AJPH
AUSTRALIAN JOURNAL OF POLITICS AND HISTORY

Australian Journal of Politics and History: Volume 70, Number 3, 2024, pp. 379–401.

All Containment and No Engagement: Australia's Contemporary Policy towards the Democratic People's Republic of Korea

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Australia's interactions with the Democratic People's Republic of Korea (DPRK), henceforth known as North Korea, have ebbed and flowed throughout their seventy-five-year history. In times of détente on the Korean Peninsula, Australia actively engaged North Korea and sought to facilitate its integration into the international system. However, during the recent détente in 2018–2019, Canberra broke with tradition and watched on as Trump, Moon, and Kim sought to negotiate a deal towards Pyongyang's denuclearisation. Why has Australia not followed its security partners and engaged, despite being an Indo-Pacific middle power and an advocate for non-proliferation? Answers to this question remain unknown in the international relations literature. Therefore, I conducted process tracing and identified seven "critical junctures" in Australia's relationship with North Korea while analysing its responses using middle power theory. Australia's preference for non-engagement is due to a shift towards a "maximum pressure" policy reliant on sanctions, reducing incentives to engage. This stems from a normative objection to Pyongyang's violation of the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons (NPT) and limited material capabilities to persuade North Korea to denuclearise unilaterally. I aim to give an up-to-date account of Australia-North Korea relations and draw attention to a neglected area in Australia's non-proliferation policy.

In January 2018, the Democratic People's Republic of Korea (DPRK), henceforth known as North Korea, emerged from its relative international isolation by sending a delegation to the Pyeongchang Winter Olympics in South Korea. A brief period of reconciliation between the two Koreas known as the "2018–2019 Korean Peace Process" or the "fourth détente" followed.[1] North Korean Supreme Leader Kim Jong-un met with former South Korean President Moon Jae-in in three summits in 2018. The improvement in inter-Korean relations led to historic meetings between Kim and former US President Donald Trump in Singapore, Hanoi, and Panmunjom. Despite Trump and Kim signing a joint statement pledging denuclearisation and improved ties in Singapore in June 2018, little progress was made to officially end the Korean War and persuade Pyongyang to denuclearise. The détente reached a stalemate after the

I would like to express my gratitude to Professor Joanne Wallis at the University of Adelaide for her helpful comments and guidance on my drafts and to the reviewer for their valuable feedback on the submission of this paper.

[1] Choi Kyung-won, "Window of Opportunity for a New Detente: 'Tight Link Strategy' of Moon Jae-in Administration and ROK–DPRK–US triangle," *Journal of Contemporary East Asia*, Vol 9, 1 (2020), pp. 29–49.

DOI:10.1111/ajph.12891.

Hanoi Summit in March 2019, when Kim unsuccessfully sought phased denuclearisation for partial sanctions relief. Despite an increase in tensions as of 2022, the situation remains relatively calm compared to the nuclear brinkmanship of 2017.

Interestingly, Australia, identified as a key US ally, an Asia/Indo-Pacific middle power, and a vocal advocate for nuclear non-proliferation, has remained quiet regarding any attempts to engage North Korea. Canberra maintains diplomatic relations with Pyongyang, rendering it well-suited to play an active but supplementary role in diplomacy alongside the United States and South Korea. This preference for non-engagement, described by commentators as akin to an "interested bystander," contradicts a history of engagement with North Korea in three previous eras of détente on the Korean Peninsula.[2] The reasons remain unexplored in the international relations (IR) literature. There have been no peer-reviewed publications on Australia-North Korea relations for nearly 15 years, with Canberra's policy towards Pyongyang largely neglected due to the rise of China and international terrorism occupying strategic attention.[3] Therefore, I ask: why has Australia not engaged North Korea since 2018?

To answer this question, I conducted process tracing of Australia-North Korea interactions from 1947 to 2022 and identified seven "critical junctures" leading to Canberra's current preference for non-engagement. Middle power theory can explain Australia's policy responses over time that led to this outcome. Australia is often identified as a middle power, with three main definitions of a middle power related to a state's position, behaviour, and identity in the IR literature. I propose that all three definitions apply to Australia's interactions with North Korea. Australia's relative material capabilities have afforded it leverage over most states in the Asia/Indo-Pacific to engage alongside the United States and South Korea. Canberra's historical support for traditional middle power initiatives, such as non-proliferation and human rights, have defined the relationship since the 1990s. Australia identified as a middle power during the early 1990s and late 2000s, consciously shaping its responses towards North Korea.

Although the different middle power approaches can determine Australia's relative capabilities, certain behavioural tendencies, and identity over various eras of the bilateral relationship, leaves gaps. In particular, the definitions do not account for a full range of middle power behaviours, especially overlooking security-seeking behaviour best described by realism. As a result, I elaborated on these middle power attributes by referencing the IR theories of realism, liberalism, and constructivism to better explain Australia's policy responses over time. I found that Australia's preference for non-engagement is due to a shift towards a "maximum pressure" policy reliant on sanctions designed to persuade North Korea to denuclearise, thus reducing incentives to engage, financially or otherwise. This shift is due to two reasons. First, Australia has a normative objection to North Korea's nuclear weapons program stemming from a historical advocacy of non-proliferation embedded in its identity and behaviour over time. Sanctions convey to Pyongyang that Canberra views its violation of the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons (NPT) as unacceptable. Second, Australia has limited coercive means and diplomatic resources to convince North Korea to denuclearise due to its middle-range capabilities and geographical distance from the

[2] Christina Lee, "How Australia Can Fix Its Non-Existent Relations with North Korea," *NK News*, 14 July 2019, *https://www.nknews.org/2019/07/how-australia-can-fix-its-non-existent-relations-with-north-korea/*.

[3] The last peer reviewed journal article on Australia-North Korea relations was Leonid A. Petrov, "Australia and the DPRK: A Sixty-Year Relationship," *Pacific Focus*, Vol 23, 3 (2008), pp. 312–339.

Korean Peninsula. This results in Canberra becoming reliant on "like-minded" partners and multilateral institutions to sanction Pyongyang and encourage diplomatic resolutions. I aim to provide an up-to-date account of Australia-North Korea relations and draw attention to a neglected area in Australia's non-proliferation policy.

I have structured this paper into four sections. First, I introduce the examination of critical junctures as research method and detail their application in this paper. Second, I survey the three definitions of position, behaviour, and identity, highlight their individual weaknesses, and draw on realism, liberalism, and constructivism to construct an enhanced framework for middle powers. Third, I trace the interactions between Australia and North Korea from 1947 to 2022, identify the seven critical junctures, and analyse successive Australian governments' responses using my enhanced framework. Finally, I conclude by summarising my findings and assessing their implications by determining when and how engagement might be warranted in the future.

Critical Junctures and Application

In the study of IR, scholars use "critical junctures" as a research method to magnify and deconstruct institutional decision-making to pinpoint the leading causes of an outcome. Junctures are "critical" because they place institutions on trajectories that are difficult to alter.[4] Scholars often identify critical junctures while conducting process tracing, which they utilise to "examine diagnostic pieces of evidence within a case to contribute to, support, or develop theory."[5] The benefits of identifying critical junctures lie in the relative simplicity with which researchers can examine policy and the flexibility to apply varying and sometimes opposing theories to empirical evidence. Moreover, it remains applicable to qualitative case studies requiring significant evidence generation. However, the margin for error is small if not conducted with a great deal of care, potentially leading to unclear and unproven conclusions. Scholars can mitigate this by profoundly understanding the specific case and related theory.

In this paper, I present critical junctures as a series of significant events occurring along a causal timeline in sequential order leading to a policy response from Australia towards North Korea. These events were not everyday occurrences and were determined via qualitative changes through a limited and specified scope, that is, an alteration to the international order, the election of a new government, or a significant crisis requiring a response.[6] I identify the juncture, describe the main events during the juncture, and deconstruct policymakers' responses towards North Korea by posing three questions of each government: Why did they respond? How did they respond? What was the outcome? When answering these questions, I apply my middle power framework to the empirical evidence. I then draw a conclusion from the prescribed theory and subsequently reveal the contributing factors over time that have led to Australia's preference for non-engagement.

A Middle Power Framework for Australia-North Korea Relations

Three definitions of middle powers feature prominently in the IR literature: position, behaviour, and identity. The first definition, a state's relative position to other states,

[4] Giovanni Capoccia and Daniel R. Kelemen, "The Study of Critical Junctures: Theory, Narrative, and Counterfactuals in Historical Institutionalism," *World Politics*, Vol 59, 3 (2011), pp. 341–369.
[5] James Mahoney, "Process Tracing and Historical Explanation," *Security Studies*, Vol 24, 2 (2015), pp. 200–218.
[6] Jason C. Mueller, "The Evolution of Political Violence: The Case of Somalia's Al-Shabaab," *Terrorism and Political Violence*, Vol 30, 1 (2018), pp. 116–141.

uses nominal gross domestic product (GDP), purchasing power parity, population, military size, geography, proximity to great powers, and defence spending to determine middle power status. Middle powers generally rank within the first twenty out of the officially recognised 193 UN member states across international rankings.[7] The positional definition is rooted in the realist tradition of relative power, which considers the state the main actor in an international system defined by survival and enduring anarchy.[8] The positional definition remains true to the definition of "middle" relative to the few great powers and the abundance of small powers in the international system.[9] Furthermore, it remains static, suitable for long-term projections. Despite this, the positional approach does not predict behaviour and can be arbitrary, with position alone revealing little into the strategic differences between states and how they view their roles in the international system.

