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**Dividing the Korean Peninsula:
The Rhetoric of the George W. Bush Administration**

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14 August 2012

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ABSTRACT*

This paper suggests that an examination of the discourse and rhetoric of the George W. Bush administration offers a more comprehensive understanding of the developments that occurred during the years of South Korea's Sunshine policy (1998-2008). Such an approach supplements the traditional neorealist perspective and helps to account for the direction of certain policies. The paper argues that in its inter-Korean discourse, the Bush administration framed South Korea as an ally and partner against North Korea, while imagining the North as part of the "axis of evil" and a threat to international security. Since the US occupies an essential role in inter-Korean affairs, its framing of North and South Korea as unalterable opposites impeded inter-Korean reconciliation under the Sunshine policy. Rhetoric from two events will illustrate this point – the 2001 US-South Korea summit and the 2004 US Presidential Elections campaign.

* I would like to thank Dr Bhubhindar Singh for his invaluable comments on an earlier version of this paper.

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Dividing the Korean Peninsula: The Rhetoric of the George W. Bush Administration

Introduction

Almost 60 years since the signing of the Korean Armistice Agreement, the Korean peninsula remains divided, although reunification appears to be an eventual goal for both Koreas. Along with cross-Taiwan Strait relations and interstate territorial disputes, the Korean peninsula is one of the potential flashpoints in Northeast Asia. Today, the peninsula is where the interests of global and regional powers intersect; the progress of reunification is thus likely to shape regional and global dynamics. The current literature discusses four ways reunification can occur: by military force, by absorption when one side collapses, by trusteeship, or by reaching a consensus between the two Koreas.¹ The likelihood of the first three options seems dim. South Koreans have rejected reunification by absorption or by force in light of the potentially high costs,² and reunification by trusteeship is not a popular option since it harks back to the “bad memories” of the US and USSR occupation of a divided Korea after World War II.³ This leaves reunification by consensus, which involves reconciliation of inter-Korean ties. If relations between the two Koreas are amicable and cooperative, there may be a possibility of reducing the social and economic costs of reunification.

Inter-Korean relations made significant progress under South Korea’s policy of engagement, also known as the Sunshine policy,⁴ from 1998 to 2008. Notably, two inter-Korean summits were held, in 2000 and 2007, involving the leaders of both sides. Traditional International Relations (IR) theory, such as neorealism, seems unable to fully account for these developments. According to neorealist tenets, the relationship between North and South Korea should take the form of hostility and military competition. While such sentiments were occasionally present during the Sunshine policy years, North and South Korea were at the

¹ Jong-yun Bae, “South Korean Strategic Thinking toward North Korea: The Evolution of the Engagement Policy and Its Impact upon U.S.-ROK Relations,” *Asian Survey* 50 (2010): 344, accessed November 8, 2011, doi: 10.1525/as.2010.50.2.335.

² Christian Oliver and Jung-a Song, “Death pushes reunification back up agenda,” *Financial Times*, December 21, 2011, 4; Gabriel Jonsson, *Towards Korean Reconciliation: Socio-Cultural Exchanges and Cooperation* (England: Ashgate, 2006), 95.

³ Bae, “South Korean Strategic Thinking,” 344.

⁴ Initiated by former South Korean President Kim Dae-jung, the Sunshine policy’s basic assumption was that North Korean provocations were a reflection of its insecurity rather than a show of strength. The policy was guided by three core principles: condemning North Korea’s military provocations, avoiding attempts to subvert or absorb the North, and promoting North-South collaboration. Five types of activities were promoted under the Sunshine policy: inter-Korean political dialogue, inter-Korean economic activity, inter-Korean family reunions, aid to the North, and international cooperation to maintain stability on the Korean peninsula. See Norman D. Levin and Yong-Sup Han, *Sunshine in Korea: The South Korean Debate over Policies Toward North Korea* (California: RAND, 2002), 23-31.

same time moving significantly toward a reconciliation of ties. However, progress in inter-Korean relations were disrupted on at least two specific occasions – in 2001 and 2004 – after remarks made by George W. Bush administration officials on the situation in the Korean peninsula. The US is an important external actor which affects inter-Korean reconciliation, and it is always in close consultation with South Korea on the North. Comments made by Bush administration officials accused North Korea's nuclear program of being a threat to regional stability. Yet, neorealist theory predicts mutual deterrence and a nuclear peace when states possess nuclear weapons.

This is not to say that neorealism is irrelevant in explaining developments on the Korean peninsula. John J. Mearsheimer's five assumptions of structural realism hold in today's context: the international system is anarchic, North and South Korea have the military capability to take aggressive action against the other, both sides are unsure about the true intentions of the other, both seek to preserve their sovereignty, and both design their policies according to their goal of survival.⁵ Yet, as mentioned, neorealism does not have full explanatory power to account for the state of inter-Korean relations during the Bush era. The issue with traditional IR theory is its reliance on structure, making the concepts of national interests and security threats "indeterminate."⁶ As Jutta Weldes writes, realism "cannot help us to explain the adoption by a state of particular policies over alternative means for achieving security."⁷ What is lacking is "the centrality of processes of interpretation,"⁸ in which actor agency plays a key role. The interpretation process depends largely on the prevailing discourse and beliefs of policy-makers. A discourse refers to a group of ideas and practices that represents some form of ideology, and can be accessed through the examination of texts and language. Through an analysis of discourse, one can better understand the motivations for state behavior as well as a state's perception of other members of the international community. Such sentiments may then translate into policies.

This paper offers the argument that in the Bush administration's inter-Korean discourse, the US framed South Korea as an ally and partner against North Korea, while imagining the North as part of the "axis of evil" and a threat to international security. This framing indicates that the US saw North and South Korea as unalterable opposites, and subsequently affected the reconciliation process since the US plays an important role on the

⁵ John J. Mearsheimer, "Structural Realism," in *International Relations Theories: Discipline and Diversity*, ed. Tim Dunne et al. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), 79-80.

⁶ Jutta Weldes, "Constructing National Interests," *European Journal of International Relations* 2 (1996): 278, accessed December 5, 2011, doi: 10.1177/1354066196002003001.

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ Ibid.

peninsula. The paper will examine the rhetoric of Bush administration officials in two case studies – the 2001 US-South Korea summit and the 2004 US Presidential Elections campaign – and show how the rhetoric disrupted the progress made in inter-Korean relations.

This paper consists of three sections. The first discusses US influence in inter-Korean affairs. The second discusses the inadequacy of neorealism and explains how the understanding of US interests in the Korean peninsula can be supplemented by discourse analysis. The third examines US rhetoric in the abovementioned case studies. The conclusion offers implications arising from the findings of this paper.

