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**Deciphering Consistency and Coherence in U.S Foreign Policy: North Korea under  
Trump and Biden**

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**Abstract**

**Propose:** This study investigated how consistent and coherent U.S. foreign policy toward North Korea was under President Trump and Biden.

**Methodology:** Through qualitative analysis of policy shifts and diplomatic strategies, this paper explored how effectively both administrations advanced their policy objectives within the intricate dynamics of U.S.-North Korea relations. Data were collected from primary sources like official government documents and secondary sources like academic journal articles and media reports. Thematic and content analyses were employed to identify recurring motifs and evaluate the articulation and implementation of policy strategies.

**Findings:** Findings indicated that Trump's untraditional approach of involving North Korean leader Kim Jong-un directly, alongside a "maximum pressure" campaign, yielded mixed outcomes. While it broke long-standing diplomatic deadlocks, it faced challenges such as inconsistencies and limited progress on denuclearization. In contrast, Biden's administration focused on multilateralism, alliance-building, and a structured policy framework. Nonetheless, it also encountered several challenges in making tangible progress toward denuclearization. The study underscored the importance of future U.S. administrations integrating the strengths of both approaches to enhance foreign policy effectiveness.

**Unique Contribution to Theory Practice and Policy:** This study improved understanding of contemporary international relations by dissecting American interactions with North Korea under two different administrations. It provided crucial insights for policymakers, highlighting how maintaining consistency and coherence is pivotal in forming effective foreign policy.

**Keywords:** *Consistency, Coherence, Multilateralism, Geopolitical dynamics, Denuclearization*

**JEL Codes:** *F50, F52, F53, F59, D74*

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## **INTRODUCTION**

The dynamic relationship between the United States and North Korea is commonly described as a complex mix of hostility and unfruitful diplomatic endeavors (Manyin & Nikitin, 2020). Thus, such strained diplomatic ties test U.S. officials' patience, particularly concerning maintaining Consistency and coherence in their foreign policy toward North Korea. The principles of Consistency and coherence are fundamental in shaping and implementing foreign policy (Jentleson, 2014). Within this framework, the question remains: How effective was the Consistency and coherence demonstrated in U.S. foreign policy towards North Korea during the Trump and Biden administrations? How competently did these administrations achieve their intended objectives in navigating challenges between the two nations?

This study analyzes American engagement with North Korea using a qualitative research methodology that thoroughly examines diplomatic strategies, strategic shifts, and policy outcomes during both presidential eras. Furthermore, it endeavors to pinpoint the weaknesses and strengths of American interactions with North Korea, spotlighting the most notable areas requiring improvement.

By evaluating the achievements and deficiencies of President Biden and Trump's approach, this paper seeks to contribute to understanding the complexities of U.S.-North Korea relations. In sum, this study aspires to contribute to a comprehensive understanding of contemporary international relations dynamics by unraveling the intricate details of American engagement with North Korea under the purview of two different administrations. This exploration will shed light on diplomatic strategies' changing nature and consequences. It also seeks to provide insights for policymakers and scholars alike.

### **Problem Statement**

The inconsistency in American foreign policy towards the North Korean regime, observed through varying strategies under President Trump's direct engagement and "maximum pressure" approach versus President Biden's multilateral and structured framework, raises critical questions about policy effectiveness. This paper examines how these varying strategies have influenced diplomatic results and what this reveals about the broader challenges of maintaining a coherent and consistent foreign policy. The study aims to offer actionable insights for future policy-making by highlighting these inconsistencies and challenges.

## **LITERATURE REVIEW**

### **Previous Scholarly Analysis on American-North Korea Relations**

The literature and previous studies on American-North Korean relations are vast, reflecting the intricacies of the relations between the two states. Scholars have explored the diverse elements of this relationship, focusing on diplomatic negotiations and the threat of nuclear. For example, in the study "The Impossible State: North Korea, Past and Future," Cha (2013) investigates North Korea's internal politics. Likewise, in the study "Foreign Policy toward North Korea: The Problems of the Strategic Ambiguity," Bandow (2020) investigates the challenges presented by North Korea's behavior and the strategic uncertainties encountered by the United States. The evolving strategies of the United States government towards North Korea are also extensively documented in works like Revere's (2020) "North Korea and the U.S. Nuclear Diplomacy and the Legacy of Hostility."

Furthermore, Kang (2020) delves proudly into the geopolitical consequences of U.S. strategy towards North Korea in his work titled *Rising Tensions in the Korean Peninsula: U.S. Foreign Policy and Regional Stability*. Kang's analysis examines how American policies and actions affect regional stability, especially regarding states such as South Korea, Japan, and China. His research underscores the significance of adopting a multilateral approach that considers the security interstress of regional states.

Additionally, scholars have substantially delved into particular aspects of the U.S. North Korean ties, such as economic sanctions and humanitarian issues. Most notably, the study of Noland and Haggard (2017). In their study of *Hard Target: Sanctions, Inducements, and the Case of North Korea*, they argue the efficacy of sanctions in attaining U.S. foreign policy objectives. They assert that although sanctions have pressured the North Korean administration, their effectiveness in compelling, meaningful policy changes failed in achieving the desired goals. Similarly, Moon (2018), in *The North Korean Economy: Between Crisis and Catastrophe*, explored the intersection of economic factors and military priorities in shaping North Korea's domestic and foreign policies, emphasizing the challenges of dealing with a regime that prioritizes military capabilities over economic development (Moon, 2018).

On the same side, other studies significantly focused on the Trump administration's approach, such as Kristof (2020) in *"The Trump-Kim Summits: High Stakes and Mixed Results,"* examine the outcomes and strategic shifts resulting from the unprecedented summits between Kim Jong-un and President Trump. Kristof's evaluation spotlights the significant transformation in American foreign policy, moving from a "maximum pressure" stance to a strategy that included high-profile, albeit contentious, face-to-face meetings. These summits were marked by their historic significance, representing the first time a sitting U.S. president met with a North Korean leader. However, the results of these meetings, although they led to a temporary de-escalation of tensions and facilitated agreements on denuclearization, the table, significant and provable advancement on dismantling North Korea's nuclear capabilities remained elusive. In short, Kristof's study highlights the challenges and complexities of diplomatic engagement with a regime that has consistently broken promises and utilized negotiations to buy time for further nuclear development.