Meanwhile, the second definition groups middle powers as possessing specific characteristics such as commitments to multilateralism, niche diplomacy, the ability to compromise, a high degree of civil penetration into foreign policy, and a reputable global standing.[10] The behavioural definition is rooted in the IR tradition of liberalism, which assumes states view cooperation as feasible, sustainable, and mutually beneficial, with anarchy transcended by a state's adherence to economic openness, diplomacy, democracy, and multilateralism.[11] Behavioural middle powers then combine their limited relative capabilities with other like-minded states to promote order in the international system by forming institutions and promoting accepted norms and rules. The behavioural definition remains highly compelling and evidences many middle powers' preference for interaction with institutions to change elements of the international system they cannot change alone. Despite this, critics charge the behavioural definition with tautology and normative bias.[12] Moreover, it possesses a narrow scope of predefined traits and is unable to explain behaviour motivated by self-interest or how identities influence middle power preferences.

The third definition determines middle powers by leaders or governments' tendencies to identify as one. The identity definition is related to constructivism, which differs from the positivist theories by considering a referent to be a state, institution, organisation, group, or individual. Actors act towards objects based on the meanings that the objects have for them because enemies are threatening and friends are not. Actors then acquire identities by participating in collective meanings, with identities denoting a specific role within a socially constructed world. Identities then form the basis of interests, which actors define in the process of defining situations.[13] Put simply, identities tell actors who they are and interests define what they want and how they should respond. The main advantage of using identity to classify middle powers is that it incorporates how nations view themselves and their roles in the international system. Despite this, the identity approach remains an unstable determinant of middle

[7] Andrew Carr, "Is Australia a Middle Power? A Systemic Impact Approach," *Australian Journal of International Affairs*, Vol 68, 1 (2014), pp. 70–84.
[8] Kenneth N. Waltz, "The Origins of War in Neorealist Theory." *Journal of Interdisciplinary History*, Vol 18, 4 (1988), pp. 615–628.
[9] Carr, "Is Australia a Middle Power? A Systemic Impact Approach," p. 73.
[10] *Ibid*.
[11] Daniel Deudney and G. John Ikenberry, "The Nature and Sources of Liberal International Order," *Review of International Studies*, Vol 25, 2 (1999), pp. 179–196.
[12] Carr, "Is Australia a Middle Power? A Systemic Impact Approach," p. 75.
[13] Alexander Wendt, "Anarchy Is What States Make of It: The Social Construction of Power Politics," *International Organisation*, Vol 46, 2 (1992), pp. 391–425.

power status in liberal democracies, with the identity of states classified as middle powers potentially changing every election.[14] Nevertheless, despite its weaknesses, the identity approach allows for flexibility and remains suitable for conducting studies inside and between states, adding another level of analysis not possible purely using position or behaviour.

All three definitions apply to Australia, and particularly, its relationship with North Korea. Its combined and persistent economic power, geographic size, distance from the Korean Peninsula, and military capabilities have provided it leverage to respond to North Korea over less capable US-aligned powers in the Asia/Indo-Pacific. In the behavioural realm, Australia has a well-documented history of engagement with multilateral institutions and like-minded states to influence beneficial outcomes for its own security and the broader region. Canberra's support for UN resolutions against Pyongyang's nuclear weapons program and defiance of the NPT, alongside concerns raised with the UN Human Rights Council (UNHRC), have remained central to the bilateral relationship since the 1990s. Despite Australia's interactions with North Korea being largely responses to systemic-level events and changes, an identity approach is still helpful for understanding the ideational reasoning behind Australia's policy preferences when it identified as a middle power, chiefly under the Hawke, Keating, and Rudd governments in the early 1990s and late 2000s.

Although these definitions determine Australia's relative position in IRs, a predisposition to certain policy choices, and the influence of individuals' and groups' respective identities, they fail to adequately explain the full range of responses by middle powers. Therefore, I have elaborated on these middle power attributes by drawing reference to the IR theories of realism, liberalism, and constructivism to better explain Australia's policy responses over time. Realism's emphasis on self-interested behaviour, relative gains, and mistrust over other states' intentions explains preferences for unilateral action, engagement based on threat mitigation, military build-ups, and the use of force. Meanwhile, liberalism explains an emphasis on norms, absolute gains, and cooperative responses such as engagement to integrate North Korea into an established order, diplomatic resolutions to disputes, and coordination with like-minded partners and institutions to persuade Pyongyang to comply with established rules. Finally, constructivism focuses on certain leaders or groups' preferences influencing Australia's responses towards North Korea whether they identified as a middle power or not. In particular, constructivism enables discussion of the ideational motivations of governments that did not identify as a middle power but may have possessed the material capabilities and behaved in a way consistent with one.

Critical Junctures in Australia-North Korea Relations 1947–2022

Initial Contact 1947–72

Australia's interactions with North Korea can be traced back to 1947 at their earliest. Australian military involvement in Northeast Asia after the Second World War saw it play a small but active role in the decolonisation of the Korean Peninsula from Japan. Under then Labor Foreign Minister H.V. Evatt, Canberra attempted in vain to reconcile the Soviet-controlled North and US-led South through the United Nations Temporary Commission on Korea (UNTCOK). UNTCOK was largely reliant on the US military government and its overtures to the Soviet administration were rejected.[15] Contrary to Australia's preference, the United States proceeded to hold a referendum resulting in

[14] Carr, "Is Australia a Middle Power? A Systemic Impact Approach," p. 76.
[15] Petrov, "Australia and the DPRK: A Sixty-Year Relationship," p. 317.

the independence of South Korea in August 1948.[16] North Korea then declared independence nearly one month later on 9 September, with Kim Il-sung appointed as Premier. After a series of low level skirmishes between North and South Korea, Australia soon found itself at war against North Korea in a combined UN force when the North invaded the South in June 1950. The newly elected Liberal-Country Party Coalition government led by Robert Menzies was staunchly anti-communist and supported close relations with the United States. After the Korean Armistice in 1953, Australia began a minimal trading relationship with North Korea, which mainly consisted of wheat exports.[17] However, any official-level engagement was off the table due to successive Coalition governments refusing to extend recognition to communist governments in the Asia-Pacific.[18]

First Critical Juncture: Sino-US Détente 1972

The success of the Sino-US détente from 1972 resulted in a shift towards a direct engagement policy, which led Australia to recognise North Korea as an independent state and establish diplomatic relations in July 1974. The Sino-US détente occurred amid a broader cessation of Cold War tensions between the United States and the Soviet Union. The significance for Australia was that with improved relations between Australia's main ally, the United States, and its main systemic rival in the Asia-Pacific, China, a threat to national security was removed, which allowed Canberra to cooperate with a broader range of states. After US President Richard Nixon visited Beijing in February 1972 and pledged the full normalisation of diplomatic relations, western bloc nations such as the UK, Japan, and Germany switched recognition from the nationalist Kuomintang in Taipei to the communists in Beijing in March, September and October 1972, respectively. Australian Labor Party (ALP) leader Gough Whitlam then recognised Beijing shortly after his election victory in December 1972.[19] This led to further engagement with states traditionally viewed as enemies such as the Soviet Union, North Vietnam, Mongolia, and North Korea.[20]

The Sino-US détente led to the first Korean détente. In July 1972, North and South Korea signed the North–South Joint Communique pledging to reunify without foreign interference and promote cordial relations. The communique was interpreted outside the Korean Peninsula as a breakthrough for eventual peace. However, Pyongyang used the cooperative atmosphere to unsettle Seoul.[21] North Korea believed

[16] Kim Hak-joon, "The American Military Government in South Korea, 1945–1948: Its Formation, Policies and Legacies," *Asian Perspective*, Vol 12, 1 (1988), pp. 51–83.

[17] Commonwealth, "Wheat Tax Bill 1965," Parliamentary Debates, House of Representatives (22 September 1965), *https://parlinfo.aph.gov.au/parlInfo/genpdf/hansard80/hansardr80/1965-09-22/0046/hansard_frag.pdf;fileType=application%2Fpdf*.

[18] Adrian Buzo, "The Twenty-One Year Freeze: Australia's Relations with the Democratic Republic of Korea," *Australian Journal of International Affairs*, Vol 51, 1 (1997), pp. 25–36.

[19] Gough Whitlam, "Establishment of Diplomatic Relations with China," Department of Foreign Affairs, 22 December 1972, *https://pmtranscripts.pmc.gov.au/sites/default/files/original/00003121.pdf*.

[20] Gough Whitlam, "Speech by the Prime Minister of Australia at a Dinner Given in His Honour by the Chairman of the Council of Ministers of the USSR," Transcript of speech delivered in Moscow, USSR, 14 January 1975, *https://pmtranscripts.pmc.gov.au/sites/default/files/original/00003592.pdf*; Commonwealth, "North Vietnam: Recognition by Australian Government," Parliamentary Debates, House of Representatives (10 May 1973), *https://parlinfo.aph.gov.au/parlInfo/search/display/display.w3p;query=Id%3A%22hansard80%2Fhansards80%2F1973-05-10%2F0016%22;src1=sm1*.

[21] Choi, "Window of Opportunity for a New Detente: 'Tight Link Strategy' of Moon Jae-in Administration and ROK–DPRK–US triangle," pp. 31.

that warming relations between Washington and Beijing would weaken the US military presence in South Korea and sought to gain international support to secure troop withdrawals through the United Nations General Assembly (UNGA).[22] Nevertheless, distrust between the two Koreas coherent with realism marred any progress towards sustained diplomacy.