US influence on inter-Korean affairs

Most scholars generally agree that the US is the most influential external actor in inter-Korean relations. Despite its aggressiveness towards the US, North Korea has also acknowledged the stabilizing factor of US military presence on the peninsula. Former North Korean leader Kim Jong-il had hinted to US Secretary of State Madeline Albright in 2000 that once the US provided “appropriate security assurances” and was no longer perceived as a threat by the North Korean military, he could have free rein to redirect North Korea’s resources away from what was seen as an aggressive foreign policy.⁹ Meanwhile, China did not have as much influence as the US over inter-Korean affairs during the Bush era. Scholars note that China prefers a positive relationship with both North and South Korea, and thus avoids taking sides in inter-Korean issues.¹⁰ Compared to the US, China occupies a less central role in inter-Korean relations.

US involvement on the Korean peninsula stems from its military presence in South Korea, its impact on South Korea’s identity, its role in the Six Party Talks (SPT), and South Koreans’ perceptions of the superpower. First, the US-South Korea security alliance binds each side to defend each other in cases of external aggression and sees US troops installed on the peninsula. Provocative acts from North Korea are often met with a US-South Korea joint response. Even during the era of the Sunshine policy, the speed of progress with regard to inter-Korean reconciliation “depend[ed] in large part on whether the US is prepared to modify its role on the peninsula, especially the size and character of its military presence

⁹ Jack Pritchard, “A guarantee to bring Kim into line,” *Financial Times*, October 9, 2003, accessed January 6, 2012, Factiva.

¹⁰ Andrew Scobell, “China and Inter-Korean Relations: Beijing as Balancer,” in *Inter-Korean Relations: Problems and Prospects*, ed. Samuel S. Kim (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004), 82; Xiaoxiong Yi, “A Neutralized Korea? The North-South Rapprochement and China’s Korea Policy,” *The Korean Journal of Defense Analysis* 12 (2000): 71, accessed December 30, 2011, doi:10.1080/10163270009463990.

there.”¹¹ US military presence on the Korean peninsula thus exhibits a great deal of influence over the conduct of North-South relations.

Second, the security alliance with the US has shaped South Korea’s collective identity. In the patron-client relationship, the US (patron) “functions as a ‘significant other’ in forming [South Korea’s (client)] national identity.”¹² US influence on South Korean identity, as well as their shared norms, will shape how ‘democratic’ South Korea views itself in relation to ‘communist’ North Korea – a state which constantly proclaims anti-US sentiments. Observers note that US policy in the Korean peninsula has the ability to influence North Korea’s actions toward South Korea, thus affecting inter-Korean ties.¹³

Third, the critical role of the US in the SPT is evidenced by how negotiations had been disrupted several times when the US displayed hostility toward the North. Both South Korean presidents leading the Sunshine policy, Kim Dae-jung and Roh Moo-hyun, had said on different occasions that the US held a central role in resolving the North Korean nuclear issue.¹⁴ Thus, even though the SPT is a multilateral forum, the US plays a leading part in the negotiations.

Fourth, South Koreans had viewed the Bush administration’s policies and rhetoric toward North Korea to be “as much a source of the crisis as Pyongyang’s covert nuclear program,” even though the South remained generally supportive of the US position regarding the North.¹⁵ Scholars have also identified the US, under the Bush administration, as a potential obstacle to inter-Korean reconciliation. Joel S. Wit notes that in the event that inter-Korean relations improve faster than US-North Korea relations, there is a risk that Washington may obstruct the progress of North-South relations.¹⁶ Similarly, Victor D. Cha characterized the post-2000 US role on the Korean peninsula as “impeder,” when the Bush administration’s “overbearing ... preoccupation with proliferation issues” clashed with South

¹¹ Selig S. Harrison, “Time to Leave Korea?,” *Foreign Affairs* 80 (2001): 62, accessed January 3, 2012, EBSCOhost.

¹² Gi-Wook Shin, *One Alliance, Two Lenses: US-Korea Relations in a New Era* (California: Stanford University Press, 2010), 9.

¹³ Ibid., 66; Jong-Han Yoon, “The Effect of US Foreign Policy on the Relationship between North and South Korea: Time Series Analysis of the Post-Cold War Era,” *Journal of East Asian Studies*, 11 (2011): 280.

¹⁴ Doo-hyong Hwang, “U.S. has key to success of six-way talks on N.K. nukes: Roh,” *Yonhap*, July 18, 2005, accessed December 28, 2011, Factiva; Howard W. French, “North Korea Tests Missile,” *New York Times*, February 25, 2003, accessed December 28, 2011, <http://www.nytimes.com/2003/02/25/international/asia/25SEOU.html>.

¹⁵ Seung-hwan Kim, “Yankee Go Home? A Historical View of South Korean Sentiment toward the United States, 2001-2004,” in *Strategy and Sentiment: South Korean Views of the United States and the U.S.-ROK Alliance*, ed. Derek J. Mitchell (Washington, DC: Center for Strategic and International Studies, 2004), 29, accessed December 26, 2011, <http://csis.org/files/media/csis/pubs/0406mitchell.pdf>.

¹⁶ Joel S. Wit, “The United States, North Korea and South Korea,” *The Korean Journal of Defense Analysis* 14 (2002): 121-122, accessed December 30, 2011, http://kida.re.kr/data/kjda/14-2_06.pdf.

Korea's policy of engagement.¹⁷ The divergence between the US and South Korean attitudes toward the North was likely to have obstructed progress in inter-Korean relations.

The US' impact on South Korea's national identity, its military presence on the Korean peninsula, and its critical role in the SPT privilege it as an "outside insider,"¹⁸ and probably the only one, in inter-Korean issues. The prominent role of the US on the peninsula ensures that Washington remains an important variable in inter-Korean reconciliation. In the next section, the paper will turn to a discussion on how discourse analysis can supplement traditional IR theory.

Constructing 'reality' through discourse

This section will first discuss where neorealism falls short in explaining developments on the Korean peninsula, followed by how an examination of US discourse fills in this analytical gap.

Neorealism

Mearsheimer offers five premises that neorealism is based on. First, the international system is an anarchic one in which great powers are the central players. Second, all states have the military means to take aggressive action against another state. Third, states are never sure about the true motivations of other states. Fourth, states seek mainly to survive and maintain their sovereignty. Fifth, states will design their policies in accordance with their goal of survival.¹⁹ These assumptions contribute to the emergence of a security dilemma, where the increase in security for any state automatically lowers the level of its neighbors' security. The latter states will then seek to increase their security level, which will in turn decrease the security of the original state. This leads to "perpetual security competition,"²⁰ becoming a dilemma for states aiming to maximize their security. Among states, there is little trust and few common interests, and power is defined largely in military terms. To ensure survival, states should maintain a balance of power.

This paper does not aim to assert the irrelevance of neorealism. Indeed, US policy toward North Korea has seen the superpower installing troops on the Korean peninsula and

¹⁷ Victor D. Cha, "The U.S. Role in Inter-Korean Relations: Container, Facilitator or Impeder?," in *Inter-Korean Relations: Problems and Prospects*, ed. Samuel S. Kim (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004), 146-148.

