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**Diplonhomie at Singapore: US-North Korea Relations after  
the Trump-Kim Summit**

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### **Abstract**

This paper deals with the evolving scenario in the Korean peninsula in the wake of the Summit between Kim Jong Un and Donald Trump in Singapore on June 12, 2018. The paper surveys the core foreign policy concerns of USA and North Korea on Korean Peninsula affairs, profiles the principal players in the negotiations drama that unfolded a little before the bilateral meeting of the two leaders to argue that the Singapore summit marks a game changer in US-North Korea relationship. The paper positions its arguments in the light of the paradigm shift effected by Trump's foreign policy doctrine that marginalizes traditional allies of the US and seeks an unusual reconfiguration of the world political order that is premised on a possible US-Saudi Arabia- Israel alliance (with possibly Russia put in ) against the duo viz, Iran and China . It is argued that both Kim Jong Un and Trump, through their unconventional diplomacy styles, are attempting to change the pre UN Sanctions status quo (that rests on endlessly repeated provocative and counter provocative actions) to one of a finitely repeating game with the outcome could be a maximin solution. In the years to follow one sees the Korean peninsula gravitating towards a medium 'double freeze' solution than getting caught in an impasse between best/worst solution for the parties concerned, viz Complete ,Verifiable Irreversible Disarmament (CVID) for the US and 'pre UN Sanction' status quo for North Korea.

**Keywords:** Asymmetric impatience, Circular Diplomacy, CVID, Double Freeze, Finite repeat.

## **1. In the Horns of a Trilemma: Core Concerns of US Foreign Policy towards Democratic People's Republic of Korea (North Korea)**

US policy towards North Korea has been influenced by four doctrines associated with five US Presidents viz Clinton – Carter, George W Bush, Obama and now Trump. The long term thrust of the Clinton Administration contained in ‘The Agreed Framework’ of October 1994 signed in Geneva, aimed at denuclearization of North Korea (Kim, 2018). The long-term goal of North Korea’s denuclearization was primary for the Bush Administration’s six party talks as well as for the Trump Administration new doctrine on North Korea. (Anderson, 2018). The idea of ‘Complete, Irreversible, Verifiable Denuclearization’ (CVID) was propounded by the George W Bush Administration. The Obama Administration balked at the idea of accepting North Korea as a nuclear state. Donald Trump also accepts the doctrine of CVID but seeks to achieve this through a graduated process of nuanced negotiations.

Two former US Presidents visited North Korea on special envoy missions many years after they demitted office. Carter in 1994 and later in 2010 and Clinton in 2009. Clinton landed up at Pyongyang to secure the release of US hostages held in North Korean labour camps. He laboured on the idea of nuclear freeze and guarantee of non-use of N option or military intervention by the US against North Korea to defuse tension. This was, as we shall show a little later, closer to the Chinese proposal of double freeze. Jimmy Carter on the other hand, in his incarnation as an envoy to North Korea, post Presidency, advocated withdrawal of US troops from Korean peninsula (Aaron Brown 2010) . The George W Bush Administration advocated the now famous policy of ‘‘Complete, Verifiable, Irreversible Disarmament’’ (CVID), which was embraced by the Obama administration and now the Trump Administration (albeit as a long-term goal).

The singular fear of North Korea about CVID was the fear of US ‘treachery’ of going after their supreme leader once CVID is achieved. The fate of Muammar Gaddafi, who accepted the denuclearization bait offered by the US, is held as evidence of the big dangers of accepting CVID.

Anderson (2018) considers three defining pillars of US policy towards North Korea which may be summarized as (1) Denuclearization of the latter based on the tenets of CVID (2) military alliance with Republic of Korea (hereafter South Korea) and forward deployment of US forces in Korean peninsula and (3) finally avoiding costs associated with counter proliferation military action. Anderson defines the three pillars to be the trilemma of US foreign policy in Korea since pursuing any of the options would mean abandoning the other two and vice versa. Thus, Anderson argues that the USA’s rationale for avoiding CVID would be to avoid the costs of counter proliferation. As Myers (2011) further observes military intervention in North Korea is not an

idea that the US would like to pursue as it considers North Korean regime to be an unpredictable as far as its use of N weapons on the invaders. On the other hand, by abandoning the quest for CVID and accepting North Korea as a Nuclear weapons state, the US can avoid unpredictability in the use of N weapons by North Korea. Further, Anderson (2018) avers that US policy of alliance with South Korea and its commitment to forward deployment of forces is not compatible with the abandonment of N program by North Korea, since North Korea is N program is motivated by the menacing presence of US forces across the DMZ and the joint military and naval exercises that US conducts with South Korea. On the other hand, as Anderson (2018) states, by matching the abandonment of CVID with economic, military and political engagement, the US will be able to reduce the costs of counter-proliferation.

