discussion topic. Nevertheless, the benign-neglect policy (BNP) will aim for capping further development.

To ensure subtle policy shifts which are crucial for a success of the BNP, approaches to and policies with North Korea’s neighbors should be the same or only slightly different to the past. This approach is very critical because the US does not want to threaten North Korea’s perception of its security and survival. If the US was to change policies with South Korea or China, North Korea could be deterred and keep developing nuclear weapons, an absolute failure of the BNP. However, China and South Korea still could contribute to the ease of tensions either through secret meetings with the US or by subtle changes in their policies.
However, as all other policy options are exhausted, it is valuable to apply a benign-neglect policy towards North Korea. The BNP has little severe consequences if applied subtle. However, as the paper has shown, the BNP has limiters. Nevertheless, it is possible to minimize if not erase these limiters.

By applying the benign-neglect policy, it could be perceived that the United States would accept North Korea’s nuclear weapons which could result in a failure of the non-proliferation treaty. However, there are several reasons which argue against this statement. First, North Korea is not a member of the NPT; thus, it does not violate this treaty. Second, there are other countries which developed nuclear weapons (India, Pakistan) which have been integrated into the nuclear club. The issue that any country could leave the NPT to develop nuclear weapons is a fundamental issue of the treaty and not particular for North Korea. Thus, instead of trying and failing to disarm a nuclear North Korea, the United States should restate its policy to cap North Korea’s nuclear weapons arsenal.

The second limiter of the benign-neglect policy is a fundamental problem for the policy itself. If the United States changes its current aggressive, flamboyant policy towards a passive and reserved stance, there is a high chance that it will spark attention, not only from North Korea but from its allies as well. Yet, this problem can be mitigated when the change of policy is subtly changed or there is a pretense for this sudden policy shift (new threats arising). The former approach is possible because of the unique stance of the United States (as discussed in the previous section). Its geographical distance is a crucial factor that allows the United States to implement policies that require time. The latter approach is only achievable when the pretense is fully convincing to North Korea as well as US allies. Moreover, the pretense must not give North Korea reason to fear the shift of US policy. Nevertheless, the spark of attention because of a US
policy shift as a limiter can be mitigated and, if appropriately applied, should not impede a successful implementation of the BNP.

The third limiting factor for the benign-neglect policy is the involvement of allies. If the US becomes passive, other countries in the region could become too. This limiter could be addressed when the United States arranges secret meetings with crucial players in the region that help to successfully implement the American benign-neglect policy. Appropriate involvements by allies could entail the reduction of help such as financial assistance to North Korea or the pursuit of a similar BNP.

A subsequent problem that could occur with the benign-neglect policy is that allies (if the BNP is not discussed with them in secret) receive the wrong message. Japan, for example, could worry about the protection umbrella by the US if it appears to Japan that the US has no interest in solving the North Korean issue anymore. However, if the US meets with Japan in undisclosed meeting and explains its intention, it would alleviate the fears of regional players.

The most worrisome consequence of the BNP entails that North Korea receives US policy change as wrong message. If a slow and subtle approach does not work or the policy change, North Korea could try to use all means to get the attention back from the US. But what means does North Korea have? It cannot violate any treaties because all of them are violated. North Korea cannot threaten with nuclear tests; two of them suffice to ensure its threat. The few options to get the attention from the US are the use of nuclear weapons, invasion of a neighbor, or dangerous activities with other countries and players.

If North Korea uses one of the first two options, it plays with its existence. The US would likely receive the back-up of the international community to fight the use of nuclear weapons or the invasion of a neighbor. As Axel Berkofsky, scholar at the Institut Français des Relations
Internationales, points out\textsuperscript{19}, the North Korean regime, despite its irrational behavior, is well aware of a counterattack that would destroy North Korea within weeks. The third option cannot be removed but the chances that North Korea is involved in dangerous activities can be decreased. Although the US is involved in a passive policy stance does not mean that it cannot have hidden control mechanisms.

One of the biggest limiters of the BNP is that this policy could be misperceived as it does not target directly the cap of nuclear weapons but the change of North Korea’s behavior. Robert Jervis, Stevenson Professor of International Affairs at Columbia University argues that wars occur because countries develop misperceptions of the other side. Misperceptions include the overestimate of the other’s hostility or misjudgments about how others will react to one's policies. If North Korea does not draw the same conclusions as the United States with this policy does (if the US is not perceived as threat, North Korea would cap nuclear weapons), the BNP will be another failed policy. Nevertheless, there are two factors that will decide about the BNP success rate:

- Amount of states that will collaborate to successfully cap North Korea’s nuclear weapons
- Economic and financial capability to develop nuclear weapons

As stated, the misperception of North Korea’s potential behavior is the greatest challenge of the benign-neglect policy. However, the United States’ past policies only worsened the North Korean issue. The implementation of the BNP would be a viable option to cap North Korea’s nuclear weapons. I am aware of the weaknesses of the benign-neglect policy and should not be the ultimate solution to the nuclear issue. However, this paper targets scholars and policy makers who can elaborate on this approach to make it a useful policy.

**The hope for Obama**

After neglecting North Korea in the beginning of his presidency and North Korea’s nuclear test in May 2009, Obama clearly indicated his stance on North Korea’s nuclear weapons on January 27th, 2010. In his first State of the Union Address, Obama stated that “North Korea now faces increased isolation, and stronger sanctions – sanctions that are being vigorously enforced.” He wants to build an international coalition that cope with North Korea. His approach has strong similarities with the aggressive approach of George W. Bush who advocated aggressive diplomacy. Obama articulated that “some progress” has been made with Bush’s reengagement towards North Korea.

Past failures with sanctions do not convince Obama that he could fail as his predecessors have. Sanctions could be now even less effective against North Korea because North Korea has developed nuclear weapons and is even less inclined to reverse it. Despite Obama’s popularity in the international community, it is doubtful if he will achieve his goals. His ideological approach might not impress North Korea. North Korea has dealt in various forms with the United States and is prepared for more sanctions. I hope Obama reads this paper before he will repeat the mistakes from his predecessors.

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