¹⁸ Tong Whan Park, "The Political Dynamics of US-Korean Relations: An American Perspective," in *A Changing Korea in Regional and Global Contexts*, ed. Lee-Jay Cho, Chung-Si Ahn, and Choong Nam Kim (Seoul: Seoul National University Press, 2004), 242.

¹⁹ Mearsheimer, "Structural Realism," 79-80.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 81.

expressing wariness at the actions of the Kim Jong-il regime – all in line with neorealist tenets. However, while neorealism has its utility in the analysis of international politics, a wholly material account cannot fully explain why a state chooses a particular policy over other options. One needs to also consider the prevailing discourse surrounding the decision-making process.

The dominance of neorealism in international politics is linked to the preoccupation with structure, which predicts recurrent patterns of state behavior and outcomes.²¹ According to Alexander Wendt, structure in neorealist theory is “made only of a distribution of material capabilities,” which neglects the input from “social relationships.”²² A purely material view of global politics does not take into account the role of agency, which can also account substantially for the actions of states. Wendt’s comparison of the British and North Korean nuclear threat to the US clearly illustrates this point. The puzzle: why is the US friendlier to Britain than North Korea, when both states possess nuclear weapons? Wendt explains: “500 British nuclear weapons are less threatening to the US than five North Korean nuclear weapons, because the British are friends of the US and the North Koreans are not, and amity or enmity is a function of shared understandings.”²³ The respective US policies toward Britain and North Korea are thus not only a function of their material capabilities, but how these capabilities are perceived and understood. The process of interpretation is influenced by the prevailing discourse, which helps to identify who a state’s ‘enemies’ and ‘friends’ are.

Additionally, neorealists argue that great powers are the central players in international affairs. In terms of economic performance and conventional military capabilities, North Korea is not considered a great power. Yet, it has occupied a key policy position during certain points of the Bush administration. Samuel S. Kim asserts that “Pyongyang’s proximity to the strategic field of play ... its relative asymmetrical military capabilities, and its coercive leverage strategy” have allowed North Korea to “exercise bargaining power disproportionate to its aggregate structural power in the US-DPRK asymmetric conflict and negotiations.”²⁴ Domestic politics in the US after the September 11, 2001 attacks may also have helped to push North Korea, along with Iran and Iraq, to the forefront of the US policy agenda.

Furthermore, the concept of a ‘threat’ depends on the intersubjective understanding

²¹ Samuel S. Kim, “Northeast Asia in the Local-Regional-Global Nexus: Multiple Challenges and Contending Explanations,” in *The International Relations of Northeast Asia*, ed. Samuel S. Kim (Maryland: Rowman & Little Publishers, 2004), 19.

²² Alexander Wendt, “Constructing International Politics,” *International Security* 20 (1995): 73, accessed June 26, 2012, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/2539217>.

²³ Ibid.

²⁴ Kim, “Northeast Asia in the Local-Regional-Global Nexus,” 27.

among policy-makers. The US sees North Korea's nuclear weapons program as offensive and a threat to its national interests, but North Korea has repeatedly stressed that its nuclear program is meant as a defensive measure against the threat of US aggression. Whether the US or North Korea is offensive or defensive depends on the narrative that exists within the minds of the policy-makers. The construction of national interests and threats is hence worth studying as a variable in foreign policy-making, as it supplements neorealist theory with the explanation of how developments or events were made possible. It is through looking at the discourse and rhetoric of the Bush administration that one can understand the US worldview in relation to the Korean peninsula. This worldview gives an insight into US interests on the peninsula, which then translates into attitudes and policies toward North and South Korea.

Utility of discourse analysis

Discourse analysis involves examining the "structure and function" of language or texts.²⁵ Discourse is never independent of its reality; rather, it is mutually constitutive with the factors that shape it.²⁶ It is through this interaction that a text (re)shapes and (re)constructs itself into a seemingly natural, coherent and logical narrative that is taken as reflective of the current situation. In analyzing a particular discourse, it is essential to be aware of the existing beliefs and perspectives of its participants. Language is important as a tool that reflects and shapes a particular worldview.

I offer three reasons for the adoption of discourse analysis, focusing on rhetoric, in this paper. First, language is rooted in cultural and social contexts, and makes up reality as we know it. The meanings of words are neither given nor timeless; instead, they are formed and understood through the interaction of societal customs and texts. Ideology, as a "belief system through which a particular social group creates the meanings that justify its existence to itself,"²⁷ plays an essential role in language. This self-legitimizing technique assigns labels built on binary oppositions to actors, where the Other is typically placed in an inferior position to the Self.²⁸ Language also allows members of a society to make sense of their world. It provides interpretive structures and attaches connotations to what are essentially arbitrary and abstract terms.

²⁵ Christopher Eisenhart and Barbara Johnstone, "Discourse analysis and rhetorical studies," in *Rhetoric in Detail: Discourse analyses of rhetorical talk and text*, eds. Christopher Eisenhart and Barbara Johnstone (Amsterdam: John Benjamins Publishing Company, 2008), 8.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, 10-11.

²⁷ Jonathan Charteris-Black, *Politicians and Rhetoric: The Persuasive Power of Metaphor* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005), 21

²⁸ *Ibid.*, 22.

Second, an examination of discourse reveals the power relations at work in international politics. Since language occupies a performative role, it not only reflects meaning, but also produces meaning. The production of meaning indicates the Foucauldian power relations inherent in the discourse – whose narrative emerges as the dominant one depends on who is at the top of the hierarchy.²⁹ Yongtao Liu notes that “all the production of IR knowledge is a social, historical and cultural process related to discursive practice.”³⁰ There is no objective reality as such, and hence the question is: whose reality is being (re)told and (re)produced? A discursive practices approach draws on the links between power and discourse, and stresses the “linguistic construction of reality.”³¹ Such an approach focuses more on the discursive outcomes than the motivations of the actors – the analytical emphasis is not on why a particular decision was made, but rather, how the “discursive spaces,” such as “concepts, categories, metaphors, models, and analogies,” make it possible for a particular situation to arise.³²

Third, an examination of policy-makers’ rhetoric allows analysts to account for the choosing of one policy option over others. Weldes and David Campbell argue that national interests and dangers to national security are concepts that emerge from a process of social construction and interpretation, premised on common beliefs among policy-makers and a state’s self-perception of its identity.³³ It is through such a process that certain knowledge about the world comes to be taken as given and logical. The aim of such an approach is not to deny that North Korea threatens global peace; rather, it is to assert that the idea of a ‘North Korean threat’ to international stability cannot be sustained outside the discourse. Danger is not constituted purely through material factors; ideational variables are equally, if not more, important in forming policies toward ‘enemies’ and ‘allies.’