Certain “in between” options that come out is the Chinese initiative of nuclear freeze by North Korea with a freeze in forward deployment of US forces in Korean Peninsula as well as joint military exercises with South Korea (referred to in diplomatic parlance as double freeze). This is more acceptable to North Korea as compared to CVID. It also looks rosy for the US as compared to idea it can reduce the costs of counter proliferation. However, given the past record of mutual mistrust where the latter went back on its word, a freeze of N weaponization programme may turn US-North Korea engagement into a repeated game of strategy with negotiations rounds endlessly dragging on.

The irreducible plank of North Korea’s approach to global affairs is, by contrast self-preservation as a State and as a country that is run by a close-knit dynasty. The Kim family that has ruled North Korea since 1948 has had three core concerns as far as its foreign policy went. These can be summarized as (a) preservation of their dynasty rule in the interests of preserving the Korean race (b) preserving the myth of racial superiority of Koreans (Myers, 2011) (c) countering and ending the presence of Japan and US from the Korean peninsula as the presence of these alien powers have been the primary source of security threat for North Korea (d) effect unification with South Korea on North Korean terms with the Kim dynasty ruling the unified country.

## **2. The Persona and Ideological persuasions of Donald Trump and Kim Jong Un**

We now look at the persona and ideological persuasion of the two Heads of States who held talks in Singapore in June 2018.

### **2.1. Donald Trump**

Donald Trump’s election as US President in November 2016 came as a surprise to many political pundits. His critics are in a state of denial and suspect a Russian hand in his election. The Mueller

investigations aim to unravel evidence on the alleged collusion between the President's campaign and Russian agents (Rozina Sabur, 2018). Notwithstanding these allegations, analysts attribute Trumps' win to the white working-class constituency that was largely ignored by his predecessors. The 'Make America Great' Campaign which was presaged on trade protectionism and anti-immigration rhetoric drew the white working class in (Morgan and Lee, 2018). Trump is also supposed to have capitalised on the hopelessness and feeling of neglect amongst Middle America's low-income stratum (Wright, 2017). The shift is considered to be symptomatic of a post truth world where people are swayed by emotions, fear and anxiety than objective realities in forming their perceptions (Tsipursky 2017). Indeed Trump's 'post truth approach' is likened to Vladimir Putin's ideological tactics to perpetuate his rule over Russia (Tsipursky, op.cit).

Trump is not singularly driven by neoconservatism though he tends to be influenced by the movement. Niki Haley (formerly US envoy at UN) and John Bolton (the National Security Advisor) are favoured by neo-cons (McCarthy, 2018). Mike Pompeo, the present Secretary of State, a hawkish Republican, shares a neoconservative world view (McCarthy op.cit). Yet Trump does not share, as McCarthy (2018) puts it "the universal system that underpins both neoconservatism and its center-left twin, liberal interventionism". Indeed Trump deviates from neo-cons viewed from the prism of the high priest of neoconservative movement, Irving Kristol<sup>1</sup>. Trump talks against the intellectual elite for bringing in radicalisation, while considering business and working class to be conservative in approach. Kristol (1972) considers inequality as just and legitimate in the Aristotelian sense, and as necessary for common good. Kristol riles against intellectuals for denouncing inequality and holds that intellectuals and other professional class (including Professors and academics) are engaged in a class struggle with business community for status and power on grounds of equality. The working class, according to Kristol, on the contrary, are not for egalitarian reforms – rather they are insecure about the idea as they fear that such reforms have the potential to radicalize society (Heywood, 2015). Trump could have points of agreement with Kristol on his characterization of academics and the working class. Nevertheless, unlike what Kristol contends, Trump's working class base is resentful of inequality<sup>2</sup>. Rather, Trump's election victory represents in some ways a form of radicalism that successfully questions and overturns existing narratives that project themselves as objective truth.

## **2.2 Kim Jong Un**

Kim Jong Un's ideological propensities have not deviated from that of his grandfather Kim II Sung, the founding father of North Korea. Though an acolyte of Josef Stalin, who was supported by the Soviet Union from the inception of his rule, and in spite of presiding over a Worker's Party

modelled on Soviet Communist Party model, Kim II Sung, was more wedded to his self-proclaimed idea of Juche, than to the Communist Ideology. Juche, as has been discussed earlier, was based on the ideal of self-reliance and the tenet of Suyong (the perpetuation of strong leadership of the great solitary leader). Kim II sung was brought up as a Christian of Methodist faith by his patriotic father Kim-Hyong-jik, who in turn was a school teacher turned herbal medicine doctor. Kim-Hyong-jik, was imprisoned many times for being in the forefront of the resistance against Japanese rule in Korea ([https:// en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Kim dynasty \(North\\_Korea\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Kim_dynasty_(North_Korea))).