After a North Korean delegation visited Melbourne in June 1973, the Minister for Overseas Trade Dr Jim Cairns visited Pyongyang in September to discuss the potential opening of a North Korean trade office in Australia.[23] Although expanding the small trading relationship was one mutual motivator, the Whitlam government's willingness to reciprocate North Korea's diplomatic overtures was mainly due to two reasons. First, it considered the brief improvement in inter-Korean relations and the less tense regional environment as sufficient to believe Pyongyang was serious about sustained engagement.[24] Second, there was a perception in Canberra that North Korea's isolation was abnormal and its integration into the international system would ease tensions on the Korean Peninsula.[25] Driving this thinking was an activist and internationalist foreign policy consistent with the behavioural definition of middle powers. Whitlam identified Australia as having "rights and responsibilities" in international affairs, including support for non-proliferation, increased foreign aid, and decolonisation.[26] This determination to promote liberal causes was combined with an attempt to chart an independent foreign policy. Australia sought closer cooperation with Asia and departed from Menzies-era reliance on the United States and the UK.[27]

Although Whitlam desired greater autonomy in international affairs, there was a general wariness among policymakers in Canberra of the US alliance and the shared military history with South Korea when engaging the North.[28] Concerns over an adverse reaction from Seoul delayed the establishment of diplomatic relations until 31 July 1974.[29] After establishing ties, North Korea opened an embassy in Canberra in December 1974. Australia then commissioned its embassy in Pyongyang in April

[22] *Ibid*.

[23] Commonwealth, "Minister for Overseas Trade: Trade Discussions," Parliamentary Debates, House of Representatives (15 October 1973), *https://parlinfo.aph.gov.au/parlInfo/genpdf/hansard80/hansardr80/1973-10-15/0036/hansard_frag.pdf;fileType=application%2Fpdf*.

[24] Buzo, "The Twenty-One Year Freeze: Australia's Relations with the Democratic Republic of Korea," p. 26.

[25] *Ibid*.; Commonwealth, "Answers to Questions upon Notice Australian Foreign Affairs Record: Korea" (Question No. 1180), Parliamentary Debates, House of Representatives (15 October 1974), *https://parlinfo.aph.gov.au/parlInfo/genpdf/hansard80/hansardr80/1974-10-15/0128/hansard_frag.pdf;fileType=application%2Fpdf*.

[26] Whitlam Institute, Submission by the Whitlam Institute within Western Sydney University to the Senate Inquiry into Nationhood, National Identity and Democracy (Canberra: Parliament of Australia, 5 December 2019), *https://www.whitlam.org/publications/2019/12/5/whitlam-institute-submission-to-the-legal-and-constitutional-affairs-legislation-committee-into-nationhood-national-identity-and-democracy*.

[27] Gough Whitlam, 1974 Election Speech, Transcript of speech delivered at Blacktown NSW, 29 April 1974, *https://electionspeeches.moadoph.gov.au/speeches/1974-gough-whitlam*.

[28] Commonwealth, "Answers to Questions upon Notice Democratic People's Republic of Korea: Diplomatic Relations (Question No. 538)," Parliamentary Debates, House of Representatives (31 July 1974), *https://parlinfo.aph.gov.au/parlInfo/genpdf/hansard80/hansardr80/1974-07-31/0143/hansard_frag.pdf;fileType%3Dapplication%2Fpdf*.

[29] "Australian Practice in International Law 1974–1975," *The Australian Year Book of International Law Online*, Vol 6, 1 (1978), pp. 187–383; *Canberra Times*, "An Envoy for North Korea," *Canberra Times*, 1 August 1975, p. 7.

1975.[30] Labor Foreign Minister Don Willesee visited Pyongyang, and his North Korean counterpart Ho Dam visited Canberra in 1975.[31] Despite some initial enthusiasm and concerns over North Korea's inability to pay Australian wool exporters, relations quickly deteriorated when North Korea closed its embassy in Canberra in October 1975 without warning.[32] North Korea officially cited stringent restrictions placed on its diplomats.[33] However, a more compelling reason appears to be Canberra's mixed messaging over the Korean Question. By 1974–75, inter-Korean relations had returned to the usual state of hostilities. Whitlam's growing relations with the eastern bloc and the Non-Aligned Movement suggests that the North Korean leadership initially interpreted the establishment of ties as an act of support due to Whitlam deviating from a consensus among Australia's key allies to deny formal recognition to North Korea.[34] Pyongyang was indeed following the liberal internationalist shift in Australian foreign policy and likely believed that Canberra was becoming more neutral in international affairs. This may have resulted in the North Korean leadership perceiving that Australia was willing to use its relatively benign international reputation to solicit support for North Korean resolutions at the UNGA.[35]

However, the behaviour of the Australian delegation at the 30th UNGA in October 1975 quelled any hopes for a non-aligned western ally. The delegation actively lobbied for the pro-South Korean resolution that the UN command be dissolved and then replaced with US and South Korean soldiers party to the 1953 Korean Armistice.[36] This occurred despite requests from Whitlam that the delegation abstain, which they did at the last minute.[37] Scepticism over North Korea's proposal for the total withdrawal of US troops suggests that there were concerns among Australian policymakers that the North may use the withdrawal to launch an invasion against the South.[38] This allegedly angered Pyongyang and likely led to the decision to recall their diplomats. North Korea then expelled Australia's diplomats from its embassy in Pyongyang after local authorities accused them of "slandering the social system and engaging in propaganda activities deranging social order."[39] Whitlam's dismissal as prime minister in November 1975 rendered any immediate reconciliation difficult. The incoming Coalition government led by Malcolm Fraser was highly sceptical of engagement with the Soviet Union and its allies. Fraser repositioned Australia as a staunch ally of the United States but maintained much of Labor's activist rigour,

[30] Petrov, "Australia and the DPRK: A Sixty-year Relationship," p. 319.
[31] *Ibid*.
[32] Frank Cranston, "N. Korean Mission Closed: Embassy Staff Leaves Country," *Canberra Times*, 31 October 1975, p. 1; Cranston, "Australia Owed $1.7 Million: North Korea Fails to Pay Its Debts," *Canberra Times*, 27 March 1976, p, 14.
[33] Petrov, "Australia and the DPRK: A Sixty-Year Relationship," p. 319.
[34] Buzo, "The Twenty-One Year Freeze: Australia's Relations with the Democratic Republic of Korea," p. 27.
[35] Petrov, "Australia and the DPRK: A Sixty-Year Relationship," p. 319.
[36] Choi Chong-ki, "The Korean Question in the United Nations," *Law and Politics in Africa, Asia and Latin America*, Vol. 8, 3/4 (1975), pp. 395–406.
[37] Gough Whitlam, "Speech at the Korean Reunification Conference," Griffith University, 24 April 1982.
[38] Buzo, "The Twenty-One Year Freeze: Australia's Relations with the Democratic Republic of Korea," p. 27.
[39] *Canberra Times*, "Sabotage, Blackmail, Abuse by Australia, N. Korea Says," *Canberra Times*, 8 November 1975, p. 6.

showing security-seeking behaviour combined with a continuation of liberal preferences in Australia's foreign policy.[40]

General Quiet 1975–89

Although Australian and North Korean officials met in Beijing in 1979 to discuss diplomatic accreditation, Canberra showed little interest reciprocating Pyongyang's attempts at engagement under the Hawke Labor government until 1989. Labor prioritised relations with South Korea due to an expanding trading relationship and ardently protested Pyongyang's alleged involvement in the 1983 Rangoon Bombing and the 1987 Korean Airlines 858 disaster.[41] Summing up Australia's attitude towards engagement, then Foreign Minister Bill Hayden vociferously stated after the 1983 bombing that any North Korean approaches to resume diplomatic ties would be met with a "fierce, basilisk eye."[42] After 1987, South Korea began to democratise under President Roh Tae-woo, continuing its rapid economic growth and gaining widespread international support. Seoul used the 1988 Summer Olympic Games to promote itself as a modern and open alternative to the increasingly isolated North.

Second Critical Juncture: End of the Cold War 1989

The rapid liberalisation of the international order at the end of the Cold War resulted in intermittent engagement between Canberra and Pyongyang from 1989 to 2008. Beginning with Soviet President Mikhail Gorbachev's *Glasnost* and *Demokratizatsiya* reforms in the mid-1980s, the eastern bloc states began to abandon communism through elections and popular uprisings during 1988 and 1989. Over the next three years, the Soviet Union dissolved into fifteen independent states. The end of the Cold War was a critical juncture for Australia due to the end of strategic power competition that restricted Canberra's influence on systemic outcomes. Australia possessed more freedom to promote regional-level security initiatives in the Asia-Pacific due to strategic alignment with the new unipolar order led by the United States, which promoted international law, economic interdependence, and liberal democracy — norms Australian foreign policy had traditionally supported since the Second World War.[43]

After the collapse of the Soviet Union, uncertainties over its newfound economic and political isolation rendered North Korea little choice but to conduct diplomatic overtures towards its traditional Cold War enemies. Pyongyang's outreach led to a second Korean détente beginning in December 1988.[44] Pivotal moments included North Korea's admission as a UN member state in July 1991 and the signing of the Agreement on Reconciliation, Non-Aggression, Exchange, and Cooperation with South Korea in December 1991.[45] Although North Korea was eager to engage, the détente proceeded slowly due to divisions on how to respond in Washington and Seoul.