Conversely, Sanger and Broad's (2022) *"The Biden Administration and North Korea: A New Path Forward?"* extensively studies the Biden government's policies and assesses how Biden's approach endeavors to balance diplomatic engagement with strategic pressure. Sanger and Broad's study suggests a shift towards a more traditional, multilateral approach to diplomacy, coupled with a sustained emphasis on sanctions and international pressure. President Biden's strategy entails strengthening partnerships with Japan and South Korea, enhancing missile defense systems in the area, and utilizing international organizations to isolate North Korea diplomatically and economically. Biden's approach additionally involves offering aid and improving better relations, but only if the North Korean regime takes verifiable steps towards denuclearization. This nuanced strategy acknowledges the limitations of past confrontational stances and the overly conciliatory approaches that failed to yield long-term results. Sanger and Broad assert that Biden's policy seeks to steer the pitfalls of previous administrations by carefully balancing between diplomatic engagement and enforcing stringent measures to ensure compliance.

Further, studies like Fitzpatrick (2021) in *"Engagement or Confrontation? U.S. Strategies for North Korea under Biden"* investigate the complexity of Biden's policy framework. Fitzpatrick

underscores the significance of adopting a phased approach, where gradual progress in denuclearization would be met with a proportional reduction of sanctions. Hence, this demonstrates strategic patience, acknowledging that swift, broad changes are unlikely; gradual efforts might be more effective. This research further emphasizes human rights issues in North Korea, which were often neglected in previous negotiations and primarily focused on nuclear issues. In essence, the difference between the Trump and Biden administrations towards North Korea illustrates the diverse tactics employed by U.S. leaders in addressing the complexities of one of America's most persistent foreign policy dilemmas.

Arguably, the literature demonstrates an evolving understanding of the U.S. North Korea American relationship, implying that any effective strategy should combine diplomatic ingenuity, strict adherence to international norms, and commitment to multilateral cooperation. The research of Kristof, Sanger, Broad, and Fitzpatrick collectively highlights the need for adaptable and multifaceted strategies in dealing with North Korea and seeking a balance between pressure and engagement to secure lasting security and stability on the Korean Peninsula. In sum, the vast body of literature concerning American-North Korean relations emphasizes the complex nature of geopolitical issues. Noland and Haggard (2017) have comprehensively analyzed diplomatic, economic, and strategic dimensions, providing valuable insights into challenges and possible avenues for one of the most persistent and intricate international conflicts. However, these works lacked an investigation of the reasons for the U.S. challenges and difficulties in crafting a consistent and cohesive policy toward North Korea.

## **Theoretical Approach**

### **Examination Consistency and Coherence in Foreign Policy**

To fully grasp the challenges and difficulties the United States faces in grafting a consistent and cohesive foreign policy toward North Korea, it is essential to delve deeply into theoretical frameworks that explain foreign policy consistency and coherence. The consistency and coherence of American foreign policy toward North Korea can be examined through the perspectives of realism, liberalism, and constructivism.

### **U.S. Consistency and Coherence and Realism Perspective**

Realist theory stresses the anarchic nature of the international system, focusing on power and security as paramount drivers of state behavior. From a realist perspective, the inconsistency in U.S. policy towards North Korea can be attributed to fluid power dynamics and security imperatives. Advocates of realism contend that America must continuously adjust its strategies to manage perceived threats and uphold its position within the international hierarchy. Arguably, the fluctuation between diplomatic engagement and military pressure reflects the realist concept of power politics, wherein strategic interests and national security imperatives drive policy shifts. At the forefront of scholars, John Mearsheimer emphasizes that states primarily act to preserve dominance and secure their survival within the international system, which often requires policy adjustments in response to potential external threats (Mearsheimer, 2018). This theoretical framework posits that American foreign policy towards North Korea is not erratic but rather a calculated response to changes in international relations and the perpetual quest for security and power. In his work of *Man, the State, and War: A Theoretical Analysis.* (Columbia University Press, 1959), Waltz, Kenneth N argue that states operate in a self-help system with no central authority to enforce rules or norms. The American interactions with the North Korean regime are based on a strategic calculation to maximize national interest.

Hence, the oscillation between engagement and pressure can be interpreted as tactical maneuvers designed to counter North Korea's nuclear ambitions and uphold regional stability, a critical component of U.S. security policy in East Asia. Stephen Walt's "balance of threat" theory also introduces another layer to this analysis. Walt discusses that states react not merely to power alone but to perceived threats, a combination of geographic proximity, capabilities, offensive intentions, and aggressive actions (Walt, Stephen M. "The Origins of Alliances." Cornell University Press, 1987). Cornell University Press, (1987). As a result, the U.S. regularly perceives North Korea's nuclear development and aggressive rhetoric as significant threats, necessitating a robust and adaptive policy approach. North Korea's development of nuclear weapons, combined with its proximity to key U.S. allies such as Japan and South Korea, plus its historical hostility towards the U.S., undoubtedly elevates the perceived threat level considerably.

Consequently, the United States utilized two specific strategies. First, it engaged in negotiation and engagement and imposed sanctions to mitigate North Korea's ability to progress its nuclear program. Second, the U.S. regularly threatened to use Military deterrence to assure the U.S. allies and dissuade North Korea from hostile actions through a credible threat of military response (Cha et al. Katz, "The Right Way to Coerce North Korea: Ending the Threat without Going to War" (Foreign Affairs, 2018). By integrating such strategies, the U.S. aims to manage the threat from North Korea in alignment with realist principles prioritizing national security and the balance of power. This multidimensional approach highlights the realist perspective that global stability is best preserved through a nuanced balancing of threats and corresponding defensive measures. (Sagan, Scott D. "The Korean Missile Crisis: Why Deterrence Is Still the Best Option." Foreign Affairs, 2017).