Constructing US identity and interests on the Korean peninsula through discourse

In assuming a self-identity that portrays it as the leader of the free world, it is always in the US’ national interest to assist other states in their transition to democracy, and hence

²⁹ Yongtao Liu, “Discourse, Meaning and IR Studies: Taking the Rhetoric of ‘Axis of Evil’ As a Case,” *CONfines de Relaciones Internacionales y Ciencia Política* (2010): 91, accessed December 15, 2011, <http://confines.mty.itesm.mx/articulos11/YongtaoL.pdf>.

³⁰ Ibid., 95.

³¹ Roxanne Lynn Doty, “Foreign Policy as Social Construction: A Post-Positivist Analysis of U.S. Counterinsurgency Policy in the Philippines,” *International Studies Quarterly* 37 (1993): 302, accessed July 20, 2006, doi: 10.2307/2600810.

³² Ibid., 302-303.

³³ Weldes, “Constructing National Interests,” 276-277; David Campbell, *Writing Security* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1998), 2-3.

freedom. Democracy is good; any other form of government is automatically excluded from the circle of trust. A democratic South Korea is an ‘ally’ of the US; a communist North Korea is a ‘threat’ to the US which must be subverted. To the US, only through regime change can North Korea redeem itself from its ‘evil’ ways and be a ‘responsible’ member of the international community. As identities are mutually constitutive, how the US sees its allies and enemies, in turn, shape and reinforce its self-perception. In constructing North Korea as a ‘closed’ and ‘unknowable’ Other, the US and its allies are compelled to maintain their ‘free’ and ‘rational’ Self.

By constructing security on such binary terms, North Korea has become the “rogue *par excellence* ... the one that lies outside the sphere of good and is to be watched, contained and controlled.”³⁴ The responsibility of policing North Korea would, naturally, fall to the US and its allies, the ones inside the “sphere of good.” However, this Manichean perspective of the Korean peninsula pits the South against its Northern neighbor. The US constructs the North and South as unalterable opposites – an ‘enemy’ and ‘ally’ respectively. The line dividing both sides of the 38th parallel is maintained not just by the physical presence of military troops, but also by ideas about the acceptable behavior of states. At the same time, the US-South Korea alliance is reinforced by the presence of the ‘threatening’ North Korea, which in turn feeds back into deepening the division on the Korean peninsula. In this sense, and because the US is an influential actor in inter-Korean affairs, reconciliation between the two Koreas can be made more difficult by US rhetoric, specifically that of the Bush administration.

In examining the rhetoric and discourse of the Bush administration on both Koreas, I will apply the concepts of presupposition, predication and subject positioning. Presupposition is a “textual mechanism that creates background knowledge and in doing so constructs a particular kind of world in which certain things are recognized as true.”³⁵ For example, a statement such as ‘South Korea is working towards the goal of a reunified Korean peninsula’ presupposes that ‘South Korea’ and the ‘Korean peninsula’ exist, the ‘Korean peninsula’ was once unified but is now divided, and ‘South Korea’ wants a ‘reunification’ of the ‘peninsula.’ Predication is the act of “attaching various labels to subjects.”³⁶ An example is the US being seen as a ‘responsible’ member of the international community representing ‘democracy’ and ‘freedom,’ while ‘communist’ North Korea is ‘evil’ and ‘threatening.’ Subject positioning

³⁴ Roland Bleiker, “A rogue is a rogue is a rogue: US foreign policy and the Korean nuclear crisis,” *International Affairs* 79 (2003): 731, accessed December 15, 2011, doi: 10.1111/1468-2346.00333.

³⁵ Doty, “Foreign Policy as Social Construction,” 306.

³⁶ Ibid.

refers to the establishment of relationships among subjects,³⁷ in which the Other (e.g., North Korea) is perceived to be inferior to the Self (e.g., the US). Using these three techniques, I will show that the Bush administration's rhetoric has hindered inter-Korean reconciliation.

This paper will focus on US rhetoric about the Korean peninsula arising from two particular events: the US-South Korea summit in March 2001 and the US Presidential Elections campaign in 2004. Prior to the events in the two case studies, relations between North Korea, South Korea and the US had been relatively smooth. Reflective of the buoyant mood characterizing North-South relations, a study by South Korea's Youth Development Institute in 2000 found that 61.3% of those surveyed predicted that reunification would occur within 10 years, while another 26.5% predicted reunification within 20 years.³⁸ Another survey conducted in September 2002 by the same institute found that 63.7% of the respondents wanted a "peaceful and gradual unification," as compared to reunification by absorption of the North or by force.³⁹ During the early 2000s, inter-Korean reconciliation was progressing, and South Korea's policy of engagement had been well received by North Korea. The thaw in North-South relations under Kim Dae-jung and Roh raised the prospects for inter-Korean reconciliation, but this progress was hindered by rhetoric from the Bush administration. The two case studies will be discussed in the next section.

Bush officials' rhetoric on North and South Korea

Both case studies will first describe the warming inter-Korean relations before US officials passed uncomplimentary remarks on North Korea. In each case study, I will focus on several speeches which best highlight the US discourse involving the Korean peninsula, and show that US rhetoric disrupted the progressive inter-Korean ties.

Case study 1: 2001 US-South Korea Summit

Ahead of the Bush-Kim summit, relations among South Korea, North Korea and the US had undergone some positive shifts. The North-South Joint Declaration emerging from an inter-Korean summit in June 2000 between Kim Jong-il and Kim Dae-jung in Pyongyang stated that both sides would "promote reunification" and "consolidate mutual trust."⁴⁰ Key ministerial talks were subsequently scheduled for mid-March 2001 to discuss a potential visit

³⁷ Ibid.

³⁸ Jonsson, *Towards Korean Reconciliation*, 197.

³⁹ Ibid., 210.

⁴⁰ "South-North Joint Declaration," United States Institute of Peace, June 15, 2000, accessed December 21, 2011, http://www.usip.org/files/file/resources/collections/peace_agreements/n_skorea06152000.pdf.

by Kim Jong-il to Seoul.⁴¹ Meanwhile, in what was seen as the “clearest sign yet” that the Bush administration wanted to engage with North Korea, US Secretary of State Colin Powell said on 6 March that the US wanted “to pick up where President Clinton and his administration left off.”⁴² In response to the new Bush administration, a North Korean Foreign Ministry spokesman said that North Korea was “fully ready to cope with whatever stand” the US would adopt, adding that North Korea “appreciate[d] the progress so far made in the bilateral ties through negotiations with [the] US.”⁴³ Separately, attempts to smooth over US-South Korea relations were quickly made following Kim Dae-jung’s joint communiqué with Russian President Vladimir Putin endorsing the 1972 Anti-Ballistic Missile (ABM) Treaty in February 2001. Both the US and South Korea downplayed the significance of the communiqué, with South Korean officials reiterating their support of the US.⁴⁴ Thus, by the time Kim Dae-jung met with US President George W. Bush on March 7, 2001, US-South Korea relations were on the mend.