The doctrine of Juche was presaged on the foundations of the superiority of Korean Race. As North Korean rulers are fond of saying 'South Korea is good race but a bad State' (Myers, 2011). The theory of the Kims was that Koreans are a uniquely virtuous race that cannot survive without the parental leader's protection (Myers op.cit). This was then the justification for perpetuating the Kim dynasty.

Kim Jong Un suffers from the same sense of insecurity as his predecessors. He is insecure about the presence of US troops in South Korea, the possible threat to North Korea's existence as an independent State and threats to his rule from a possible US-South Korea joint military intervention or from a coup de 'tat by his own subordinates. Kim is always wary of agreeing to CVID, given the poor track record of the US in adhering to quid pro quo action. Contrary to what the Bush Administration had promised, Gaddafi suffered a brutal end after he abandoned his N capabilities. This precedent is an added reason for Kim to balk from CVID<sup>3</sup>.

### **2.3 The Lieutenants**

We now look at the background and ideological persuasions of lieutenants from both sides who carried the line of negotiations of the two leaders. We first look at the two US Secretaries of State of the Trump Administration who were/are involved in the US-North Korea negotiations and then look at Kim's favourite envoy.

#### **2.3.1 Rex Tillerson**

Tillerson was a Fortune 10 CEO of ExxonMobil, who worked as Secretary of State for 14 months before he was fired by Trump through a Presidential tweet. Tillerson was for the Paris Accord on Climate Change, despite his background as a hydrocarbon pro. Tillerson was also at odds with the President of the Iran deal, free trade issues and finally on North Korea (Harris, 2018). He was for free trade and strengthening of alliances with US partners and for a strong stand against China on the Belt & Road Initiative, Russia, Iran and terrorist organizations (Harris 2018). He was for

foreign policy to be in the hands of professional foreign policy officers and brooked no interference from the White House<sup>4</sup>. However, it is argued that post-Tillerson, the State Department will be busy implementing Trump's 'America First' agenda (Harris op.cit).

### **2.3.2 Mike Pompeo**

Mike Pompeo, business man turned hawkish Republican, a former Congressman (Representative) from Kansas went on to head the CIA, before he was picked up by President Trump to replace Rex Tillerson as Secretary of State in March 2018. Pompeo took over his position as Secretary of State in April 2018 (Harris, 2018). Pompeo has been for denuclearizing North Korea and during early August 2018, accused North Korea for flouting UN sanctions. In his initial meetings with State Department staff after taking over, Pompeo clearly mentioned that he did not, unlike Tillerson, believe in schooling the state department with professional diplomats (Harris, 2018). Pompeo nevertheless promised to bring the State Department's "swagger back" which, for him, was based on "aggressiveness born of the righteous knowledge that our cause is just, special and built upon America's core principles" (Harris, 2018).

Pompeo's diplomacy tactics is based on 'blow hot blow cold' style: a bout of aggression followed by statements of reconciliation<sup>5</sup>. In the run up to the Singapore Summit, Pompeo had meetings with Kim Jong Un. This did not prevent him from criticising North Korea for violating UN sanctions and for not adhering to the UN Security Council resolutions on denuclearization. As Nezam (2018) argues, Pompeo was tasked by President Trump to find a way to appropriately sequencing North Korean denuclearization process. This means that US will not like to water down sanctions and prematurely normalise relations with North Korea, as it fears that this will compel the US to recognise the North Korea as a nuclear power. In other words, Nezam's argument centres on the Trump Administration rooting for CVID as was the case with the Bush and Obama Administrations. On the other hand, if US talks tough with North Korea to ensure CVID, it will risk North Korea moving back to reclusion (Nezam op,cit) . It is likely that Pompeo satisfies the dual diplomacy track of Trump administration –breaking ice through high level summit parleys, while hammering key US foreign policy concerns in official level talks that follow the Summit.<sup>6</sup>

### **2.3.3 Kim Yong Chul**

The tallest diplomat from North Korean side is Kim Yong Chul. He has had parleys with Tillerson and Pompeo besides having successful direct meetings with Trump.

Kim Yong Chul is Kim Jong Un's man Friday when it comes to talks with US and South Korea. Chul is Vice Chairman of the Workers' Party of Korea (WPK) Central Committee, member of the State Affairs Commission which is North Korean government's supreme power and policymaking organization. Chul is also member of the WPK Political Bureau and a member of the WPK Central Military Commission. With an extensive background as North Korea's chief of Reconnaissance General Bureau from 2009 to 2016, Yong Chul conducts diplomatic talks with US and South Korea with the same felicity with which he conducts espionage activities against South Korea. Chul, a polyglot, has a reputation for his morbid sense of humor and unconventionalism and is widely considered as the brain behind Pyongyang's cyber-attacks and the sinking of the naval ship ROKS Cheonan in March 2010 that killed 49 South Korean sailors. As North Korea's ace diplomat and had direct talks with President Trump in May 2018 (Thomas Catenacci, 2018). His ace act of diplomatic symbolism came when he delivered the giant letter from Kim Jong Un to President Trump at the White House on June 1, 2018 (Lindsay Benson, 2018).