[40] Ungerer, "The Middle Power Concept in Australian Foreign Policy," p. 546.
[41] Colin Brammall, "Hayden Attacks North Korea over Blast Doubt Cast on Any Approach to Resume Diplomatic Ties with Australia," *Canberra Times*, 13 October 1983, p. 10.
[42] *Ibid*.
[43] John J. Mearsheimer, "Bound to Fail: The Rise and Fall of the Liberal International Order," *International Security*, Vol 43, 4 (2019), pp. 7–50.
[44] Don Oberdorfer, *The Two Koreas: A Contemporary History* (Reading, MA: Addison-Wesley, 1997), p. 203.
[45] Moon Chung-in, "Between Principle and Pragmatism: What Went Wrong with the Lee Myung-Bak Government's North Korean Policy?" *Journal of International and Area Studies*, Vol 18, 2 (2011), pp. 1–22.

Meanwhile, Pyongyang grew increasingly frustrated with an international system it perceived was not reciprocating its goodwill and considered developing nuclear weapons to ensure long-term regime security.

Australia sent two diplomatic officers from the Australian Embassy in China to Pyongyang upon invitation in January 1989.[46] For Labor, an opportunity to promote Australia as a "good international citizen" loomed. Foreign Minister Gareth Evans actively identified Australia as a middle power from September 1988 and introduced Australia's foreign policy as "middle power diplomacy with an Asia-Pacific orientation."[47] Evans defined Australia's role in liberal terms consistent with the behavioural definition of middle powers — "not powerful enough in most circumstances to impose our will but maybe persuasive enough to have like-minded others see our point of view and act accordingly."[48] In particular, this middle power identity recognised Australia as possessing middle-range material attributes relative to larger and smaller powers while combining its efforts with like-minded states for the "peaceful resolution of conflict, acceptance of international law, protection for the weak against the strong, and the free exchange of ideas, people and goods."[49] This normative approach resulted in Australia encouraging economic integration within Asia through the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC), engaging in the Cambodian Peace Settlement through the UN and founding the Madrid Protocol concerning environmental protection in Antarctica.[50] With middle power diplomacy based on liberalism consciously guiding Australia's foreign policy, Canberra likely believed Pyongyang's increased contact with the outside world would lead to its integration into the international community and potential liberalisation.

After considering North Korean proposals such as plans for investment projects, expanded trade, and the full normalisation of diplomatic ties, the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT) reviewed its engagement policy and concluded that Pyongyang's proposals were overly ambitious for the pace of international events.[51] Most notably, Evans was sceptical of the North's commitment to sustained cooperation due to its notorious track record of failing to comply with bilateral and multilateral agreements. Pyongyang's reputation as an international debtor, which Australia experienced first-hand when North Korea defaulted on loans worth $62 million issued in the early 1970s, and its highly centralised economy gave Canberra the impression that it had little incentives to offer.[52] Evans preferred "testing the water" on

[46] Buzo, "The Twenty-One Year Freeze: Australia's Relations with the Democratic Republic of Korea," p. 29.
[47] Gareth Evans, "Australia's Middle Power Diplomacy," Transcript of speech delivered at the Inaugural Sir Zelman Cowen AIJA Annual Address on International Relations, Australian Institute of Jewish Affairs, Melbourne, VIC, 10 November 1993, *http://www.gevans.org/speeches/old/1993/101193_fm_australiasmiddlepowerdiplo.pdf*.
[48] Gareth Evans, "Middle Power Diplomacy," Transcript of speech delivered at the Inaugural Edgardo Boeninger Memorial Lecture by Professor the Hon Gareth Evans, Chancellor of The Australian National University, President Emeritus of the International Crisis Group and former Foreign Minister of Australia, Chile Pacific Foundation, Santiago, Chile, 29 June 2011, *http://www.gevans.org/speeches/speech441.html*.
[49] Evans, "Australia's Middle Power Diplomacy," 10 November 1993.
[50] *Ibid*.
[51] Buzo, "The Twenty-One Year Freeze: Australia's Relations with the Democratic Republic of Korea," p. 29.
[52] Steven W. Brain, "Peaks and Troughs: Australian — DPRK Relations in the 21st Century," *Korea Observer*, Vol 38, 2 (2007) pp. 351–361.

engagement rather than making any binding commitments.[53] This cautious approach to restoring diplomatic relations resulted in engagement continuing slowly. DFAT Deputy Secretary Michael Costello visited Pyongyang in November 1990 to meet exiled Cambodian Prince Norodom Sihanouk to discuss a peaceful settlement in Cambodia and refugee flows.[54] North Korea used the opportunity to again push for renewed bilateral ties.[55] Canberra agreed to dispatch a parliamentary delegation to attend the 85th Interparliamentary Union Conference in Pyongyang in May 1991, and accepted a Workers Party of Korea (WPK) delegation to Australia in early 1992.[56]

Evans's wariness regarding the feasibility of sustained engagement was justified when the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) noted discrepancies in Pyongyang's plutonium reprocessing reporting at its Yongbyon nuclear facility in May 1992. Australia's policy towards North Korea rapidly shifted to preventing Pyongyang from developing nuclear weapons. Evans strongly condemned North Korea's withdrawal from the NPT in March 1993 as "dangerous not only for regional stability but the world" and opted for a response coherent with Australia's liberal middle power identity by assuming a leading role in drafting the IAEA resolution.[57] Evans then imposed preconditions on upgrading bilateral ties, which included improved relations with Seoul, satisfactory resolution of the nuclear issue, and evidence of commitments to repaying loans from Australian and international banks.[58] Further developments in the nuclear crisis saw the US call for economic sanctions on North Korea and even surgical strikes on the Yongbyon facility. Evans openly discouraged containment and affirmed the need for continued diplomacy.[59] After the United States and North Korea signed the Agreed Framework in October 1994 to build Pyongyang two light-water nuclear reactors to meet its energy needs, Australia donated $22 million via the Korean Energy Development Organisation (KEDO) towards heavy-fuel oil and development aid until 2006.[60] However, further engagement stalled due to North Korea failing to meet Australia's preconditions, alongside being perceived by policymakers as violating international norms. A growing mismatch between Australia's middle power identity based on liberal norms and North Korea's zero-sum view of international cooperation consistent with realist understandings of state behaviour limited potential for sustained engagement.

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[53] *Ibid*.

[54] Commonwealth, "Official Hansard No. 142, 1990," Parliamentary Debates, Senate (21 December 1990), *https://parlinfo.aph.gov.au/parlInfo/download/chamber/hansards/1990-12-21/toc_pdf/S%201990-12-21.pdf;fileType=application%2Fpdf#search=%22North%20Korea%20Michael%20Costello%22*.

[55] *Canberra Times*, "Secret Talks with North Korea on Relations," *Canberra Times*, 7 November 1990, p. 5.

[56] Inter-Parliamentary Union Australian National Group, *Report of the Australian Delegation to the 85th Conference of the Interparliamentary Union, Pyongyang, Democratic People's Republic of Korea* (Canberra, ACT: Department of the Senate, 1991), *https://parlinfo.aph.gov.au/parlInfo/search/display/display.w3p;query=Id%3A%22publications%2Ftabledpapers%2FHSTP03864_1990-92%22;src1=sm1*.

[57] Buzo, "The Twenty-One Year Freeze: Australia's Relations with the Democratic Republic of Korea," p. 32.

[58] *Ibid*.

[59] *Ibid*., p. 33.

[60] Cameron Hill, "Australia's Aid to North Korea: A Short History and Future Issues," Parliament of Australia, 21 June 2018, *https://www.aph.gov.au/About_Parliament/Parliamentary_Departments/Parliamentary_Library/FlagPost/2018/June/aid-DPRK*.

Third Critical Juncture: The Sunshine Policy 1998

The initial success of South Korea's Sunshine Policy in 1998 resulted in Australia engaging North Korea in 1999 after five years of silence. South Korea directly engaged the North after the inauguration of new President Kim Dae-jung citing the growing GDP gap and potential instability caused by Pyongyang's continued isolation. The Sunshine Policy had three basic principles; the South would not tolerate armed aggression from the North, the South would not attempt to absorb or overthrow the North's government, and the South would actively seek cooperation and promote reconciliation with the North.[61]

The Sunshine Policy led to a third détente on the Korean Peninsula and proved to be a significant opportunity for Pyongyang to gain international aid after a famine from 1994 to 1998. A breakthrough in the détente occurred in June 2000 when North Korean Supreme Leader Kim Jong-il and Kim Dae-jung met for the first inter-Korean summit in Pyongyang and signed the 15 June Declaration for Eventual Reunification. This expanded upon the 1972 Joint North–South Communique and promoted cross-border exchanges for the first time. In Washington, the Clinton administration took advantage of the summitry by negotiating another nuclear deal after North Korea launched its *Taepodong-1* missile in 1998. US Secretary of State Madeleine Albright met with Kim Jong-il in Pyongyang in late 2000 and progressed towards a new agreement to halt missile testing.[62]

Meanwhile, Australian foreign policy shifted towards an emphasis on its relative material position in international relations with the election of the Howard Coalition government in 1996. Foreign Minister Alexander Downer believed Australia played a "pivotal role" and overtly rejected a middle power identity as downplaying Australia's global relevance.[63] The Howard government was sceptical of typical middle power initiatives, such as environmentalism, foreign aid, and a reliance on multilateralism. It also sought to establish a central role for the US alliance in long-term strategic planning.[64] Although its motivations were largely consistent with realist understandings of self-interest and relative gains, particularly when compared with Evans's middle power diplomacy, the Howard government continued to support certain liberal internationalist goals. These included coalition-building in the Asia-Pacific, economic interdependence, multilateral military engagements, and non-proliferation.[65] In response to the easing situation on the Korean Peninsula, the Howard government engaged North Korea believing isolation did little to change its stance on non-proliferation.[66] Furthermore, the Coalition sought to maintain economic stability and were concerned that tension on the Korean Peninsula would harm the recovery of the regional economy after the 1997 Asian Financial Crisis.[67] In particular, the Howard government wanted to prevent any resurgence of the nuclear issue after the Korean

[61] Han Yong-Sup, "The Sunshine Policy and Security on the Korean Peninsula: A Critical Assessment and Prospects," *Asian Perspective* Vol 26, 3 (2002), pp. 37–69.
[62] ACA, "Secretary Albright's Visit to North Korea," Arms Control Association, 2003, *https://www.armscontrol.org/events/2000-10/secretary-albrights-visit-north-korea*.
[63] Alexander Downer, "The Myth of Little Australia," *Sydney Morning Herald*, 26 November 2003, *https://www.smh.com.au/opinion/the-myth-of-little-australia-20031126-gdhv42.html*.
[64] Commonwealth, "Australia's Strategic Policy," Department of Defence, 1997, *http://repository.jeffmalone.org/files/defence/SR97.pdf*.
[65] *Ibid*.
[66] Brain, "Peaks and Troughs: Australian — DPRK Relations in the 21st Century," p. 354.
[67] Petrov, "Australia and the DPRK: A Sixty-Year Relationship," p. 323.