### **Consistency and Coherence in American Foreign Policy: A Liberalism Perspective**

Liberal theory stresses the critical roles of international institutions, economic interdependence, and the collective influence of domestic policies on foreign policy. Liberal contend that the inconsistencies in U.S. policies towards North Korea can be interpreted as levels of commitment to multilateralism, the application of engagement in diplomatic negotiations, and economic sanctions. These fluctuations are also influenced by changes in U.S. administrations, shifts in public sentiment, and the dynamics of global alliances, all contributing to shaping policy coherence (Ikenberry, 2018). From a liberal standpoint, international organizations such as the United Nations and the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) are essential platforms for addressing security concerns and promoting dialogue (United Nations, 2023; IAEA, 2023). The U.S.'s engagement with these organizations in its approach to North Korea reflects a commitment to a rules-based international order. An excellent example is the Six-Party Talks, which included North Korea, South Korea, China, Japan, Russia, and the United States (Council on Foreign Relations, 2018). Such efforts can arguably exemplify an attempt to utilize multilateral frameworks for achieving denuclearization on the Korean Peninsula. The success and setbacks of these discussions underscore the challenges of maintaining policy consistency while balancing the varied interests of multiple stakeholders (Brookings Institution, 2018).

Economic independence is also a fundamental aspect of liberal theory, which proposes that more robust economic ties reduce the likelihood of conflict (Keohane & Nye, 2012). As such, the United States leaders have utilized a range of economic sanctions against North Korea to restrain its nuclear goals, alongside proposing economic intensives for denuclearization and

reform (Chanlett-Avery & Rinehart, 2016). However, the effectiveness of these sanctions has been a subject of discussion, underscoring a conflict between punitive measures and the potential benefits of economic cooperation (Haggard & Noland, 2017). The fluctuations in the intensity and scope of sanctions over different administrations illustrate how economic measures are employed variably to either pressure or encourage compliance from North Korea (Albert, 2020).

The transition between the Trump and Biden administrations marks a significant shift in American foreign policy toward North Korea. For Instance, the Biden administration's approach, characterized by traditional diplomacy, sharply contrasted with the Trump administration's hasty approach and his continuing threat of arms, which then shifted to unprecedented direct engagement with Kim Jong-un (Landler, 2018). Additionally, Trump repeatedly insisted on bypassing conventional diplomatic channels and minimizing the role of global institutions, marking unquestionably a shift away from liberal emphasis on multilateralism and economic interdependence (Sanger & Haberman, 2018). Conversely, President Biden's administration has sought to reestablish more liberal stances on foreign policy. Biden stresses the importance of cooperation through partners and international institutions to renew the U.S.'s commitment to a multilateral framework (Jakes, 2021). Delve into his administration, Biden has adopted a more cautious and structured approach to North Korea, focusing on rebuilding alliances with Japan and South Korea and pursuing a coordinated strategy with Russia and China. This undoubtedly demonstrates a return to the principles of liberalism, prioritizing collective security and international cooperation (Smith, 2021).

Further, domestic policies within the United States are pivotal in forming foreign policy toward North Korea. Different administrations, shaped by their ideological leanings and electoral motivations, adopt various strategies when addressing North Korean issues (Lind, 2020). In the case of Trump, he frequently bypassed conventional foreign policy interest groups, instead preferring to rely on his close advisors and a select group of loyalists. (Sanger & Haberman, 2018). Additionally, Trump repeatedly made decisions and relied on his personal instincts and direct engagements, as evidenced by his unprecedented meetings with Kim Jong-un, which undoubtedly were untraditional diplomatic protocols (Baker & Lee, 2018). President Biden, on the other hand, has encountered pressures from various interest groups and public opinion to tackle human rights abuses in North Korea alongside the nuclear dilemma (Rogin, 2021). Biden significantly emphasizes the importance of domestic considerations; Biden aimed not just at pursuing a purely liberal policy but also at securing public support (Crowley & Jakes, 2021). However, Biden's multifaceted approach can be interpreted as balancing security concerns with broader humanitarian goals, aiming to achieve policy coherence and consistency through a liberal lens. These shifts are not only a result of changing leadership but reflect evolving public opinion and the influence of key interest groups (Pew Research Center, 2020). Public sentiment towards North Korea can shift between favoring hardline and supporting diplomatic endeavors, complicating the quest for a coherent and consistent policy. In sum, from a liberal viewpoint, the consistency and coherence of U.S. foreign policy towards North Korea are framed by the intersection of international institutional commitments, economic strategies, domestic political dynamics, and the interplay of global partners. As such, the divergent foreign policies of the Trump and Biden administrations underscore how these factors can result in significant policy shifts.

### **Consistency and Coherence in U.S Foreign Policy from a Constructivism Viewpoint**

Constructivist theories underscore ideas, norms, and identities' influence on state behavior. Constructivists argue that the inconsistency observed in U.S. policy towards North Korea is due to the shifting perceptions of North Korea's identity and intentions. In most cases, Policy shifts mirror alterations in the U.S. view of North Korea, perceiving it as a threat or potential partner (Wendt, Alexander. "Anarchy is What States Make of It: The Social Construction of Power Politics." (Wendt, 1992, pp. 391-425). Wendt's seminal study " suggests the constructivist perspective on state behavior. Wendt argues that material capabilities or structural constraints do not merely dictate the behavior of states in the international order but are profoundly influenced by the ideas, norms, and identities that states hold.

From another constructivist perspective, the fluctuation in American foreign policy does not indicate randomness or lack of strategy but reflects evolving social constructs. Changes in leadership, international norms, and public norms form these constructs. (Checkel, 2017; Adler-Nissen & Pouliot, 2014; Katzenstein, 2016). For example, the American administration might initially take a hardline stance against North Korea, seeing it as a rogue state. Additionally, constructivism emphasizes mutual constitution, where the identities and actions of states are interdependent (Adler-Nissen & Pouliot, 2014). This means North Korea's behavior and statements are crucial in forming American foreign policy. As such, if North Korea regularly signals a willingness to denuclearize or pursue peaceful negotiations, the U.S. might reciprocate with diplomatic overtures. In contrast, aggressive behaviors by North Korea reinforce its identity as a threat, leading the U.S. to adopt a more confrontational policy. Further, based on constructivist theory, policy consistency can be established through internalizing norms and identities over time (Checkel, 2017). When a specific view of North Korea becomes firmly entrenched in the American political and social fabric, it can lead to a more stable and predictable foreign policy. For instance, if the U.S. consistently views North Korea as a potential partner for peace, this perception can become deeply rooted, resulting in sustained diplomatic efforts regardless of short-term provocations. From a constructivist view, the coherence and consistency of American foreign policy toward North Korea also evolve due to changing ideas, norms, and identities (Katzenstein, 2016). Comprehending these underlying social constructs offers a more nuanced explanation of the apparent inconsistencies in policy, highlighting the role of perception and mutual constitution in international relations.