At the Bush-Kim meeting, Bush publicly declared support for Kim Dae-jung’s Sunshine policy, and both presidents affirmed that inter-Korean reconciliation was important for regional peace and stability.⁴⁵ The summit displayed a unified stance from Bush and Kim Dae-jung on North Korea, and reflected the strong bilateral ties between the US and South Korea. I will focus on remarks made by Bush during a joint press conference with Kim Dae-jung after their meeting, and Powell’s comments to the US Senate’s Foreign Relations Committee on March 8. Sentiments from the statements can be categorized under three main points: the Self consisting of the US and its allies against a North Korean Other, the necessity of the US presence in Northeast Asia, and skepticism over North Korea.

First, US rhetoric had drawn a clear line separating itself and South Korea from the North. In particular, Bush expressed hope that the Sunshine policy would “convince the North Koreans that we are peaceful people and that they need not be fearful about the

⁴¹ “South Korea denies North Korean leader’s visit to Seoul due in May,” *Agence France-Presse*, March 8, 2001, accessed January 5, 2012, Factiva.

⁴² “Powell says US will engage North Korea,” *Agence France-Presse*, March 7, 2001, accessed January 3, 2012, Factiva.

⁴³ “DPRK ready to cope with whatever stand to be taken by new U.S. administration,” *Korean Central News Agency*, January 25, 2001, accessed February 27, 2012, <http://www.kcna.co.jp/item/2001/200101/news01/25.htm#1>.

⁴⁴ Christopher Torchia, “South Korea says it understands U.S. thinking on missile defense,” *Associated Press Newswires*, March 2, 2001, accessed January 3, 2012, Factiva; “S. Korea expresses indirect support for U.S. Missile plan,” *Kyodo News*, March 2, 2001, accessed January 3, 2012, Factiva; “Washington downplays significance of joint SKorea-Russia statement,” *Agence France-Presse*, February 28, 2001, accessed January 3, 2012, Factiva.

⁴⁵ Levin and Han, *Sunshine in Korea*, 109.

intentions of America and of the Republic of Korea, that we want the peace.”⁴⁶ Here, Bush presupposed that North Korea was “fearful” of the US and South Korea, creating the image of the US and its allies as a global force “fear[ed]” and respected by other states. The statement further predicated that “we,” which encompassed the US and South Korea, were “peaceful” states. If the US and South Korea wanted peace, then “they,” the North, would be seen as disrupting the peace with its actions; if “we,” the Self, was the US and South Korea, then North Korea made up the Other. Bush also appeared to have firm ideas about what would help the Korean peninsula achieve peace – specifically “the idea of trade, flows of capital ... open dialogue [and] reunification of families.”⁴⁷ Bush privileged liberal market ideals over other types of economic systems, in effect acknowledging that the free trade system should be the only type of economy that states should adopt to achieve peace. In this context that Bush constructed, North Korea, with its rejection of the Western market ideals, was inherently a threat to stability. In this sense, North Korea remained inferior to South Korea and the US because it had failed to attain a perceived higher stage of political and economic development. Bush’s discourse on North Korea ran in parallel to Powell’s comments to the US Senate’s Foreign Relations Committee on March 8. Powell labeled North Korea as a “failed society that has to somehow begin opening if it is not to collapse ... once it’s open, it may well collapse anyway.”⁴⁸ Here, Powell made several assumptions about what constituted a successful or failed state. To the US and its allies, North Korea had “failed” against their measures; however, to the North Korean leadership bent on regime survival, the state had actually managed to achieve its top political objective. Such remarks might have had the effect of further isolating the Kim Jong-il regime since the latter clearly lay outside of what the US believed a responsible state should be.

Second, Bush’s statements stressed the importance of the US on the Korean peninsula: “with the right alliance and right formulation of policy, hopefully, it will achieve the peace that we all want.”⁴⁹ Clearly, Bush was referring to the US-South Korea alliance as the one to uphold, and the measures adopted by US and South Korean policy-makers as the ones to follow. Bush had positioned the US and South Korea higher on the moral scale compared to North Korea. Such remarks affirmed the necessity of the US-South Korea alliance, and

⁴⁶ “Remarks by President Bush and President Kim Dae-Jung of South Korea,” The White House: President George W. Bush, March 7, 2001, accessed January 3, 2012, <http://georgewbush-whitehouse.archives.gov/news/releases/2001/03/20010307-6.html>.

⁴⁷ Ibid.

⁴⁸ “Washington will take its time developing NKorean policy: Powell,” *Agence France-Presse*, March 8, 2001, accessed January 4, 2012, Factiva.

⁴⁹ “Remarks by President Bush.”

denied South Korea agency in working toward inter-Korean reconciliation on its own. Implicitly, the US was recognized in that statement as an integral actor exerting a positive influence on the Korean peninsula to counter the ‘threatening’ North Korea.

Third, Bush displayed cynicism over the intentions of North Korea. Noting that there was “not very much transparency” in the Kim Jong-il regime, Bush expressed his “skepticism about whether or not we can verify an agreement in a country that doesn’t enjoy the freedom that our two countries [i.e., US and South Korea] understand – [they] don’t have the free press like we have here in America.”⁵⁰ Here, North Korea was constructed as an unknowable entity, in opposition to the “free” US and South Korea. The assumption was that a closed state could not possess good intentions. Bush additionally expressed unease over “the fact that the North Koreans are shipping weapons around the world.”⁵¹ It was expected that the audience receiving this message would automatically understand that North Korea’s actions were provocative; yet, the US itself “ship[s] weapons around the world.” What Bush did not explicitly say, but was embedded in his message, was that a “rogue state” like North Korea would naturally have offensive intentions. Similarly, Powell called Kim Jong-il a “despot”⁵² in his Senate address, constructing a hierarchical relationship in which the US was morally superior to the “despotic, broken”⁵³ North Korea. The boundaries differentiating a good/bad leader and successful/failed state thus reinforced the US’ image of North Korea as a ‘threat’ to international stability. It is in this context of North Korea that the Bush administration’s harsh policy toward North Korea can be understood. Since the North did not appear to reciprocate the US’ and South Korea’s “peaceful” intentions and its behavior lay outside the norms of the international community, there was no point in continuing to accommodate the Kim regime. In constructing North Korea, the Bush administration in turn constructed the US and South Korea as in opposition to the North. The identities of the US and South Korea were brought closer to each other, while the North was seen as remaining outside this exclusive relationship, hence reinforcing its isolation and impeding inter-Korean reconciliation.

Despite the relatively hostile rhetoric emanating from the US during the summit, Kim Dae-jung said a day after meeting with Bush that North Korea, which seemed to be gradually engaging with other states, was going through a change which was “wondrous and full of meaning.”⁵⁴ He added that “the ice has begun to melt in the last remaining Cold War on

⁵⁰ Ibid.

⁵¹ Ibid.

⁵² “Washington will take its time.”

⁵³ Ibid.