### **3. Foreign Policy Doctrines**

#### **3.1 Donald Trump**

It is difficult to pin Donald Trump to a clearly defined ideology. His thinking does not fall into standard silos that one would attribute to US politicians (liberal, conservative, far right, Neo conservative etc). Trump is certainly a conservative who feels the pulse of white working class. He is not a liberal crusader (Daniel McCarthy, 2018). As we have stated earlier, compared to the George W Bush, Trump is not closely associated with neo conservatism. His narrative is a refreshing blast of counter-mainstream thinking as he riles against the Washington DC establishment. His 'America First' credo removes him far away from Wilsonism as also from multilateralism. This is apparent from his disdain for the United Nations. Trump also has elements of neo-realism in his thinking as evident from the primacy he accords to America's national economic interests. However he is not a classical neo-realist, as he still believes that US State power vis-a-viz Islamic fundamentalism, terrorism and his conscious effort to win relative gains vis-a-viz competing economic powers like China<sup>7</sup>. In Trump's scheme of things, foreign policy needs to be primarily driven by himself (and not the State Department). This thinking is critical to the success of his "America First" doctrine<sup>8</sup>.

This penchant to seek glory abroad explains Trump's effort to secure agreements with dictators like Kim Jon Yun. This is sought to be achieved through direct, personal approaches than through regular channels of diplomacy that guided Obama, Bush and Clinton.

The disruption Trump is causing to the world order, is expressed in the following tenets of his world view (a) discounting traditional US allies who are present in NATO, G 8 and NAFTA (like Mexico and Canada). (b) His affinity for Israel as compared to his predecessor, and his personal friendship with Vladimir Putin (which was openly professed by him despite the menacing shadow of Mueller investigations on the Russian hand in Trump's election victory in November 2016) causes him to disrupt the conventional constellation of forces that have been guiding the international order. (c) The Trump doctrine is seeking rapprochement between Israel, Russia and Saudi Arabia and UAE against China, Iran and Shia fundamentalism. This is brokered with the help of the Prince Mohammed Bin Sayed, the Crown Prince of Abu Dhabi, who is perhaps the most astute Middle East statesman and diplomat since World War II. This represents a radical effort at reconfiguring the global order that one has been used to since World War II. Bin Sayed has been reportedly brokering a deal to end sanctions against Russia (for annexing Crimea) and wean away Russia from supporting Iran and the Bashar Al Assad regime in Syria (Adam Entous, 2018). The bizarre part of the Trump doctrine is the possibility of a US-Russia- Sunni (Wahabi) – Jewish alliance against Shia fundamentalism and terror as exemplified through the Hamas. It is conceivable that this alliance will direct its guns against China in due course<sup>9</sup>. In short, the Trump doctrine is centrally guided by the credo of 'America First'. The ideal of US national economic interests and the idea of US economic supremacy in relative terms, predominates the thinking in such a strong manner that the idea of transformational diplomacy (in the interest of spreading American values of democracy abroad) that guided US foreign policy during the Bush Administration is being reworked in the direction of complete overhaul of the idea of who should constitute overseas allies in the present day world.<sup>10</sup> The role of the State Department and career diplomats is marginal in Trump's foreign policy scheme of things. This could be also because Trump visualizes his foreign policy as a mirror of his 'America First' doctrine, which in turn, requires career diplomats to adapt to the 'domestic political dimensions of diplomacy' (Black, 2011;262) a task not easy to accomplish. Also, Trump's effort is to carve out a personalized style of diplomacy wherein the President leads from the front to handle difficult Heads of States, by discounting not only officials from his own establishment but also keeping out time-tested US allies<sup>11</sup>. Thus 'America First' goes with 'Trump First' and as Daniel Russell (former Director of Asia Affairs at the National Security Council under the Obama Administration) says 'diplotainment' (Nakamura, 2018). In essence, the term is used to define Trump initiated apex Summits as mammoth spectacles of personalized diplomacy. The Singapore Summit was a classic case in point of diplotainment and associated pageantry.

### **3.2 Kim Jong Un**

As with predecessors, Kim Jong Un considers survival of his regime as the primary *raison d'être* of his foreign policy. Both Kim and his father (Kim Jong Il) before him, considered their Nuclear programme as a means for countering US Nuclear umbrella over South Korea and an effort to seek resolution of the Korean crisis in North Korea's terms.