### **Critiques of American Foreign Policy towards North Korea**

Critics of American foreign policy toward North Korea emphasize the complexities and limitations the United States encounters in this complicated relationship. One notable critique centers on strategic ambiguity. This uncertainty in U.S. intentions and responses has resulted in confusion and misjudgment (Cha, 2019). This ambiguity can be traced back to different administrations and has contributed to unpredictability in dealings with North Korea. Furthermore, Pritchard (2018), in *The Tragic Story of How North Korea Got the Bomb*, argues that American foreign policy's reactive nature has impeded effective diplomacy. Hence, instead of proactively tackling underlying issues, U.S. decision-makers have often been reactive, responding to North Korean provocations. Consequently, such a reactive response has led in a cycle of escalation and undoubtedly increased tensions (Pritchard, 2018).

Besides strategic ambiguity and reactive responses, critics highlight inconsistencies in U.S. policy implementation. These were significantly evident during the Trump Era. The fluctuation between military threats and diplomatic overtures created uncertainty for North Korea. It also



impacted America's critical regional allies, including Japan and South Korea. Snyder (2018) argues in 'South Korea at the Crossroads: Autonomy and Alliance in an Era of Rival Powers' that these oscillations undermined U.S. commitments and regional alliances' stability. Although the Biden administration has sought a more coherent approach, challenges persist. North Korea's ongoing advancements in missile technology pose a substantial security threat. This situation necessitates novel strategies to address proliferation concerns effectively. Moreover, broader geopolitical dynamics, especially the strategic competition with China, further complicate American efforts to engage effectively with the North Korean regime.

Critics argue that the U.S. policy towards North Korea lacks sustained diplomatic engagement. For instance, there have been intermittent attempts at dialogue and negotiation. Critics also add that external factors have undermined these efforts. Hence, simply, it can be said that the lack of a consistent, long-term diplomatic strategy hampers significant progress in resolving tensions on the Korean Peninsula (Kelly, 2021). Moreover, frequent turnover in American administrations and personnel disrupts the continuity of diplomatic efforts. This makes building trust and momentum in negotiations with North Korea challenging. Therefore, critics assert that a more sustained and coherent diplomatic approach is necessary. This is to break the cycle of confrontation and pave the way for lasting peace and denuclearization.

### **The Gap Study and Literature Review Summary**

Despite extensive research on American-North Korean relations, there is a gap in a deep understanding of the strategies of different administrations in tackling the North Korean regime and how their different approaches compare in achieving long-term objectives and addressing immediate security concerns. While many critiques and analyses focus on individual administrations, there needs to be more comparative studies systematically evaluating the consistency and coherence of policies across different presidential terms. Addressing this gap is essential, as it offers insights for developing more effective and sustainable foreign policy strategies. In sum, the academic literature on American-North Korea relations is a solid foundation for assessing the consistency and coherence of U.S. foreign policy. However, by utilizing theoretical frameworks from realism, liberalism, and constructivism and considering the concepts of consistency and coherence, this research aims to evaluate the Trump and Biden administrations' approaches specifically.

### **METHODOLOGY**

#### **Research Approach: Qualitative Analysis**

This paper utilized a qualitative research approach to analyze the consistency and coherence of American foreign policy towards North Korea during the Donald Trump and Joe Biden era. A qualitative methodology was apt for this investigation due to its ability to delve into the intricacies and nuances of diplomatic strategies, policy shifts, and their outcomes. Through its focus on qualitative data, this study aimed to reveal the underlying factors contributing to policy consistency and coherence, providing a detailed understanding of U.S.-North Korea interactions. Qualitative research facilitated a more flexible, in-depth examination of the intricate nature of international relations, capturing the subtleties and context that quantitative methods might overlook.

## Data Collection

Data were collected from various sources to guarantee robust and in-depth analysis. This approach was chosen to ensure that information reflects multiple perspectives and encompasses a broad spectrum of insights, most notably in the following ways:

**Primary Sources:** Official government documents, the U.S. Department of State website and the White House archives, policy papers, and relevant databases from the Trump and Biden administrations. This method aimed to uncover the unique policy positions and strategic objectives of each administration regarding U.S.-North Korea relations, providing valuable insights into evolving diplomatic landscapes.

**Online Academic Sources:** Secondary data and expert insights on American North Korea were collected through journals, reports accessible via academic databases, reputable internet platforms, and scholarly articles. For instance, databases such as JSTOR, ProQuest, and Google Scholar provided peer-reviewed articles and academic papers investigating various aspects of international diplomacy and policy analysis.

**Media Reports:** News articles and analyses from respected media platforms were reviewed to assess public perception, media framing, and the broader discourse regarding U.S. policy towards North Korea. Credible sources included Reuters, The Washington Post, and The New York Times. The media on these platforms offered insights into how policies were received and understood by the public and the press while uncovering discrepancies between official strategies and media reports.

## Data Analysis:

The collected data underwent analysis utilizing two reliable qualitative methods, including thematic and content analysis, to comprehensively understand and thoroughly examine the research question. These approaches were chosen for their ability to offer profound insights into the complex and nuanced nature of the data, facilitating a comprehensive understanding of American policy towards North Korea under both administrations.

**Thematic Analysis:** This approach was utilized to discover and analyze themes Within the data. This study categorized information into themes such as strategic shifts, diplomatic engagement, and policy outcomes, shedding light on the common threads and differences in the approaches of the Trump and Biden administrations. Thematic analysis enabled a detailed exploration of recurring motifs, yielding insights into the broader implications of policy decisions. Coding of the data involved several iterative rounds to guarantee reliability and validity, with themes refined iteratively based on emerging patterns.

**Content Analysis:** This technique systematically analyzed official statements, primary documents, and media reports. The content analysis measured specific terms, concepts, and themes, providing a detailed picture of how American policy toward North Korea was articulated and implemented. Through systematically coding and categorizing the data, the content analysis helped identify the frequency and context of key terms and ideas, providing a structured approach to understanding the data. In sum, by utilizing thematic and content analysis, this research attained a comprehensive and multifaceted understanding of the data, ensuring a robust and credible analysis of American policy toward North Korea.