⁵⁴ “North Korea going through ‘wondrous’ change: Kim,” *Agence France-Presse*, March 8, 2001, accessed

Earth.”⁵⁵ Kim also played down the differing views held by the US and South Korea on North Korea.⁵⁶ In this sense, the South displayed their determination in continuing to work towards inter-Korean reconciliation, even in the face of a somewhat skeptical US. Regardless, North Korea reacted strongly to the Bush administration’s rhetoric during the summit, and following the US-South Korea meeting, displayed “indifference toward improving inter-Korean relations.”⁵⁷ Six days after the Bush-Kim meeting on March 13, North Korea announced that it would postpone the fifth round of the high-level talks with South Korea due to occur on the same day, scheduled to plan for Kim Jong-il’s potential visit to Seoul.⁵⁸ Although no reason was given for the postponement, observers speculated that North Korea was unhappy with Bush’s hardline stance and skepticism of the regime.⁵⁹ The postponement of the talks meant that the progress of inter-Korean reconciliation was halted – the status of Kim Jong-il’s visit to Seoul was now uncertain, and issues such as inter-Korean family visits and plans over the Kyongui railway linking both Koreas, originally on the agenda of the talks,⁶⁰ were now put on hold. Meanwhile, the North Korean Workers’ Party newspaper, *Rodong Sinmun*, published an editorial on March 15 criticizing the Bush administration for their “aggressive hostile policy.”⁶¹ It acknowledged that “a sign of détente” had emerged in the Korean peninsula, but said that the US was “a stumbling block in the way of peace and reunification.”⁶² In a radio broadcast, North Korea also urged the South to “reject subservience and reliance on outside forces.”⁶³ This was a direct criticism of South Korea for its alliance with and perceived deference to the US. To North Korea, the US was an outsider and should not interfere in inter-Korean affairs, and the Bush administration’s hostility only served to intensify the tension between the North and South. In this instance, US rhetoric had indeed posed an obstacle to the warming inter-Korean relations developing before the US-

January 5, 2012, Factiva.

⁵⁵ Ibid.

⁵⁶ “President denies clash of opinions with US counterpart on North policy,” *BBC Monitoring Asia Pacific*, March 8, 2001, accessed January 5, 2012, Factiva.

⁵⁷ Yinhay Ahn, “North Korea in 2001: At a Crossroads,” *Asian Survey* 42 (2002): 48, doi: 10.1525/as.2002.42.1.46.

⁵⁸ Zeno Park, “North Korea calls off talks with South,” *Agence France-Presse*, March 13, 2001, accessed March 19, 2012, Factiva.

⁵⁹ Yong-Chool Ha, “South Korea in 2001: Frustration and Continuing Uncertainty,” *Asian Survey* 42 (2002): 57, accessed February 27, 2012, doi: 10.1525/as.2002.42.1.56.

⁶⁰ Don Kirk, “N. Korea cancels talks with Seoul planned meeting was to discuss family reunions, railroad links,” *Pittsburgh Post-Gazette*, March 14, 2001, accessed February 27, 2012, Factiva.

⁶¹ “U.S. hostile policy toward DPRK under fire,” *Korean Central News Agency*, March 15, 2001, accessed January 3, 2012, <http://www.kcna.co.jp/item/2001/200103/news03/15.htm#1>.

⁶² Ibid.

⁶³ “North Korea urges South to drop subservience to US,” *Agence France-Presse*, March 13, 2001, accessed February 27, 2012, Factiva.

South Korea summit. A similar trajectory of events occurred during the 2004 US Presidential Elections campaign, leading to a 10-month delay in convening the fourth round of the SPT.

Case study 2: 2004 US Presidential Elections campaign

Since Roh took over the presidency in 2003, inter-Korean relations had been improving. Roh continued Kim Dae-jung's policy of engagement with North Korea, and inter-Korean economic relations flourished with cooperation on projects such as the Kaesong Industrial Complex and the Mount Kumgang Tourism Zone.⁶⁴ During a seminar commemorating the fourth anniversary of the 2000 inter-Korean summit, North Korea's chief delegate to the seminar delivered a "personal message" to Roh from Kim Jong-il, who said that "South and North Korea need to continue the current favorable atmosphere between them to greatly develop inter-Korean relations."⁶⁵ The outcome of the third round of the SPT in June 2004 had received mixed reactions from the media and observers. Some felt that there had been no breakthrough in the discussions, especially in light of news that North Korea had tested a short-range missile just before the talks begun.⁶⁶ However, others noted that both the US and North Korea had "assumed more sincere and compromising attitudes" during the talks; notably, the US offered to provide North Korea with "energy aid and a security guarantee in exchange for ending its nuclear program," a shift from its previous insistence on a "complete, verifiable and irreversible dismantling" of the North's nuclear programs before making concessions.⁶⁷ The parties involved also agreed to hold the fourth round of talks by September 2004.⁶⁸ Meanwhile, the US in June 2004 announced plans to downsize its military presence in South Korea, but it also declared a US\$11 billion upgrade of South Korea's defense capabilities.⁶⁹ The US additionally dismissed concern about South Korea's past secret

⁶⁴ Hong Nack Kim, "South-North Korean Relations Under the Roh Moo-Hyun Government," *International Journal of Korean Studies* 10 (2006): 37-39, accessed December 22, 2011, http://www.icks.org/publication/pdf_2006_s/2_Kim.pdf.

⁶⁵ "S Korean leader receives 'personal message' from North's Kim Jong-il," *BBC Monitoring Newsfile*, June 15, 2004, accessed January 5, 2012, Factiva.

⁶⁶ "No breakthroughs in North Korea nuclear talks: US," *Agence France-Presse*, June 25, 2004, accessed January 5, 2012, Factiva; "North Korea may have test launched missile this week: report," *Agence France-Presse*, June 26, 2004, accessed January 5, 2012, Factiva.

⁶⁷ "US, N. Korea Raise Hope for Breakthrough," *Korea Times*, June 25, 2004, accessed January 5, 2012, Factiva.

⁶⁸ "Next round of six-way nuclear talks by September: official," *Agence France-Presse*, June 26, 2004, accessed December 22, 2011, Factiva.

⁶⁹ James Brooke and Thom Shanker, "U.S. May Cut Third of Troops in South Korea," *New York Times*, June 8, 2004, accessed March 5, 2012, Factiva; "Background Note: South Korea," US Department of State, last modified July 7, 2011, accessed March 5, 2012, <http://www.state.gov/r/pa/ei/bgn/2800.htm>; Hyung-jin Kim, "U.S. Completes Deploying New Patriot Missiles," *Yonhap English News*, November 30, 2004, accessed March 5, 2012, Factiva.

nuclear experiments.⁷⁰ North Korea was unhappy with both the US' "double standards" in handling the South's nuclear issue⁷¹ and the US\$11 billion "arms buildup plan" on the Korean peninsula.⁷² These events set the context for the hostility that erupted when Bush officials' passed uncomplimentary remarks about North Korea in their campaign speeches.