Nuclear Crisis and the launching of *Taepodong-1*. If North Korea successfully developed nuclear weapons, it would pose an existential threat due to a potential strike capability against Australia and North Korea's neighbours, chiefly China, Japan, and South Korea — where Canberra's main economic interests lied. In the absence of a normative middle power identity based on a broader moral objective, regional economic integration and non-proliferation began to converge directly with Australia's national security despite being perceived by previous Labor governments as initiatives to achieve regional and international security.

A series of meetings between Australian and North Korean officials were held in 1999, beginning with a delegation visiting Pyongyang led by future Prime Minister Kevin Rudd and Gareth Evans.[68] Alexander Downer then met with his North Korean counterpart Paek Nam-sum at the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) Regional Forum in Bangkok and the UNGA in New York in 2000. Australia then decided to normalise diplomatic relations on 8 May 2000 and accredited Ambassador to China David Irvine to North Korea in July 2000.[69] Pyongyang pledged to re-establish a diplomatic presence in Canberra and, after a difficult search for a site, finally opened its embassy in May 2002.[70] Downer met with Paek in both Pyongyang and Canberra during 2000, using his November 2000 visit to Pyongyang to further help "bring North Korea in from isolation."[71] Two-way trade also expanded with figures reaching $48 million despite mainly featuring Australian exports.[72] Tourism and education were other areas of cooperation. The Sydney-based Immanuel Travel Service advertised trips to North Korea's Arirang Games, and the first North Korean students commenced Master of International Development courses at the Australian National University (ANU).[73] Despite exhibiting preferences consistent with the behavioural definition of middle powers motivated by national security concerns when engaging North Korea, the inauguration of George W. Bush as US President in 2001 and the new administration's scepticism over nuclear diplomacy dimmed the Howard government's initial enthusiasm. Bush suspended negotiations until a full review of US policy towards North Korea was completed, later opting for a mixture of pragmatic engagement and increased pressure on Pyongyang to meet its commitments to the 1994 Agreed Framework.[74] Canberra postponed the opening of its embassy in Pyongyang, suggesting the Coalition was concerned that any further commitment to the relationship would appear out of lockstep with Washington.[75]

Fourth Critical Juncture: September 11 Terror Attacks 2001

The September 11 attacks in the United States changed the trajectory of engagement between Australia and North Korea. On 11 September 2001, members of the Islamic

[68] *Ibid*., p. 321.
[69] *Ibid*., p. 324.
[70] Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS), Year Book Australia 1970 (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2003).
[71] See Associated Press (AP) Archive, "North Korea: Alexander Downer Arrives," *YouTube*, 22 July 2015, *https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fI5qrSMf5YA*.
[72] Petrov, "Australia and the DPRK: A Sixty-Year Relationship," p. 324.
[73] *Ibid*.
[74] Sebastian Harnisch, "U.S.-North Korean Relations under the Bush Administration: From 'Slow Go' to 'No Go,'" *Asian Survey*, Vol 42, 6 (2002), pp. 856–882.
[75] See Alexander Downer saying "We won't be opening an embassy in Pyongyang for the time being" in "Australia to Get Tougher on N Korea," *The Age*, 28 December 2002, *https://www.theage.com.au/national/australia-to-get-tougher-on-n-korea-20021228-gduzn7.html*.

fundamentalist group Al-Qaeda destroyed the World Trade Center in New York and caused heavy damage to the Pentagon. The significance of September 11 for Australia was that international terrorism became central to strategic planning and resulted in the mass allocation of national resources to meet the perceived threat. The United States launched the Global War on Terror resulting in large scale instability in the Middle East. A multinational coalition led by the United States invaded Afghanistan in 2002 and Iraq in 2003 on the premise of preventing the spread of terror.

September 11 heightened fears in Washington and Canberra that North Korea could proliferate nuclear weapons to terrorist groups if it possessed them. In a dramatic shift of US policy and in line with its liberal interventionist view of world affairs, US President George W. Bush accused North Korea of "arming with missiles and weapons of mass destruction" in his inaugural State of the Union address in February 2002.[76] Bush grouped Pyongyang alongside Iran, Iraq, and designated terror groups in an "Axis of Evil." Bush then cancelled the Agreed Framework. North Korea admitted its pursuit of nuclear weapons in October 2002 and announced its withdrawal from the NPT in January 2003.[77] The rhetoric in Bush's speech heightened fears in Pyongyang of US-led regime change and strengthened its commitment to a nuclear deterrent. North Korea later agreed to dialogue as part of the Six-Party Talks. The objective was to ensure the complete, irreversible, and verifiable denuclearisation (CVID) of North Korea in exchange for fuel aid, the construction of light-water reactors, and normalised relations with the United States.[78]

In response to North Korea's withdrawal from the NPT, the Howard government opted for direct diplomacy. Canberra dispatched a delegation to Pyongyang in February 2003 believing that the trust built during the previous three years might convince Pyongyang to reconsider.[79] However, the visit was unsuccessful and only served to amplify the international community's concerns. The limits of Canberra's influence became apparent in North Korean Ambassador to Australia Chon Jae-hong's speech to the Australian Institute of International Affairs (AIIA) when he stated that the nuclear issue was strictly between the United States and North Korea.[80] After the bilateral failure, the Howard government opted for a multilateral response resembling a typical behavioural middle power. Australia combined its efforts with the United States, South Korea, and Japan and sought to participate in dialogue as part of a P5 + 5 arrangement suggested by US Secretary of State Colin Powell. However, Pyongyang rejected the proposal.[81]

Exhausted of diplomatic options, the Howard government decided on a containment policy to protest North Korea's non-compliance. Canberra postponed technical assistance and suspended joint research in agriculture, market economics, and nutrition.[82] Australia then joined the Proliferation Security Initiative (PSI), which sought to stop the trafficking of nuclear weapons, their delivery systems, and related

[76] George W, Bush, "President Delivers State of the Union Address," Transcript of speech delivered at the United States Capitol, Washington, DC, 29 January 2022, *https://georgewbush-whitehouse.archives.gov/news/releases/2002/01/20020129-11.html*.
[77] Andrew O'Neil, "Confronting the Reality of a Nuclear North Korea: The Challenge of Shrinking Policy Options," *Policy and Society*, Vol 23, 2 (2004), pp. 101–128.
[78] US Department of State, "Joint Statement of the Fourth Round of the Six-Party Talks" (Beijing, China, 18 September 2005), *https://2001-2009.state.gov/r/pa/prs/ps/2005/53490.htm*.
[79] Petrov, "Australia and the DPRK: A Sixty-year Relationship," p. 325.
[80] *Ibid*.
[81] Brain, "Peaks and Troughs: Australian — DPRK Relations in the 21st Century," p. 355.
[82] Petrov, "Australia and the DPRK: A Sixty-Year Relationship," p. 326.

materials using air and ground interdiction capabilities.[83] Australia's participation in the Invasion of Iraq, threat-based framing of North Korea in the Australian parliament, and the fallout from the *Pong-su* incident saw the Howard government double-down on containment by late 2003. The *Pong-su* incident damaged trust between Canberra and Pyongyang at the bilateral level when the Australian Federal Police (AFP) seized a North Korean cargo ship trafficking illegal substances into Australia.[84] Canberra responded by summoning the North Korean ambassador, sentencing four members of the crew and deporting North Korean citizens aboard the ship.[85] The *Pong-su* was later destroyed in a joint Royal Australian Air Force (RAAF) and Royal Australian Navy (RAN) exercise, sending a strong message against North Korea's increasingly zero-sum behaviour.[86] The incident reinforced the perception in Canberra that Pyongyang was an unreliable rogue state threatening Australia and the broader region's security. Moreover, the Howard government's growing preference for containment policies to protest North Korea's non-compliance with the NPT and Pyongyang's defiance of a widely accepted norm rendered the bilateral relationship difficult to sustain.

Fifth Critical Juncture: North Korea's First Nuclear Test 2006

After three years of cooling engagement, North Korea announced the detonation of an underground nuclear bomb at its Punggye-ri test site in October 2006.[87] The significance of the nuclear test for Australia was that it signified a growing consensus among policymakers and international partners that diplomacy was having little to no effect on changing Pyongyang's behaviour. North Korea viewed cooperation with other states, particularly the United States, as less sustainable to ensure its survival due to distrust. The United States, Japan, and South Korea began to consider containment policies as most viable to mitigate the growing threat of North Korea's nuclear capabilities and ensure its compliance with the NPT.[88]

The United Nations Security Council (UNSC) strongly condemned the October 2006 nuclear test. Although the Bush administration had ruled out a surgical strike and a full-scale invasion to force regime change, there was commentary in US foreign policy circles regarding potential military action to prevent North Korea from conducting further missile and nuclear tests.[89] Despite such talk, the UNSC agreed on limited

[83] DFAT. "Proliferation Security Initiative (PSI)," Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, *https://www.dfat.gov.au/international-relations/security/non-proliferation-disarmament-arms-control/psi/Pages/proliferation-security-initiative-psi*.