## Limitations and Challenges

Although the qualitative method provided in-depth insights, there are certain limitations and challenges encountered in this study:

**Subjectively:** Undoubtedly, the qualitative method is naturally subjective; the researcher's perspectives and biases may influence the interpretation of data. However, triangulations were employed by using multiple data sources to reduce bias and improve the paper's credibility and validity.

**Data Accessibility:** Access to some primary official documents primary sources was limited, which could impact the analysis depth. Nonetheless, this research utilized publicly available databases, academic sources, and government archives.

**The Changing Nature of U.S Foreign Policy:** America's foreign policy towards North Korea is fluid and can change rapidly in response to geopolitical events. As a result, capturing the most current and relevant data presents a challenge. This paper tackled this challenge by including the latest available information and considering historical context. Additionally, this study provided a comprehensive overview of policy trends and shifts over time.

**Analysis Scope:** Given the extensive scope of American–North Korean relations, this paper may not address every aspect in detail. Therefore, to offer a deep and balanced analysis, the emphasis was on the most significant and impactful elements of the Trump and Biden administrations' policies to offer a balanced and comprehensive analysis. As such, this paper underscores the primary drives of policy consistency and coherence by focusing on core events and decisions.

**Reliability and Validity:** Ensuring reliability and validity in qualitative methods can be difficult. However, this research utilized methodical rigor by using multiple sources and approaches for data collection and analysis. Hence, Triangulation was applied to improve the trustworthiness of the findings, considering a credible and valid analysis of American foreign policy towards North Korea.

**Research Bias:** Identifying the potential for researcher bias is critical in qualitative research. The research design included reflective practices and peer debriefing to mitigate bias.

In sum, such research methods were essential in conducting a rigorous qualitative analysis, ensuring that the study provides a nuanced, well-rounded account of American foreign policy toward the North Korean regime under the Trump and Biden administrations.

## Consistency in American Foreign Policy under President Trump

The Trump administration's strategy towards North Korea undoubtedly represented a significant departure from previous American foreign policies. As such, Trump's approach and behavior can arguably be interpreted as a mix of unprecedented direct diplomacy, aggressive discourses, and strict economic sanctions (Panda, 2020). To deter North Korea's nuclear ambitions and prevent any potential development and proliferation of its nuclear weapons program, Trump intensified his campaigns to counter North Korea. Based on the National Security Strategy (White House, 2017), the Trump administration applied "maximum pressure" via extensive sanctions and diplomatic isolation. This political behavior outlines a clear strategy to compel North Korea to denuclearize, heavily leaning on economic measures and global cooperation. In addition, this administration took an unconventional turn by directly engaging with Kim Jong-un during the summit held between both presidents in Singapore in

June 2018. Such diplomatic endeavors were distinctive and offered dialogue that had been absent in previous administrations.

Nonetheless, these meetings were often criticized for lacking concrete steps toward denuclearization (Cha, 2021). Scholars and Critics have argued about the consistency and effectiveness of Trump's approach toward North Korea. While Trump maintained a consistent stance on applying economic pressure and engaging in direct diplomacy, the absence of tangible progress toward denuclearization raised questions regarding his policies' sustainability and strategic coherence (Solingen, 2019). As such, Trump's political behavior towards North Korea was criticized for its inconsistency in messaging and strategy. Critics contend that the emphasis on the optics of diplomacy over substantive progress allowed the North Korean regime to further advance its nuclear program under the guise of ongoing negotiation (Panda, 2020). This political thought limited the effectiveness of the diplomatic engagements and potentially emboldened Pyongyang by reducing the immediate pressure to comply with international denuclearization demands. Consequently, the strategy's long-term viability and effect on regional security remained highly contentious among critics and policymakers (Hagström & Gustafsson, 2019).

The varying rhetoric, from conciliatory gestures to provocative statements conveyed through social media and public speeches, contributed to uncertainty and volatility in diplomatic relations (Drezner, 2020). Therefore, such inconsistency unquestionably weakened American credibility and predictability in international relations. Additionally, the lack of a clear roadmap for achieving complete denuclearization and fluctuating rhetoric surrounding North Korea's nuclear capabilities contributed to inconsistency in American foreign policy under Trump. This erratic approach not only complicated talks but also sent mixed signals for both allies and adversaries, potentially undermining broader strategic goals and reducing the effectiveness of U.S. leverage in negotiations.

### **Coherence in U.S Foreign Policy under Trump**

The Trump administration's foreign policy is frequently seen as inconsistent; however, a profound look reveals a multifaceted strategy aligned with broader strategic goals. The Trump administration emphasized an "America First" policy, focusing on national interests, economic growth, and military strengthening. This overarching goal shaped various aspects of foreign policy, including the strategy towards the North Korean regime. Therefore, the Trump approach's "maximum pressure" campaign against North Korea was consistent with its broader goal of curbing nuclear proliferation and protecting American national security. This strategy was aligned with Trump's emphasis on demonstrating American strength and deterrence, highlighting a clear connection between specific policy actions and overarching strategic objectives (Landler & Sanger, 2017). However, critics contend that focusing on economic pressure without clear diplomatic incentives can be counterproductive. The Kim regime's resilience and adeptness at leveraging nationalistic sentiments meant that sanctions alone were insufficient to achieve denuclearization. Critics highlighted that this approach lacked a balanced mix of pressure and engagement, which is crucial for successful diplomatic outcomes (Revere, 2018). On the same side, Trump's foreign policy also involved extensive coordination with partners, especially in Asia-Pacific. The administration collaborated closely with Japan and South Korea to present a united front against North Korea through strategic dialogues, Joint military exercises, and coordinated sanctions. In addition, Trump made concerted efforts to involve China in its strategy towards the North Korean regime. This approach includes