However, Kim Jong Un is also actively exploring a shift in strategy as far as foreign relations go. In reality, Kim Un is experimenting with a grand restructuring of the core strategy of North Korea's foreign policy as laid down by Kim Il Sung and Kim Jong-il. Kim Un, like Trump, abhors the United Nations route of conflict resolution and would like to settle issues bilaterally with the countries with which it has had problems. This explains his efforts to seek a *détente* with US and South Korea by freezing ICBM tests and releasing detained US prisoners, ahead of the Singapore Summit. However, unlike Trump, Un will not break away from his time-tested allies viz, China and Russia. The force of UN sanctions compels him to surreptitiously depend on his allies for economic survival. He also needs his time tested allies to help him bargain with South Korea and the USA in an effective manner.

For this very reason, Kim will avoid rolling back or dismantling his Nuclear programme as he apprehends he will meet with Gaddafi's fate in Libya. Interestingly, it is quite possible that Trump, himself may not like to de-fang North Korea's N capabilities as his diplomatic glory of having brought a difficult dictator to the negotiation table will be short lived.

Kim Un's priority is to avoid the imposition of the CVID regime on his country. For Trump, CVID is a legacy that ties him down from experimenting with change in US-North Korea relations. Kim for his part would like to not only avoid CVID, but ideally earn his country the recognition of being a Nuclear power. However it is likely that in return for removal of UN sanctions and abandonment of CVID by the US, Kim may agree to freeze his Nuclear programmes.

### **4. Unconventional Diplomacy Styles of Kim and Trump**

Both Trump and Kim practise unconventional styles of diplomacy that is based on breaking existing protocol and procedures and surprising the world with their unpredictable demeanour and conduct. Both believe in the power of bilateral summits and have no patience for multi-party debates on globally significant issues which are conducted under the aegis of the United Nations. Indeed both men loathe even plurilateral parleys. They prefer to handle their issues directly than through plurilateral summits by involving Russia, China, South Korea and Japan as well. Both

symbolise “madmen” theory of negotiation and are willing to take extreme action to get what they want. (Sanger and Hun 2018). Finally both men practice personal equations based, egotistic negotiations style.

The manner in which Kim walked across the DMZ to meet President Moon of South Korea, unaccompanied by his entourage and the warmth with which he shook hands with his South Korean counterparts was an unusual spectacle that was removed from the officious style of being received by his South Korean counterpart with gun salutes and walk over red carpets (Rick Noak, 2018). Earlier, in 2018, a belligerent Kim surprised Korea watchers by agreeing to participate in the Winter Olympics held in Pyeongchang in February 2018. The North Korean sports delegation was led by Kim Yo Jong, Kim Jon Un’s younger sister. In some ways this is reminiscent of the ping pong diplomacy that Richard Nixon and Mao Ze Dong initiated to break their Sino-US cold war in the 1970s. At Singapore, Kim was closeted with Trump for a round of warm discussions without his entourage of advisors, before signing the Joint Statement. His gigantic letter to President Trump (delivered through Kim Chule) to break the ice in their relationships prior to the Singapore Summit, was an unusual spectacle of symbolism that is alien to conventional diplomacy.

Trump is also known for his unconventional diplomacy, as he seeks to bring the culture of business negotiations to country level parleys. He used tweets to queer the pitch of his negotiation stands. Trump began his Singapore Summit parleys with Kim Un with a slide show which is more corporate culture in style than an official diplomacy practice. As mentioned earlier, Trump has discounted career foreign service officers and preferred people with corporate background to lead his negotiations team. It is argued that Trump’s team that handles North Korea matters is not an A team of diplomats (Abigail Tracy, 2018)

Trump, has reversed the order where the Head of the State meets his counterpart after a series of well institutionalised official level meetings. Trump had meetings with Kim Chule at the White House before the Singapore Summit, when in terms of the established protocols of diplomacy, the Head of the State does not meet an official emissary of another country’s head of the State earlier on. Indeed, in the wake of the Singapore Summit with Kim, Trump had the guts to even say that many details germane to the agreement were brought to his notice after he had signed the Joint Statement (Moraes 2018)<sup>12</sup>. Indeed he was fulsome in his praise of Kim Jong Un as a great negotiator and as a ‘tough guy’ (Moraes, 2018).

Cristal summarizes the impact of the two leader’s unconventional styles at the Singapore Summit of June 2018, as a change in framing which is far removed from the makings of a conventional

diplomatic encounter (Volpicelli, Gian. 2018). Both Trump and Kim, according to Cristal, hit off as they were of the same type - egotistic and unpredictable.