[84] Commonwealth, Parliamentary Debates, House of Representatives (3 August 2004), *https://parlinfo.aph.gov.au/parlInfo/genpdf/chamber/hansardr/2004-08-03/0116/hansard_frag.pdf;fileType=application%2Fpdf*.

[85] Petrov, "Australia and the DPRK: A Sixty-Year Relationship," p. 327.

[86] Max Blenkin, "RAAF Precision Strike Sinks Heroin Freighter," *The Age*, 24 March 2006, *https://www.theage.com.au/national/raaf-precision-strike-sinks-heroin-freighter-20060324-ge200u.html*.

[87] Mun Suk Anh, "What Is the Root Cause of the North Korean Nuclear Program?" *Asian Affairs: An American Review*, Vol 38, 4 (2011), pp. 175–187.

[88] See Ministry of Foreign Affairs Japan (MOFA), Press Conference, 13 October 2006, *https://www.mofa.go.jp/announce/press/2006/10/1013.html*.

[89] Ashton B. Carter and William J. Perry. "If Necessary, Strike and Destroy North Korea Cannot Be Allowed to Test This Missile," *Washington Post*, 22 June 2006, *https://www.washingtonpost.com/archive/opinions/2006/06/22/if-necessary-strike-and-destroy-span-classbankheadnorth-korea-cannot-be-allowed-to-test-this-missilespan/ac0fccd7-014d-4bc1-8dd5-37e038665b3f/*; George W. Bush, "President Bush Rules Out Military Attack on North Korea," Public Broadcasting Service (PBS), Transcript of interview with George W. Bush, 11 October 2006, *https://www.pbs.org/newshour/show/president-bush-rules-out-military-attack-on-north-korea*.

military and economic sanctions. UNSC Resolution 1718 banned imports and exports of military equipment, luxury goods, and imposed travel restrictions on persons involved in North Korea's nuclear weapons program.[90] Pyongyang displayed hostility towards the sanctions. Most notably, North Korea's UN envoy Park Gil-yon referred to the resolution as "gangster-like" and even an "act of war."[91] Despite the sharp rhetoric, Pyongyang opted to return to the Six-Party Talks and halt further nuclear testing in a last-ditch attempt to gain security guarantees from the United States.

Forced into a position where it could do little to alter North Korea's behaviour unilaterally, the Coalition responded similar to a behavioural middle power by implementing autonomous and multilateral sanctions in late 2006.[92] Canberra's autonomous sanctions included a ban on North Korean officials travelling 100 km outside the Australian Capital Territory (ACT), refusal to grant North Korean citizens visas, and financial sanctions on all currency transactions between Australia and North Korea.[93] Meanwhile, the implementation of UNSCR 1718 banned Australian exporters from supplying North Korea with most essential goods, effectively ending the modest economic relationship. This included wine, spirits, cars, cosmetics, electronics, and even basketballs.[94] The full range of sanctions was detrimental to the strained bilateral relationship, which reached a tipping point when Pyongyang announced the closure of its embassy in Canberra in December 2007.[95] Australia later changed its diplomatic accreditation to Pyongyang from Beijing to Seoul, suggesting strengthened support for South Korea over the nuclear issue and effectively shutting off all avenues for engagement apart from rare ambassadorial visits and development assistance through international non-governmental organisations.

Sixth Critical Juncture: End of the Sunshine Policy 2008

After ten years of limited results due to growing tensions between Washington and Pyongyang, newly elected South Korean President Lee Myung-bak abandoned the Sunshine Policy in 2008 and stalled the expansion of economic ties until Pyongyang denuclearised. This formed the core of Lee's "Vision 3000 Plan," which sought to increase the North's GDP through investment while solving the nuclear issue.[96] The significance of this critical juncture was that it led to increased tensions on the Korean Peninsula and the consensus among US allies, including Australia, that diplomacy had both failed in convincing North Korea to denuclearise and integrate into the liberal international order. Pyongyang responded to Seoul's new hardline approach by reaffirming its commitment to its nuclear deterrent, launching the *Kwangmyongsong-2* satellite, and rejecting IAEA inspectors from entering its Yongbyon facility.[97]

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[90] UNSCR, Resolution 1718 - Non-proliferation/Democratic People's Republic of Korea (United Nations Security Council, 14 October 2006), *http://unscr.com/en/resolutions/doc/1718*.
[91] Marcus Noland. "The (Non-) Impact of UN Sanctions on North Korea." *Asia Policy*, 7 (2009), pp. 61–88.
[92] DFAT, "Democratic People's Republic of Korea (North Korea) Sanctions Regime," Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, 2022, *https://www.dfat.gov.au/international-relations/security/sanctions/sanctions-regimes/democratic-peoples-republic-korea-sanctions-regime*.
[93] Petrov, "Australia and the DPRK: A Sixty-Year Relationship," p. 335.
[94] *Ibid*., p. 334.
[95] *Ibid*., p. 335.
[96] Park Jong-Chul, "Lee Myung-Bak Administration's North Korea Policy: Challenges and Tasks," *The Journal of East Asian Affairs*, Vol 22, 2 (2008), pp. 31–69.
[97] Davenport, "Chronology of US-North Korean Nuclear and Missile Diplomacy," Arms Control Association.

North Korea's decision to withdraw from dialogue altogether in early 2009 resulted in the collapse of the Six-Party Talks.[98] In April, Pyongyang announced the reactivation of its nuclear facilities and spent fuel reprocessing.[99] In May, it successfully detonated its second nuclear bomb in an underground test.[100] This led South Korea to join the PSI, which Pyongyang previously warned would constitute an "act of war."[101] Meanwhile, rumours circulated in international media that North Korean leader Kim Jong-il suffered a stroke. His third son, Kim Jong-un, was announced publicly as his successor in June 2009. Kim Jong-un's accession coincided with several highly provocative acts against South Korea. This included the sinking of the *ROKS Cheonan*, killing 46 sailors and the shelling of the South-controlled Yeonpyeong Island, resulting in four deaths, suggesting zero-sum retaliation against Lee's increasingly hardline approach.[102]

Immediately after North Korea's withdrawal from the Six-Party Talks in 2009, the newly elected Labor government led by Prime Minister Kevin Rudd urged North Korea to return to dialogue and even hinted at Australia's participation in an expanded format.[103] The revival of a middle power identity exhibiting preferences consistent with liberalism was mainly behind the Rudd government's desire to participate in multilateral dialogue. Rudd emphasised new opportunities for "creative middle power diplomacy."[104] Defined in normative terms, Australia would "bring together major, regional, and small powers to shape and implement solutions" and "enhance the rules-based order."[105] Central to this was Rudd's three pillars: the alliance with the United States, membership in the UN, and comprehensive engagement with Asia.[106] Canberra strengthened its participation in regional and global multilateral forums such as APEC, the East Asia Summit (EAS), and the UN. Despite increased support for activist and internationalist causes similar to Gareth Evans tenure as foreign minister, growing scepticism among states in the Asia-Pacific over sustained systemic-level cooperation after the Global Financial Crisis of 2007–2008 saw little absolute gains. Many of Rudd's proposals struggled to attract support, such as the Asia-Pacific Union and higher emissions targets at the Copenhagen Climate Summit in 2009.

[98] *Ibid*.
[99] *Ibid*.
[100] Zhao Lianfeng, Xie Xiaobi, Wang Weimin, and Yao Zhenxing, "Yield Estimation of the 25 May 2009 North Korean Nuclear Explosion," *Bulletin of the Seismological Society of America*, 102, (2012), pp. 467–478.
[101] Alzo David-West, "North Korean Newsbriefs," *North Korean Review* Vol 5, 2 (2009), pp. 93–98.
[102] Kim Nan, "Korea on the Brink: Reading the Yŏnp'yŏng Shelling and Its Aftermath," *The Journal of Asian Studies*, Vol 70, 2 (2011), pp. 337–356.
[103] Michelle Toy and Michelle Grattan, "Red Carpet and a Rebuke for Rudd," Australian Broadcasting Corporation (ABC), 11 April 2008, *https://www.theage.com.au/national/red-carpet-and-a-rebuke-for-rudd-20080411-ge6yce.html*.
[104] ABC, "Rudd Outlines His Foreign Policy Vision," Australian Broadcasting Corporation (ABC), 27 March 2008, *https://www.abc.net.au/am/content/2008/s2200208.htm*.
[105] Kevin Rudd, "The Rise of the Asia Pacific and the Role of Creative Middle Power Diplomacy," 19 May 2011, *http://www.foreignminister.gov.au/speeches/2011/kr_sp_110519.html*.
[106] Gurol Baba and Taylan Özgür Kaya, "Testing the Creativity of Kevin Rudd's Middle Power Diplomacy: EU–Australia Partnership Framework Versus the Asia-Pacific Community," *International Relations of the Asia-Pacific*, Vol 14, 2 (2014), pp. 239–269.