leveraging trade negotiations with Beijing to secure its cooperation on North Korean sanctions (Council on Foreign Relations, 2018). While outcomes were varied, this approach highlighted an understanding of the importance of regional dynamics and the necessity of multilateral cooperation to tackle intricate security challenges. Critics, nonetheless, pointed out that despite the emphasis on regional coordination, there were instances of misalignment and misunderstanding between America and its allies. For example, South Korea's push for engagement with North Korea sometimes conflicted with Trump's more confrontational approach, creating friction and undermining a cohesive strategy (Cha, 2020). Arguably, such divergence in priorities and interests underscored the challenge of achieving a cohesive approach when allies have differing priorities and strategies. Moreover, despite the Trump administration having encountered sharp internal disputes among interagency over its approach to the North Korean regime, it managed to maintain a relatively consistent policy direction, focusing on maximum pressure and direct diplomacy. For instance, Secretary of State Mike Pompeo and National Security Advisor John Bolton played active roles in navigating these internal dynamics and balancing hawkish and diplomatic viewpoints to maintain a unified public front (Baker, 2019). Unquestionably, this capacity to manage internal divisions was crucial for upholding the coherence of the administration's strategy. However, internal discord sometimes results in mixed signals and policy incoherence. Critics contend that personnel changes and contradictory statements from various officials created domestic and international confusion. This lack of a cohesive approach weakened the overall effectiveness of the foreign policy (Wright, 2020). Hence, arguably, The Trump administration's internal dynamics highlight the complexities of bureaucratic politics, where multiple actors with divergent interests influence policy outcomes.

### **Assessing Continuity, Change, and Coherence under the Biden Administration**

Delving into President Biden's strategy toward North Korea demonstrates that it starkly contrasts with the methods employed by his predecessor, Donald Trump. President Biden criticized Trump's direct engagement with Kim Jong-un, asserting that it provided unwarranted legitimacy and did not deliver progress toward denuclearization (Panda, 2020). Instead, the Biden administration championed a renewed emphasis on traditional diplomacy rooted in multilateralism, underscoring the necessity of coordinated actions with U.S. partners and strict adherence to international norms and agreements (Miller, 2020). As such, it can be argued that Biden's strategy, while grounded in a return to conventional diplomatic norms, signifies a broader shift in American foreign policy. By stressing the importance of maintaining solid alliances with Japan and South Korea and engaging with China's regime to pressure North Korea into compliance with international demands, the Biden administration has departed from Trump's personalized diplomacy towards a structured and consultative approach. Additionally, Biden enhanced effectiveness through sustained international coordination and strategic patience. Although the outlook for diplomatic engagement under Biden's administration appeared cautiously optimistic and focused on achieving substantive steps toward denuclearization, these endeavors have yet to bear fruit since the North Korean regime did not respond positively.

Further, Arguably, although Biden's approach focuses on consistency, predictability, and multilateral cooperation to achieve sustainable progress on denuclearization, it has also been much criticized. For instance, while diplomatic engagement and multilateral cooperation are essential, they may inadvertently prolong negotiations without achieving tangible results (Kim, 2021). Additionally, Biden's focus on rebuilding alliances and adhering strictly to international

norms could limit flexibility in responding to North Korea's strategic actions and regional dynamics (Park, 2021). On the same side, President Biden's method did not sufficiently navigate the intricacies of Sino-American relations. China's role is, without a doubt, pivotal as North Korea's primary economic lifeline and exerting considerable influence over Pyongyang. Biden's diplomatic strategy did not include engaging China to enforce global sanctions and pressure North Korea. However, this strategy faces complications due to broader strategic tensions between the U.S. and China. However, this approach is complicated by broader strategic tensions between the U.S. and China, including trade issues such as Human rights, trade disputes, and regional security competition in the South China Sea (Swaine, 2021). This perspective highlights the inherent challenges of balancing diplomacy with deterrence, especially in addressing North Korea's complex security calculations.

### **Consistency in U.S. Foreign Policy under President Biden**

President Biden's foreign policy has exhibited a measured approach marked by a combination of deterrence and diplomacy. Unlike the Trump administration's policies, Biden has upheld a strong position on denuclearization while expressing a willingness to engage in dialogue under specific conditions (Jones, 2023). Additionally, the Biden foreign policy toward the North Korean Regime aims to create a consistent and predictable framework, focusing on conventional diplomacy, alliance-building, and multilateral cooperation. As such, central to Biden's foreign policy has been a deliberate change towards multilateralism-engagement. This political thought is evident in efforts to rejoin international agreements such as the World Health Organization and the Paris Climate Accord, highlighting a commitment to global cooperation and collective problem-solving (Miller, 2022). Biden has also strengthened ties with traditional partners in Europe and Asia. For instance, endeavors to reaffirm commitments under NATO and the Indo-Pacific Quad framework highlight the continuity of U.S. support for regional stability and security (Garcia, 2021; Patel, 2021). These alliances function as force multipliers in addressing challenges, such as regional conflicts and geopolitical tensions.

Regarding economic diplomacy, Biden's principles have been consistent throughout his foreign policy, and this can be observed in his endeavors to advance economic growth and tackle global economic challenges. Further, Biden's strategy involves bolstering economic ties with international allies, renegotiating trade agreements to reflect U.S. interests, and tackling unjust trade practices—for instance, the revision of the United States-Mexico-Canada Agreement (USMCA). Although the agreement was initially negotiated under Trump, the President has upheld and enforced it, strongly emphasizing labor rights and environmental standards. Thus, the Biden administration has ensured that Mexico complies with its labor commitments under the USMCA, including implementing labor reforms and protecting workers' rights. Hence, arguably, this strategy enhances economic relationships with key regional partners and addresses unfair trade practices. In addition to that, Biden's administration has also intensely engaged with partners to tackle international economic challenges, such as supply chain disruptions worsened by the COVID-19 pandemic. This joint effort arguably bolsters U.S. competitiveness while advocating for a rules-based international economic order, demonstrating consistency in his foreign policy approach to economic diplomacy (Thompson, 2021).

Furthermore, Biden's foreign policy method also emphasizes promoting democratic values and human rights worldwide. This approach diverges from the transactional approach observed in the Trump approach, which often downplayed human rights concerns in favor of geopolitical

interests. Biden's foreign policy is marked by deliberate endeavors to reestablish coherence, consistency, and credibility in U.S. global engagement. Such an approach unquestionably departs from the unpredictability of Trump's tenure, representing a return to a more conventional U.S. foreign policy, prioritizing stability, predictability, and principled leadership on the global stage.