I will focus on three speeches – two by Bush addressing voters in Wisconsin on August 18, 2004, and in Michigan on September 13, as well as US Secretary of State-Designate Condoleezza Rice's speech to the Senate Foreign Relations Committee on January 18, 2005. The themes arising from these speeches can be grouped in a way similar to the first case study: the Self consisting of the US and its allies against a North Korean Other, the necessity of US alliances with states such as South Korea and Japan, and skepticism over North Korea's intentions.

First, Bush and Rice made clear that North Korea did not belong to the same international community as the US and its allies. In an expression reminiscent of Bush's "axis of evil" statement in his 2002 State of the Union address,⁷³ Rice identified North Korea as one of the "outposts of tyranny" in the world, along with Cuba, Burma, Iran, Belarus and Zimbabwe.⁷⁴ In doing so, Rice presupposed that such a thing as "tyrann[ical]" behavior exists, and such behavior had been exhibited by North Korea. Rice's statement had the effect of dividing the world into 'good' and 'bad' states, which categorized states' intentions into either 'peaceful' or 'threatening.' It was a black-or-white simplification of the world; there were no gray areas, and North Korea was clearly on the wrong side of the fence. Likewise in his campaign speeches, Bush referred to Kim Jong-il as a "tyrant."⁷⁵ Specifically in one address, Bush said that the SPT was important as there were "now five countries saying to the tyrant in North Korea, disarm, disarm."⁷⁶ The predicate had become the actual signifier; "tyrant" was now a synonym for 'Kim Jong-il.' Effectively, Bush had depersonalized his subject and

⁷⁰ Hyun-jin Seo, "Seoul's uranium experiments 'no cause for concern,'" *The Korea Herald*, September 4, 2004, accessed December 22, 2011, Factiva.

⁷¹ "US exposes more illicit nuclear activity by South Korea," *Agence France-Presse*, September 9, 2004, accessed December 22, 2011, Factiva.

⁷² "Foreign Ministry Spokesman on U.S. 'Arms Reduction,'" *Korean Central News Agency*, June 24, 2004, accessed March 5, 2012, <http://www.kcna.co.jp/item/2004/200406/news06/25.htm#1>.

⁷³ "President Delivers State of the Union Address," The White House: President George W. Bush, January 29, 2002, accessed March 8, 2012, <http://georgewbush-whitehouse.archives.gov/news/releases/2002/01/20020129-11.html>.

⁷⁴ "Opening remarks by Secretary of State-Designate Dr. Condoleezza Rice," US Department of State Archive, January 18, 2005, accessed January 5, 2012, <http://2001-2009.state.gov/secretary/rm/2005/40991.htm>.

⁷⁵ "President's Remarks at Ask President Bush Event," The White House: President George W. Bush, August 18, 2004, accessed January 5, 2012, <http://georgewbush-whitehouse.archives.gov/news/releases/2004/08/20040818-11.html>; "Remarks in 'Focus on Health Care' Event," Presidential Rhetoric.com, September 13, 2004, accessed January 5, 2012, http://www.presidentialrhetoric.com/campaign/speeches/bush_sept13b.html.

⁷⁶ "President's Remarks at Ask President Bush Event."

removed from Kim his human agency. In his speeches, the other person whom Bush had referred to as a “tyrant” was Saddam Hussein. This suggested that Bush placed Kim in the same category as Saddam Hussein, which perhaps suggested that the US would not rule out invading North Korea and deposing Kim, like it had done with the former Iraqi president. The US and its allies were thus pitted against the inferior and morally corrupt regime of “tyranny” in North Korea.

Second, Bush and Rice stressed the importance of US alliances with its partners, such as Japan and South Korea. Bush expressed gratitude for the contributions by South Korea and other allies to the coalitions for the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan,⁷⁷ while Rice noted that South Korea was one of the US’ “key partners in our efforts to deter common threats.”⁷⁸ By highlighting the strong ties between US and its allies, the rhetoric of Bush and Rice served to further isolate the North, effectively portraying it as the antithesis of the US and South Korea. Freedom was a recurrent theme in the speeches. Bush asserted that “freedom is the Almighty God’s gift to each man and woman in this world”⁷⁹ – reinforcing the notion that it is only natural for a state to be free. Rice declared US support for “oppressed people on every continent,”⁸⁰ including the people of North Korea. This defined the US (and its allies) as a beacon for liberty – in opposition to North Korea. As the leader of the free world, the US was obligated to help the ‘inferior’ North Korea achieve freedom for its people, returning it to its ‘natural’ and ‘right’ condition. Such discourse emphasized the difference between North and South Korea, and additionally implied that the South was on the right path, while the North was clearly on the wrong one.

Third, the US displayed skepticism over North Korea’s motivations. Rice called for “unit[y] in insisting that Iran and North Korea abandon their nuclear weapons ambitions, and choose instead the path of peace.”⁸¹ As with Bush’s concern about North Korea “shipping weapons around the world”⁸² in the 2001 US-South Korea summit, Rice also appeared to assume that North Korea had aggressive intentions because it was not a democratic state. Taken further, Rice’s statement ironically meant that the US had also not “cho[sen] ... the path of peace” because it possessed nuclear weapons. Yet, this deduction was automatically excluded from the discourse because the US was a ‘good’ state – it was the defender of

⁷⁷ Ibid.

⁷⁸ “Opening Remarks.”

⁷⁹ “President’s Remarks at Ask President Bush Event.”

⁸⁰ “Opening Remarks.”

⁸¹ Ibid.

⁸² “Remarks by President Bush.”

democracy and a leader “work[ing] to advance freedom’s cause.”⁸³ On the other hand, North Korea, as part of the “axis of evil,” could not be expected to have peaceful intentions because its political system and beliefs were different from the US. Hence, the ‘reality’ of the situation was that North Korea harbored offensive intentions and should be prevented from continuing down the path of ‘evil.’ In its discourse, the US had constructed North and South Korea as opposites to each other. With the reiteration of themes such as freedom and morality, it was implied that North Korea had to undergo regime change before it could be included into the US-led international community – perceived by the US as a desirable outcome.

South Korea’s response to the US’ harsh rhetoric on North Korea had been relatively muted. At the end of August 2004, Seoul appeared hopeful for the resumption of the SPT, although the event did not occur in September as scheduled.⁸⁴ Regarding Rice’s “outpost of tyranny” reference, South Korean Foreign Minister Ban Ki-moon commented that her comments were not as hostile as Bush’s “axis of evil” speech in 2002 and expressed the hope that her remarks would not undermine the progress of the SPT.⁸⁵ However, North Korea withdrew from the SPT, blaming its actions on the US’ “hostile policy.”⁸⁶ Responding to Rice’s “outpost of tyranny” remark, North Korea on February 10, 2005, announced publicly for the first time that it had nuclear weapons and reiterated its opposition to the SPT.⁸⁷ As a result, the fourth-round of the SPT only resumed in July 2005, 10 months later than scheduled. Since Seoul was committed to a resolution of the nuclear issue against the larger picture of reconciliation,⁸⁸ US rhetoric and North Korea’s response threw a spanner into the works, derailing the progress made in inter-Korean reconciliation.