### **5. Trump and Kim: Towards an Analysis of the Negotiations Game**

As mentioned earlier, three strategic aims of US policy in Korean peninsula enunciated by Anderson (2018) viz, CVID, US-ROK military alliance and commitment to forward deployment of nuclear umbrella by the US and minimizing costs of counter-proliferation are not mutually exclusive. Thus for CVID to happen, it is essential for US to remove its forward deployment strategy in the Korean peninsula. By implication, if CVID is brought in and forward deployment of US troops and N shield is removed, the costs of counter-proliferation would be minimized.

If the US were to follow their zero sum game approach to the issue, they would settle for nothing but CVID. Donald Trump as an ace business negotiator was known for his zero sum approach to negotiations connected to business deals<sup>13</sup>. Under a zero sum approach there is no effort to understand the point of view of the person /persons sitting across the table Further as Malhotra and Powell (2016) state the zero sum approach does not work in the 'context of protracted conflicts and complex international deal which is the whole point about inter-country negotiations. Indeed Trump's withdrawal threat from NAFTA is a case in point of his effort as the US President, to play a zero sum game approach to international relations<sup>14</sup>.

Thus, Trump's approach to inter country talks can be likened to the part played by an irrational negotiating partner, one who is willing to risk everything to make sure that his rivals across the table get nothing (Susskind, p20). All the same, Susskind states it is not unusual for hard bargainers to back down once they realize that their opponents may walk away without yielding their ground (Susskind, p21).

Indeed when it came to North Korea, Trump's zero sum driven posturing did not yield dividends as his rival did not consider his threat credible as compared to that meted out by Kim Un viz his missiles successfully hitting US. Kim's unpredictability or mad man strategy which, when backed by his missile strike threat could be one reason that would have forced Trump to the negotiation table at Singapore. The other reason for Trump to agree to the Singapore Summit with Kim Jong Un is the growing realization that it is not easy to overthrow the Kim regime in Korea given Kim's ideological hold over his people Further, any effort to enforce CVID through a war is something Trump would like to avoid on account of the exorbitant costs of such a policy on the US and there is no guarantee that this will be successful, partly on account of Kim's resilience and partly on

account of China and Russia being totally against any military intervention on account of their fear that it will breed migration of war stricken Koreans to their countries war.

The third reason for Trump to hit the high table at Singapore in June 2018 is that the status quo is unbearable too. The ever eluding CVID solution and the failure of US efforts to get the Kim regime removed in North Korea only prolongs the agony of counter-proliferation costs for the US. The status quo (minus UN Sanctions) is highly desirable for Kim Jong Un as his stature as a durable, unreliable rogue is unblemished as is his grip over his people.

Trump's 'America first' policy is not just about retaliatory trade measures on imports. It is also based on reducing US commitments to world policing. His assertion that NATO allies bear the costs of troops/ weapons deployment in international theatres and his insistence that South Korea to bear the costs of THAAD are cases in point. Thus given Trump's insistence on reducing financial costs on overseas defence commitments, it is obvious that the costs of counter proliferation is the central driving force of his policy on Korea.

Unlike Trump, Kim Un is not an adherent to the zero sum game. He plays a mixed strategy based on stealthy Nuclear tests and missile launches that are random and unpredictable that alternate with signals of peaceful intent. The idea is to confuse and deflate Trump's zero sum game strategy and get him to move towards a co-operative outcome. Paradoxically, as with Trump, for Kim Un too the costs of status quo (of Nuclear one up-manship in Korean peninsula) are unbearable. An infinite repeat game raises the costs of counter proliferation for Trump and the costs of Nuclear option for Kim<sup>15</sup>.

To top it, is the costs of the UN Security Council sanctions for Kim that comes with every missile that is fired and every N test that is done by him as part of his mixed strategy of confusing his opponent with his random provocation. The periodic N tests are unavoidable for Kim to prevent a threat to his regime in North Korea as it is a demonstration to his own people of his bold leadership and of the superiority of the North Korean State as well as a credible signal to US and South Korea about his unpredictable, mad man strategy which is backed by his prowess to harm them with Nuclear weapons.

Depending upon political and economic stakes and their time horizons both leaders have been compelled to gravitate to a co-operative solution that is based on a second best or worst, maximin strategy. It also means that the US-North Korea game changes from an infinite game of threats and counter threats to a finite repeat game where you pipe down and talk with occasional threats to prevent other from taking the larger share of the co-operative game dividends.

### **5.1 Towards a Finite Co-operative Repeat Game: From Linear to Circular Diplomacy**

Moty Cristal contrasts the linear diplomacy of Western (including US) powers with the circularity implicit in Asian diplomacy (Volpicelli 2018). Indeed if one were to situate this idea to the context of game of strategy, one can argue that Trump's zero-sum game approach to inter-state relations accords well with the classical linear approach of US diplomacy, which in turn was expected to end with the pyrrhic victory of the US in a short period of time. On the other hand, Kim Jon Un's approach has been to have an infinite repeated game until the US abandons its zero sum approach—the idea being to wear the US out on its faith in zero sum game.