### **Comparison and Analysis of Trump and Biden Administrations**

Delving deeply into both administrations reveals that President Trump's and President Biden's foreign policies toward North Korea are considerably different approaches, particularly regarding their diverse strategic priorities and ideological frameworks. President Trump's Strategy actively directs engagement with Kim Jong-un, aggressive discourse to apply maximum pressure and aim for denuclearization (Cha, 2021). This unconventional method culminated in the landmark 2018 Singapore Summit, where Trump became the first sitting American president to meet with a North Korean president (Revere, 2020). President Strategy highlighted personal diplomacy and bold moves, aiming to disrupt the deadlock that had defined U.S.-North Korea relations for decades (Sanger, 2018). Additionally, Trump's strategy was further marked by his administration's reliance on sanctions and economic pressure as critical tools to influence North Korea's behavior (Revere, 2020). For instance, the 'maximum pressure' campaign entailed the implementation of extensive sanctions targeting North Korea's economy to cut off revenue streams that could support its nuclear program (U.S. Department of State, 2017). Simply put this approach aimed to compel North Korea to come to the negotiating table to abandon its nuclear weapons (Kristof, 2020). Nonetheless, this strategy resulted in considerable economic hardships for the North Korean population, prompting humanitarian concerns and ethical debates about the use of such tactics (Moon, 2018).

Conversely, President Biden's strategy emphasizes conventional diplomacy and multilateralism. Thus, Biden rejected President Trump's personalized, often erratic, unpredictable diplomacy. Instead, Biden prioritized enhancing alliances with key regional partners such as Japan and South Korea to coordinate international efforts to pressure North Korea (Bandow, 2018). This approach highlights a return to conventional diplomatic norms, relying on sustained and strategic engagement with allies. Additionally, Biden's approach incorporates a sophisticated grasp of regional dynamics and the importance of China's role in resolving the North Korean issue. Unlike President Trump, who frequently adopted a confrontational approach, Biden seeks to engage Beijing as a strategic ally in applying pressure on North Korea. Applying such political thought involves utilizing diplomatic channels and economic incentives to motivate China to play a more active role in enforcing international sanctions against the North Korean regime (Liu, 2019). However, such an approach faces substantial challenges due to broader geopolitical tensions between Washington and Beijing, including trade disputes.

### **Strengths and Weaknesses in Consistency and Coherence in both Administrations**

The Trump administration adopted a markedly different approach to breaking new ground in direct diplomacy with North Korea. By engaging Kim Jong-un directly, Trump aimed to establish new negotiation channels and achieve breakthroughs that had eluded previous administrations. As such, this approach aligned with his overarching "America First" policy, characterized by assertive, independent actions designed to reconfigure global relationships in favor of U.S. interests (White House, 2017). Nevertheless, this strategy exhibited notable weaknesses. The lack of a clear and sustained diplomatic process following the summits and

fluctuating messaging and evolving policy emphases undermined the effectiveness and coherence of Trump's approach (National Security Council, 2019). Critics contend that the emphasis on high-profile meetings without substantive follow-through enabled North Korea to continue advancing its nuclear development largely unchecked (Johns, 2020). Further, Trump's erratic communication, personal style, and reliance on social media to announce policy decisions created additional challenges. Therefore, the unpredictability of his statements, ranging from threats of military action to declarations of love for Kim Jong-un, created uncertainty and confusion among both partners and adversaries (Davis, 2019). This inconsistency not only weakened the credibility of U.S. foreign policy but also complicated endeavors for diplomats and policymakers to maintain a coherent strategy in dealing with North Korea.

Conversely, Biden's administration strategy has prioritized consistency and predictability, which are critical components for maintaining stable international relations. This approach benefits from greater coherence, aligning with longstanding U.S. foreign policy traditions and providing a clear framework for diplomatic engagement (Friedman, 2021). However, this strategy also confronts obstacles. Focusing on conventional diplomacy and multilateralism can sometimes lead to protracted negotiations with limited immediate results, potentially granting the North Korean regime time to progress in its nuclear goals (Kim, 2021). As such, Biden's administration has faced criticism for its inability to achieve significant progress in halting North Korea's nuclear program despite its consistent and predictable approach. Thus, North Korea continued to advance nuclear technology, illustrating the regime's defiance and resistance to international pressure (Miller, 2020).

### **Impact on American -North Korea Relations and Regional Stability**

The contrasting approaches of Trump and Biden have greatly influenced U.S.-North Korea relations and the stability of East Asia. Trump's direct engagement with President Kim Jong-un initially raised hopes for a diplomatic breakthrough. However, the lack of substantive progress in later negotiations led to a resurgence of tensions and provocations. The dramatic shifts in U.S. policy, ranging from threats of "fire and fury" to historic handshakes, contributed to uncertainty and volatility in the region (Lee, 2019). Though groundbreaking, President Trump's highly publicized summits with Kim Jong-un ultimately failed to achieve lasting results. The initial optimism generated by such global meetings was not followed by concrete steps toward denuclearization, leading to skepticism and disappointment among U.S. partners. In addition, the emphasis on unconventional diplomacy, photo opportunities, and achieving agreements also allowed the North Korean regime to exploit the situation, gaining global attention and legitimacy without offering significant compromises (Fifield, 2019).

From another angle, Biden's approach, emphasizing consistency and multilateralism, seeks to stabilize relations and a sustainable framework for tackling the nuclear threat posed by the North Korean regime. Through close collaboration with partners and maintaining a unified stance, Biden seeks to increase pressure on North Korea while keeping diplomatic channels open for future negotiations. Though more predictable, this strategy has yet to yield significant achievements, as North Korea is still resistant to denuclearization talks without offering any concessions (Jackson, 2021). In addition, Biden's approach to alliance management and regional stability contrasts sharply with President Trump's often unilateral and transactional style. President Biden seeks to create a cohesive and resilient regional security architecture by favoring consultations and coordinated actions with significant allies such as Japan and South



Korea. Such a multilateral approach bolsters the credibility of American commitments and fosters greater trust and cooperation among regional allies (Smith, 2021). Nonetheless, the challenge remains in aligning these allies' varied interests and priorities, particularly when it comes to engaging China and addressing broader geopolitical issues in the Indo-Pacific region (Taylor, 2021).