Although Rudd supported multilateral dialogue, the international community's failure to convince North Korea to return to negotiations saw Canberra opt for minilateral consultation with the United States, Japan, and South Korea.[107] Furthermore, the second pillar of Rudd's foreign policy, membership in the UN, conflicted with any notion of bilateral engagement. North Korea's continued defiance of international law meant that engagement without a multilateral consensus would risk legitimising Pyongyang's behaviour. Rudd's visit to South Korea in November 2008 appears to have further strengthened his preference. Rudd and Lee Myung-bak shared highly convergent foreign policy goals.[108] Both leaders sought expanded roles in international affairs, such as firm support for the US alliance, the denuclearisation of North Korea, trade liberalisation, and increased visibility in multilateral forums.[109] As a result, Australia's bilateral relationship with South Korea improved at the expense of relations with the North. Rudd supported Lee's strong stance against Pyongyang and upgraded the bilateral relationship by signing the Joint Statement of Enhanced Global and Security Cooperation in March 2009.[110] North Korea remained a focal point, which can be interpreted as both external balancing behaviour against a nuclear threat best explained by realism and cooperation with a "like-minded" state coherent with liberalism to persuade Pyongyang's compliance. Australia implemented UNSC Resolution 1874 after the May 2009 nuclear test, authorising UN member states to inspect North Korean cargo and destroy any suspected to be involved in its nuclear weapons program.[111] Canberra's policy remained essentially identical under new Labor Prime Minister Julia Gillard. She condemned the Yeonpyeong Bombing and visited Seoul in November 2010 to reaffirm support for Lee's policies.[112] Although Gillard was vocal in her opposition to North Korea's nuclear tests, she advocated for diplomacy to resolve the crisis.[113]

Continued Containment 2011–2017

After the heightened tensions from 2009–2011, North Korea continued developing its nuclear weapons program amid growing international isolation. The Obama administration in the United States adopted a policy of "strategic patience," which consisted of incremental sanctions hoping that North Korea would return to dialogue. Pyongyang conducted nuclear tests in 2013, 2015, and two in January and September

[107] Sarah O'Malley, "PM Kevin Rudd Says Nuclear North Korea a Risk to Peace," *Herald Sun*, 27 May 2009, *https://www.heraldsun.com.au/news/pm-kevin-rudd-says-nuclear-north-korea-a-risk-to-peace/news-story/e214e2332ffde7294a5f0d19e31e8011*.

[108] Sarah Teo, "Middle Power Identities of Australia and South Korea: Comparing the Kevin Rudd/Julia Gillard and Lee Myung-bak Administrations," *The Pacific Review*, Vol 31, 2 (2018), pp. 221–239.

[109] Kevin Rudd, Transcript of Joint Press Conference with President Lee Myung-Bak Prime Minister's Courtyard, Parliament House Canberra, ACT, 5 March 2009, *https://pmtranscripts.pmc.gov.au/release/transcript-16448*.

[110] Peter K. Lee, "Middle Power Strategic Choices and Horizontal Security Cooperation: The 2009 Australia-South Korea Security Cooperation Agreement," *Australian Journal of International Affairs*, Vol 73, 5 (2019), pp. 449–465.

[111] UNSCR, Resolution 1874 — Non-Proliferation/Democratic People's Republic of Korea (United Nations Security Council, 2009), *http://unscr.com/en/resolutions/doc/1874*.

[112] Julia Gillard, Speech to the Korean International Trade Association Dinner, Seoul, South Korea, 23 April 2011, *https://pmtranscripts.pmc.gov.au/release/transcript-17807*.

[113] Adam Gartrell, "Gillard Tours DMZ, Talks Tough on N. Korea," *Sydney Morning Herald*, 24 April 2011, *https://www.smh.com.au/world/gillard-tours-dmz-talks-tough-on-n-korea-20110424-1dsk0.html*.

2016. Canberra's response to the tests largely followed the UNSC, which included sanctions on the export of coal, silver, copper, and zinc.[114] North Korea made several attempts to engage Australia during the early 2010s to no avail. One of which notably included a proposal by Pyongyang to reopen its embassy in Canberra and send a delegation to visit in 2013, which were later rebuffed by Australia over North Korea's 2013 test.[115] Despite shunning sustained engagement until Pyongyang officially declared its intent to denuclearise, the Obama administration encouraged Canberra to rebuild the bilateral relationship with Pyongyang and re-establish a diplomatic presence.[116] However, both the Gillard Labor and Abbott Coalition governments rejected US proposals citing North Korea's human rights record and financial constraints.[117]

Seventh Critical Juncture: The Inauguration of Donald Trump 2017

The inauguration of US President Donald Trump in 2017 caused a second shift towards systemic-level tension in IRs after September 11. Australia-North Korea relations also reached their lowest point in history. The United States became hostile to multilateral institutions under Trump with preferences for unilateralism, trade protectionism, and political brinkmanship. Trump withdrew from the Trans-Pacific Partnership (TTP), the Intermediate-Range Nuclear Forces Treaty (INF), and alienated NATO allies in Europe.[118] Meanwhile, in East Asia, Trump launched a trade war against China and re-established the Quadrilateral Security Dialogue (QUAD), which ended an era of cordial relations between the United States and China. The significance for Australia was the return of China as a perceived threat after almost five decades. Trump's foreign policy and Beijing's increasingly assertive behaviour, both consistent with realist understandings of state behaviour, fractured the liberal international order Australia had relied on for an enhanced impact on security outcomes since the 1990s.

The unpredictability of Trump's foreign policy complicated the already tense environment on the Korean Peninsula. Trump implemented a "maximum pressure" policy defined by a strengthened economic and political sanctions regime designed to force North Korea into negotiations over the abandonment of its growing nuclear arsenal.[119] Pyongyang tested two Intercontinental Ballistic Missiles (ICBM) and conducted its most significant nuclear test in September 2017.[120] The UNSC then implemented further sanctions on Pyongyang.[121] Trump and Kim traded threats of

[114] UNSCR, "Resolution 2321 — Non-Proliferation/Democratic People's Republic of Korea," (United Nations Security Council, 2016), *http://unscr.com/en/resolutions/doc/2321*.
[115] ABC, "Australia Says No to North Korean Embassy," Australian Broadcasting Corporation (ABC), 5 June 2013, *https://www.abc.net.au/news/2013-06-05/an-australia-says-no-to-north-korean-embassy/4736058*; Chris Johnson, "North Korean Embassy Trip Put on Hold," 14 February 2013, *https://www.smh.com.au/national/north-korean-embassy-trip-put-on-hold-20130214-2eetq.html*.
[116] Euan Graham, "A Modest Proposal for Australian Engagement in North Korea," *Lowy Interpreter*, 17 October 2017, *https://www.lowyinstitute.org/the-interpreter/modest-proposal-australian-engagement-north-korea*.
[117] Alex Oliver, "Australia's Flatlining Foreign Affairs Budget," *Lowy Interpreter*, 10 May 2017, *https://www.lowyinstitute.org/the-interpreter/australia-s-flatlining-foreign-affairs-budget*.
[118] Ahmad Rashid Malik, "US Withdrawal from the Trans-Pacific Partnership: Prospects for China," *Strategic Studies*, Vol 38, 1 (2018), pp. 21–33.
[119] Leon V. Sigal, "Paved with Good Intentions: Trump's Nuclear Diplomacy with North Korea," *Journal for Peace and Nuclear Disarmament*, Vol 3, 1 (2020), pp. 163–182.
[120] Hans M. Kristensen and Matt Korda, "North Korean Nuclear Weapons, 2021," *Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists*, Vol 77, 4 (2021), pp. 222–236.
[121] Kim Im-han, "Trump Power: Maximum Pressure and China's Sanctions Enforcement against North Korea," *The Pacific Review*, Vol 33, 1 (2020), pp. 96–124.

mutual destruction throughout late 2017. North Korea began a diplomatic charm offensive in January 2018.[122] Moon and Kim met at three historic summits. Trump later agreed to meet Kim at the Singapore Summit in June 2018, where the two leaders agreed to work towards denuclearisation and the de-escalation of tensions.[123] North Korea sought sanctions relief during the Hanoi Summit in March 2019, which later ended in a stalemate when Washington and Pyongyang disagreed over the process of denuclearisation.[124]

Australia returned to a role based on its relative material attributes under the Turnbull Coalition government. Similar to the Howard government, Foreign Minister Julie Bishop described Australia as a "top-20 nation," suggesting the middle power moniker downplayed Canberra's global role.[125] Despite the abolition of AusAID, scepticism over climate change, and funding cuts to DFAT, the Turnbull government preferred minilateral and multilateral responses towards emerging security issues in the Asia/Indo-Pacific.[126] The Coalition interpreted the preservation of the "rules-based" international order and the values governing it as a direct extension of Australia's national security.[127] Under the Morrison Coalition government from August 2018 until May 2022, Australian foreign policy lost much of its internationalist rigour and underwent another shift towards realist understandings of state behaviour informed by an increasingly tense regional environment caused by deteriorating US-China relations and the COVID-19 pandemic. Morrison's scepticism of multilateralism, strategic realignment with the United States and UK and heightened threat-based rhetoric regarding China bore similarities to Menzies-era thinking of the 1950s and 1960s, when state-based threats were central to Australian strategic planning.[128]

The Turnbull government's support for maximum pressure was informed by successive Coalition and Labor governments' view of North Korea's nuclear weapons program threatening national and regional security.[129] Furthermore, China's rise and Trump's indifference towards traditional allies raised fears in Canberra of a waning US military commitment in Asia. The Coalition sought to find common ground with Trump to ensure Australia's long-term security, with a commitment to maximum pressure a simple trade-off due to the non-existent relationship with North Korea. Canberra's condemnation of Pyongyang's nuclear testing and human rights violations

[122] Khang Vu, The Peril of North Korea's Charm Offensive," *Lowy Interpreter*, 9 April 2018, *https://www.lowyinstitute.org/the-interpreter/peril-north-korea-s-charm-offensive*.