A circular approach to diplomacy, on the contrary, is predicated on the idea of finite repeat that relies 'concession for concession approach' that produces enduring consensus over a reasonable period of time. However since the possibility of retaliation that repetition introduces can make it in the player's interests to co-operate (McMillan, 1992, p32) within a finite horizon of repetition, particularly when one player is more impatient than the other for a quick outcome. The circular approach is also based on a finite approach for seeking a self-reinforcing solution that may not be the worst /best outcome that the parties desire.

Viewed in this manner, both Kim and Trump have abandoned their core positions to come to the high table in Singapore seeking a co-operative solution of a circular /enduring type. Mutual suspicions of one's deeper intentions and failures of observing good behaviour in the past, could create relapses to the circular outcomes. Indeed, it is this factor of mistrust that compels both countries and their leaders to indulge in blow hot blow cold diplomatic tactics<sup>16</sup>.

What aided the game changing outcome was, as mentioned earlier, unconventional diplomacy both prior to and during the Singapore Summit. The leadership driven process that marginalized career US foreign officers was a radical change that created change in game of strategy. Trump treating Kim Jon Un as an equal at Singapore was a non-conventional move. What aided the change was amusing remarks like Trump's suggestion at Singapore that North Korea turn into a tourist destination (Fisher, 2018)

### **5.2 The Singapore Outcome: Why it is heading towards Finite Repeat**

The Trump -Kim Joint Statement at the end of their Summit welcomed the Panmunjom Declaration of April 27, 2018 whereby Kim Jong Un and the South Korean President Moon Jae-in had pledged to work for the "complete denuclearisation of the Korean Peninsula". (Anon 2018). Further both Trump and Kim agreed to 'cooperate for the development of new U.S.-DPRK relations and for the promotion of peace, prosperity, and security of the Korean Peninsula and of the world'. (Anon

2018). Trump went a step further and announced that US would suspend military exercises with South Korea as a gesture off goodwill to North Korea. This announcement took South Korea by surprise as it was done without any prior consultations with South Korea (Borger, Julian, 2018). Both leaders committed to recovering POWs/MIA remains in North Korea. The two leaders also agreed to follow up official level negotiations led by Mike Pompeo from the US side and his counterparts on the North Korean side to implement the Joint Statement commitments.

Critics of Trump allege that he gave away to Kim without extracting concessions to him (Beauchamp and Williams, 2018). Kim gave away nothing except on the POW issue. By far the allegation is true as the core concern of US on CVID was not touched upon in the Joint Statement. The statement regarding ‘promotion of peace, prosperity, and security of the Korean Peninsula and of the world’ is a possible commitment a cessation of hostilities based on Nuclear Weapons but it falls short of a zero sum solution of CVID based on de-nuclearization that has been the core concern of US since 2000. Viewed in this manner the Panmunjom declaration though emphasizing the importance of complete denuclearization of the Korean peninsula was also not based on CVID.

Rather, the offer by Trump for cessation of military exercises with South Korea amounts to a freeze in tensions and in Nuclear build up, something which is akin to the idea of double freeze that China had proposed earlier (provided Kim also makes a commitment for cessation of provocations from his side).

### Feasible Pay-offs from the Game of Strategy played between Trump and Kim

		North Korea / Kim Jong Un		
		CVID, CVID	CVID, SQ	CVID, DF
USA / Trump			SQ, SQ	
			DF, SQ	DF, DF

### 5.3 Game Change Dynamics:

In a 2 player game, where both players have the same dominant strategies, say peace in the region, Nash equilibrium obtains as is the case with a Prisoner's Dilemma game. Also though in a Prisoner's Dilemma game, the maximin strategy is a Nash equilibrium, this need not be true always.

The above 3x 3 matrix illustrates that out of nine possible outcomes, only 6 are feasible in the light of the realities of US – North Korean relationships. The zero-sum game for Korea is SQ – SQ, while for the US it is CVID – CVID. The intermediate possibilities are

CVID – SQ

DF – SQ

CVID – DF and

DF – DF

The transition to a cooperative outcome means a move from zero sum (all win) to maximin, where both parties come down from their positions of confrontationist bargaining, to talk to each other in a co-operative spirit.

The Nash equilibrium as a stable solution is

CVID – DF

given the fact that for North Korea movement to SQ-DF is impossible and the movement to CVID – SQ is also impossible

The solution DF – DF is Maximin as it is better than the worst solution after CVID (for North Korea) or Status Quo (for USA).

By agreeing to talk, both Trump and Kim have shown a greater desire to transition from the all win situations to intermediate positions.