Both case studies show that the Bush administration’s rhetoric disrupted the progress in inter-Korean relations made under the Sunshine policy. North Korea’s cancellation of inter-Korean talks in 2001 and the postponement of the SPT in 2004 were responses to US rhetoric that attempted to impose a certain image on it. Such an image involved the exclusion of

⁸³ “Opening Remarks.”

⁸⁴ “6-Party Talks to Be Held As Planned: Amb. Han,” *Korea Times*, August 30, 2004, accessed January 5, 2012, Factiva; No progress made in resuming nuclear talks, South Korea’s Foreign Minister says,” *Associated Press Newswires*, September 1, 2004, accessed January 5, 2012, Factiva.

⁸⁵ “Minister Hopes ‘Outpost of Tyranny’ Remark Doesn’t Affect Nuke,” *Yonhap*, January 20, 2005, accessed January 5, 2012, Factiva.

⁸⁶ DPRK Foreign Ministry Spokesman Blasts Bush’s Reckless Remarks,” *Korean Central News Agency*, August 23, 2004, accessed January 5, 2012, <http://www.kcna.co.jp/item/2004/200408/news08/24.htm#1>.

⁸⁷ “DPRK FM on Its Stand to Suspend Its Participation in Six-party Talks for Indefinite Period,” *Korean Central News Agency*, February 10, 2005, accessed January 5, 2012, <http://www.kcna.co.jp/item/2005/200502/news02/11.htm#1>; Burt Herman, “North Korea boasts it has nuclear weapons, will stay away from nuclear disarmament talks,” *Associated Press Newswires*, February 10, 2005, accessed January 10, 2012, Factiva.

⁸⁸ “Roh Moo-hyun’s inauguration speech,” *BBC News*, February 25, 2003, accessed January 5, 2012, <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/asia-pacific/2797053.stm>.

North Korea from the US-led international community, the perception that the North had dubious intentions, and the necessity of US presence in Northeast Asia to counter North Korea. In that process, US framing of both Koreas as opposites impeded the reconciliation process on the Korean peninsula.

Conclusion

This paper has argued the importance of the US in inter-Korean affairs and focused on how the rhetoric of the Bush administration adversely affected North-South relations during the Sunshine policy years. Specifically, I have examined the rhetoric of Bush administration officials during the 2001 US-South Korea summit and the 2004 US Presidential Elections campaign. In both case studies, the Bush administration constructed the image of ‘North Korea’ as a failed state under an irrational leadership and the Other of the US and South Korea. At the same time, it constructed ‘South Korea’ as a democratic ally, and emphasized the necessity of the US-South Korea alliance. Since the US occupies an essential role in inter-Korean affairs, hostile rhetoric against North Korea would hinder the inter-Korean reconciliation process, even if North-South relations look optimistic.

The importance of rhetoric and discourse in the field of IR should not be discounted, as the discursive framework within which issues are understood can affect policies. While neorealist theory has some explanatory power over the progress of inter-Korean reconciliation, US rhetoric has also proven disruptive to positive North-South relations. For policy-makers, the findings of this paper have three implications.

First, the process of policy-making occurs within a language frame with a tailored set of rules. For the Bush administration, its policy toward the Korean peninsula was limited by its critical rhetoric on North Korea and friendly rhetoric on South Korea. The “axis of evil” and “rogue state” discourse on the Kim Jong-il regime essentially narrowed the policy options available to the US – as Samuel S. Kim notes, “‘evil’ is something to be destroyed, not something to negotiate with.”⁸⁹ Likewise, the discourse on South Korea perceived the latter to be reliant on the US, to the extent that inter-Korean progress under the Sunshine policy was disrupted. Choosing one policy option over another is largely a function of a state’s existing beliefs and perceptions. Policy-making is a response not only to physical action, but also sentiments embodied in the discourse of states. It is through an examination of such discourse that intentions may be discerned.

⁸⁹ Kim, “Northeast Asia in the Local-Regional-Global Nexus,” 28.

Second, a state's national interests and threats to its security are formed through a process of social construction. The concepts of national interests and security threats should not be viewed in isolation – they arise out of a complex web of negotiations, ideologies and beliefs. Through shared knowledge and intersubjective understanding among policy-makers, a consensus emerges on what the state should protect and what it should defend against. This accounts for why states which are not considered great powers globally may also occupy a central role in international affairs. The Other-ing of North Korea in US discourse identifies it as a threat to US national interests, and thus justifies the necessity of its troops on the Korean peninsula. Policy-makers should be aware of how national interests and security threats have been constructed. With this understanding, they can then effectively design their strategies to achieve their policy goals.

Third, structure should not be privileged over agency in the study of international politics and foreign policy. Structure may predict a certain endpoint, but agency may alter and shape the final outcome. A small state may not seem central to international affairs, but if the existing discourse attaches significance to its behavior, then it elevates in importance. Public figures need to be mindful of the messages that they are sending out. In the case of North Korea, certain words from the US are likely to result in counter-productive responses from Pyongyang. The US may thus want to refrain from cultivating an extremely negative image of North Korea in its discourse. Additionally, the US and South Korea will have to navigate the politics of their alliance with care, to avoid pushing North Korea into further isolation.

Moving beyond the Bush administration and South Korea's Sunshine policy, the passing of Kim Jong-il on December 17, 2011 and the coming to power of his son, Kim Jong-un, may also change the relationship among North Korea, South Korea and the US. On February 29, 2012, it was announced that North Korea had agreed to shelve plans for nuclear and long-range missile tests, suspend uranium enrichment at one nuclear reactor, and allow foreign nuclear inspectors into North Korea. In return, the US will supply food aid to the North. After this deal was struck, however, Pyongyang launched a rocket on April 13, resulting in the US suspending the aid deal. Meanwhile, an anonymous source "with links to Pyongyang and Beijing" cautioned that "if the US stops taking steps and treats North Korea as a foe instead of a friend," such as during the Bush era, North Korea may once again turn away from negotiations.⁹⁰ The increasing influence of China in North Korea further indicates the importance for the US to exercise restraint towards the Kim regime – should North Korea

⁹⁰ Benjamin Kang Lim and Brian Rhoads, "No policy shift from new N.Korea leader despite nuclear deal," *Reuters*, March 6, 2012, accessed March 6, 2012, Factiva.

close off all communication with the US and turn completely to China, the latter could potentially supplant US dominance on the peninsula. This would adversely affect US leverage over inter-Korean affairs. For the foreseeable future, however, the US looks set to retain its influence in inter-Korean affairs. It is therefore essential to be aware of the US discursive framework that surrounds the Korean peninsula, as it is through this lens that US policies and rhetoric towards North and South Korea can be better understood.

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