### **Implications for Future Foreign Policy Decision-Making**

The contrasting approaches of Trump and Biden offer valuable insights for shaping future American foreign policy decision-making. Trump's bold and unconventional diplomacy highlighted the potential advantages of direct engagement and departing from conventional diplomatic norms to attain substantial results. However, his approach's shortcomings underscore the significance of follow-through, coherent strategy, and the dangers of inconsistency in international relations (Jervis, 2021). Future U.S. administrations may consider integrating some elements of Trump's direct engagement method with Biden's emphasis on consistency and multilateralism. For instance, a strategy that combines high-level direct diplomacy with sustained and coordinated endeavors through conventional diplomatic channels could present a balanced approach. This approach would entail maintaining clear and consistent policies, strengthening alliances, and being prepared directly when necessary to achieve significant diplomatic achievements (Wright, 2022). Biden's methodical and alliance-based approach highlights the value of multilateralism and the power derived from unified global collaboration (Brands, 2022). As such, arguably, focusing on consistency and adherence to global norms establishes a stable foundation for long-term diplomatic engagements. However, potential drawbacks like prolonged negotiations and limited flexibility must be tackled to ensure that diplomatic endeavors lead to tangible results (Haass, 2021).

Further, future American foreign policy toward North Korea should consider the evolving geopolitical landscape and the role of other major regional powers, particularly China (Green, 2022). Engaging China more effectively and finding common ground on mutual concerns could enhance the prospects for a coordinated and impactful approach to the North Korean regime. In addition to that, there is an urgent to address humanitarian concerns and the well-being of the North Korean population. The United States should not overlook it (Park, 2023). While sanctions are essential for exerting pressure on the North Korean regime, future decision-makers should also consider measures that mitigate the adverse humanitarian and aiding the North Korean populace. This approach might entail implementing targeted sanctions, increased humanitarian aid, and involving civil society organizations to address the population's pressing needs.

In sum, Trump's and Biden's foreign policy approaches toward the North Korean regime reflect more significant distinctions in their respective strategies within international relations. While Trump's direct diplomacy and bold gestures significantly depart from conventional practices, Biden's renewed focus on multilateralism and consistent diplomacy highlights the importance of stability and coherence in foreign policy (Jervis, 2021; Baker, 2021). However, both strategies have their strengths and weaknesses, and future American administrations can learn from their experiences to craft more effective and balanced strategies in addressing intricate global issues. By combining the strengths of both methods, future decision-makers can achieve a more comprehensive and impactful strategy toward North Korea. This would entail merging bold initiatives with sustained multilateral endeavors while maintaining a consistent policy framework that tackles the issue's regional and humanitarian dimensions. Ultimately, a

nuanced and flexible strategy that adapts to evolving circumstances and leverages the strengths of both direct engagement and conventional diplomacy will be crucial for addressing complex international challenges.

### **Recap of Conclusions**

Presidents Trump and Biden have followed notably different foreign policy approaches toward the North Korean regime, each possessing unique advantages and drawbacks. President Trump's term was marked by an unorthodox approach to direct interactions with North Korean leader Kim Jong-un, complemented by a campaign of "maximum pressure" through economic sanctions. This approach sought to overcome the deadlock in U.S.-North Korean relations but was criticized for its inconsistency and lack of considerable progress on denuclearization. Conversely, President Biden's administration has adopted a more transitional diplomatic framework, focusing on multilateralism, alliance-building, and a structured, predictable policy framework. However, Biden's approach has encountered similar challenges, especially in achieving tangible advancements toward North Korean denuclearization.

In sum, formulating an effective American foreign policy toward the North Korean regime has inherent complexities and challenges. As such, arguably, The Trump administration's direct engagement approach, though innovative, highlighted the risks associated with inconsistent messaging and the absence of sustained diplomatic processes the President Biden administration's return to conventional diplomatic norms has highlighted the importance of multilateralism and regional cooperation, although it has yet to achieve significant outcomes in denuclearization efforts.

### **Recommendations for Strengthening Consistency and Coherence in U.S foreign**

Unlike Trump, President Biden has demonstrated a more consistent and coherent approach to United States foreign policy. Nevertheless, the United States lacks adequate consistency and coherence in its foreign policy. Therefore, future U.S. administrations should incorporate unique political ideologies and strategies to strengthen a consistent, cohesive, and effective foreign policy toward North Korea. This comparative analysis article presents several key recommendations:

- a) Future U.S. administrations should consider merging diplomatic engagement strategies equally with Biden's multilateral, alliance-based approach. This approach could optimize the strengths of both approaches to enhance the effectiveness of American foreign policy.
- b) Strengthen Alliances and Regional Cooperation, particularly with South Korea and Japan. Strengthening military partners, economic alliances, and diplomatic coordination with these powerful regional actors not only amplifies pressure on North Korea but also creates a stable and resilient framework for sustained negotiations and crisis management.
- c) To achieve maximum interests in the region, the policy decision makers should engage China strategically given its substantial influence over North Korea. Tackling broader geopolitical tensions and finding common ground on North Korea could facilitate more effective cooperation.
- d) The United States should maintain consistent and coherent messages to prevent the confusion and volatility observed in the Trump administration. Clear communication enhances the credibility and predictability of American foreign policy, both at home and abroad.

- e) To ensure a consistent and coherent foreign policy, the United States must think outside the box and consider any steps it takes toward North Korea, for instance, in terms of posing sanctions against the North Korean regime. While it is considered an essential tool, the humanitarian impact must be carefully managed. As such, Future administrations should include specific sanctions and enhanced humanitarian aid to adverse effects on the North Korean population while upholding diplomatic objectives.

#### **Areas for Further Studies**

Despite this research offering an in-depth study comparing the Trump and Biden administrations and their foreign policy approaches toward North Korea, further scholarly inquiry is warranted in various areas to enhance the consistency and coherence of American foreign policy. For instance, firstly, conducting a comprehensive analysis of China's role and influence over North Korea is crucial. Insight into the dynamics of Sino-North Korean relations can guide more effective American strategies. Secondly, analyzing and comparing the long-term effectiveness of multilateral and unilateral approaches in attaining denuclearization and regional stability would offer valuable insights for U.S. decision-makers, particularly concerning identifying appropriate strategies toward the North Korean regime. Thirdly, a deep study of the impact of sanctions on the North Korean population is also essential to clearly understand the identified strategies to pressure the regime while mitigating harm to the civilian population.

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