[123] The White House, "Joint Statement of President Donald J. Trump of the United States of America and Chairman Kim Jong Un of the Democratic People's Republic of Korea at the Singapore Summit, Singapore," 12 June 2018, *https://trumpwhitehouse.archives.gov/briefings-statements/joint-statement-president-donald-j-trump-united-states-america-chairman-kim-jong-un-democratic-peoples-republic-korea-singapore-summit/*.

[124] Lisa Collins and Sue Mi Terry, "Assessment of the Trump-Kim Hanoi Summit," Center for Strategic and International Studies (CSIS), 28 February 2019, *https://www.csis.org/analysis/assessment-trump-kim-hanoi-summit*.

[125] See Brett Mason, "Foreign Policy for a Top 20 Nation," Transcript of speech made on behalf of Julie Bishop at the Australian Institute of International Affairs (AIIA), 27 October 2017, *https://www.internationalaffairs.org.au/foreign-policy-for-a-top-20-nation/*.

[126] Australian Government, "2017 Foreign Policy White Paper," Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, *https://www.dfat.gov.au/sites/default/files/2017-foreign-policy-white-paper.pdf*.

[127] *Ibid*.

[128] See Scott Morrison's reference to "negative globalism": Scott Morrison, "The 2019 Lowy Lecture: Prime Minister Scott Morrison," Transcript of lecture delivered at the Lowy Institute, 4 October 2019, *https://www.lowyinstitute.org/publications/2019-lowy-lecture-prime-minister-scott-morrison*.

[129] Australian Government, "2017 Foreign Policy White Paper."

became more vocal and hardline.[130] North Korea responded by threatening Australia with a nuclear strike in April 2017 if it continued "toeing the US line."[131] Canberra did not suspend diplomatic relations, suggesting the Coalition was leaving the door open for potential bilateral engagement if North Korea made progress towards denuclearisation. However, the relationship's very existence conflicted with maximum pressure when the Turnbull government refused to grant the North Korean under-19s football team visas to play in an Asian Football Confederation (AFC) qualifying match in Australia despite having no connection with the multilateral sanctions regime.[132] Canberra suspended payments through the UN World Food Program in October 2017 after a request for an inspection was refused by North Korean authorities, showing an increased zero-sum view of the relationship on both sides.[133]

Australia-North Korea relations remained tense despite a rapid improvement in inter-Korean relations and US-North Korea relations during 2018. Trump's unilateral response to engage Pyongyang conflicted with Australia's advocacy for maximum pressure through its preferred multilateral channel. The Turnbull and Morrison governments likely believed they had little to contribute due to the vast superiority of the US' diplomatic resources, North Korea's unwillingness to engage Australia over denuclearisation, and the non-existent trade relationship due to sanctions, providing little financial incentive to engage.[134] Although endorsing Trump's efforts at diplomacy, the general scepticism among policymakers suggests that Canberra believed the summits would produce little results towards North Korea's complete denuclearisation.[135] The Morrison government largely ignored North Korea as a strategic priority due to an increased focus on China's growing influence in Southeast Asia and the South Pacific as a perceived threat to national security.[136] Pyongyang objected to the AUKUS agreement alongside Beijing in September 2021 and accused

[130] Julie Bishop, "Australia's National Statement — United Nations General Assembly," Transcript of speech delivered at the United Nations General Assembly, New York, NY, 23 September 2017, *https://www.foreignminister.gov.au/minister/julie-bishop/speech/australias-national-statement-united-nations-general-assembly*.

[131] Kirsty Needham, "North Korea Warns Australia of Nuclear Strike Over Julie Bishop's Comments," *Sydney Morning Herald*, 22 April 2017, *https://www.smh.com.au/world/north-korea-warns-australia-of-nuclear-strike-over-julie-bishops-comments-20170422-gvqg5e.html*.

[132] Tracy Holmes, "Refusing Visas to North Korean Football Team Unlikely to affect Kim Jong-un's Nuclear Weapons Program, Expert Says," *Australian Broadcasting Corporation* (ABC), 5 November 2017, *https://www.abc.net.au/news/2017-11-05/australia-refuses-visas-to-north-korean-under-19-football-team/9120140*.

[133] DFAT, "Democratic People's Republic of Korea (North Korea) Country Brief," Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, 2021, *https://www.dfat.gov.au/geo/democratic-peoples-republic-of-korea/democratic-peoples-republic-of-korea-north-korea-country-brief#:~:text=Australia%20maintains%20only%20limited%20diplomatic,destruction%20and%20ballistic%20missile%20programs*.

[134] See First Assistant Secretary of DFAT's North Asia Division Graham Fletcher's comments on engagement with allies over North Korea: Commonwealth, Official Committee Hansard, Foreign Affairs, Defence and Trade Legislation Committee, Senate (31 May 2018), *https://parlinfo.aph.gov.au/parlInfo/download/committees/estimate/ea758764-18a7-4e60-a9e8-d10828349242/toc_pdf/Foreign%20Affairs,%20Defence%20and%20Trade%20Legislation%20Committee_2018_05_31_6138_Official.pdf;fileType=application%2Fpdf#search=%22North%20Korea%20Fletcher%22*.

[135] See the comments from Julie Bishop Bill Shorten and Kevin Rudd: Daniel McCulloch, "Australia Eyes Role after Trump-Kim Summit, *The Courier*, 12 June 2018, *https://www.thecourier.com.au/story/5461716/australia-eyes-role-after-trump-kim-summit/*.

[136] Australian Government, "2020 Defence Strategic Update," Department of Defence, 2020, *https://www.defence.gov.au/about/strategic-planning/2020-defence-strategic-update*.

Australia's proposed acquisition of nuclear submarines as "triggering a nuclear arms race."[137] Australia's narrowing of its strategic vision to counter China's growing influence and the decision to sign AUKUS suggests that North Korea factored little in the Morrison government's strategic considerations. As a result, chances for cooperation have become further limited by increasing systemic tension and a mutual preoccupation with security.

Conclusion

Australia's diplomatic relations with North Korea have shifted significantly over their history. From 1947 to 1973, Canberra pursued a policy of non-recognition. From 1974 until 2002, successive governments sought to integrate North Korea through brief periods of engagement when Pyongyang attempted to emerge from its systemic isolation. From 2003 to 2006, Canberra pursued a mixture of engagement and containment policies when North Korea declared its pursuit of nuclear weapons. After 2006, policymakers resorted to an incremental containment policy now defined by "maximum pressure" as Pyongyang committed to developing its nuclear weapons program in defiance of the NPT. Australia is now highly reliant on sanctions to convince North Korea to denuclearise. This shift towards containment is due to two reasons. First, Australia has a normative objection to North Korea's nuclear weapons program stemming from a historical advocacy of non-proliferation embedded in its identity and behaviour over time. Sanctions convey to Pyongyang that Canberra views its violation of the NPT as unacceptable. Second, Australia has limited coercive means and diplomatic resources to convince North Korea to denuclearise due to its middle-range capabilities and geographical distance from the Korean Peninsula. This results in Canberra becoming reliant on "like-minded" partners and multilateral institutions to sanction Pyongyang and encourage diplomatic resolutions. A growing preoccupation with securing Australia's immediate strategic environment has further constrained its limited resources and relegated North Korea's denuclearisation lower on a list of priorities, which has left its policy towards Pyongyang neglected and lacking innovation. When combined with reduced economic incentives on both sides due to maximum pressure, normative concerns over engagement without concrete steps towards denuclearisation legitimising North Korea's behaviour and a history of misunderstandings — not engaging North Korea is the least risky policy response.

If engagement seems highly unlikely now, is there any value in engaging when another critical juncture arises? If Australia's North Korea policy continues to focus entirely on CVID, both engagement and containment will likely yield little results. North Korea views nuclear weapons as fundamental to its long-term survival and will not forfeit its only way to gain coercive parity with the major powers in Northeast Asia. The continued implementation of sanctions will see little progress in convincing North Korea to denuclearise and may exacerbate the already dire human rights situation. The North Korean leadership's ability to earn funds and refine its nuclear weapons program amid stringent border closures from COVID-19 shows how ineffective sanctions for a unique regional case such as North Korea can be.

Furthermore, if Australia's current policy aims to denuclearise North Korea, its adherence to maximum pressure is beginning to show fundamental contradictions. The proposed acquisition of nuclear-powered submarines through AUKUS harms Canberra's non-proliferation credentials and renders it difficult to maintain normative

[137] Jagannath Panda, "What AUKUS Means to North Korea," 38 North, 9 December 2021, *https://www.38north.org/2021/12/what-aukus-means-to-north-korea/#_ftnref1*.

leverage to convince Pyongyang to do otherwise. Currently, the United States and North Korea under Biden and Kim show no sign of conducting dialogue and reaching an agreement on denuclearisation. If tensions escalate and become difficult to manage, communication between North Korea and the outside world will become vital in avoiding a potential miscalculation. Australia should use the existing bilateral relationship to show its strategic value to the United States and South Korea as a partner and engage North Korea to serve as an intermediary. Canberra would likely need to forego the immediate goal of CVID, allow North Korea to re-establish a diplomatic presence in Canberra, and lift some autonomous sanctions to create the conditions for sustained engagement.

Acknowledgement

Open access publishing facilitated by The University of Adelaide, as part of the Wiley - The University of Adelaide agreement via the Council of Australian University Librarians.