In general, where Nash equilibrium occurs when, in a zero-sum game situation, both players choose a maximin strategy. Given the fact that Trump and Kim have intentionally transitioned to a maximin strategy in their attempt to seek a co-operative solution, the maximin strategy need not be a Nash equilibrium.

Indeed the transition to maximin in the post Singapore is not a Nash solution since the two countries can gravitate to DF-SQ, if North Korea's previous record of unreliability in sticking to agreements once again surfaces. However, in the short run, given the limited tenure of an impatient

Trump's US Presidency DF – DF as a Maximin solution may be feasible and decisively better than the provocative environment of tension created by the zero-sum game approaches employed by the parties concerned.

#### 5.4 Asymmetric Impatience

The issue of symmetric impatience arises when parties to the conflict have the same degree of patience when it comes to arriving at a solution. Since patience is relative to time, it follows that Reservation Price (RP) of the negotiating parties is a dynamic factor that could be altered by the relative ratio of patience to time, depending upon the time preference (discount rates) of the party concerned.

The zone of agreement or trading zone (Susskind, 2014) between Kim and Trump is the gap between their Reservation Prices which is as under;

$$RP_T - RP_k < 0 \text{ Where } RP_t \text{ and } RP_k \text{ are Reservation prices of Trump and Kim respectively ..... (1)}$$

In the wake of the Singapore summit, Trump's anxiety to secure an agreement on the Korean issue was greater given the pressures of his radical foreign policy shifts. By comparison, Kim is less impatient since, he is a dynast and has a long term stake in holding power in North Korea as compared to Trump who has a limited tenure Presidency. Accordingly Trump has a high discount rate (and a high time preference) as compared to Kim.

$$(-d_t) < (1 - d_k) \rightarrow \text{where, } d \text{ is discount rate}$$

$$\text{where } 0 \geq d \leq 1 \text{ ..... (2)}$$

It follows that Trump is more impatient for an US- North Korea agreement than Kim as he desperately needs a diplomatic victory abroad to bolster his personal image in the US as well as legitimacy for the radical shifts in his foreign policy (moving away from his allies in NATO and NAFTA).

##### 5.4.1. Implications of Asymmetric Impatience: A Rudimentary Approach

In terms of the paradigm of economic exchange involving a buyer and a seller, we could characterise Trump as the seller of the peace deal and Kim Jong Un as the buyer (consumer) of the deal. Since the degree of impatience is higher for Trump post Singapore, he would seek to win a deal of agreement with a few rounds of negotiations. Let  $I_{TPS}$  be Trump's impatience level prior to

the Singapore summit and  $I_{T'S}$  be his impatience level after Singapore summit. Let  $T_{TPS}$  and  $T_{TS}$  be the time horizon (the length of the negotiation rounds) prior to and after Singapore summit for Trump, then

$$(I_{TPS}/T_{TPS}) < (I_{TS}/T_{TS}) \dots\dots\dots (3)$$

The above formulation indicates that the Trump would like to squeeze more outcomes from a given negotiation round in the period after the Singapore summit than realize them through extended series of repeated rounds.

Kim's "impatience to time horizon ratio", prior to and after the Singapore summit, can be represented as below.

$$(I_{KPS}/T_{KPS}) > (I_{KS}/T_{KS}) \dots\dots\dots (4)$$

The above indicates that as in the case of Trump, Kim's impatience levels has also increased after the Singapore summit as compared to the pre-Singapore summit period though his degree of impatience is definitely lower than that of Trump. It follows that what was an "*infinite repeated game*" (continuing tension between USA and North Korea, in a zero-sum situation) is being pushed in the post Singapore summit phase to being a "*finite repeat game*". A finite repeat game would lower the scope of iterative bargaining in terms of the frequency of negotiations required to be undertaken to conclude an agreement.

Given that Trump's impatience level is even higher than that of the Kim, in the wake of the Singapore summit, the following situation would obtain.

$$(I_{KS}/T_{KS}) < (I_{TS}/T_{TS}) \dots\dots\dots (5)$$

This implies that Kim may find his relatively low impatience to time ratio handy in pushing Trump to lower his Reservation Price (RP) further, in the post-Singapore summit period. What is more Kim as the buyer of peace deal would, on realizing Trump's elevated impatience level, lower his own RP to extract more consumer surplus than he would have got if Trump's impatience had not risen in the post-Singapore summit phase.

The above means that

$$RP_{TPS} > RP_{TS} \dots\dots\dots (6)$$

$$RP_{KPS} > RP_{KS} \dots \dots \dots (7)$$

and  $(RP_{KPS} - RP_{TPS}) > (RP_{KS} - RP_{TS})$  with the gap entirely accruing to Kim, who is the consumer of the peace deal.

This means that Kim succeeds in avoiding CVID in total while Trump veers towards the idea of a double freeze, which gets to be acceptable to Kim as well. The idea of double freeze in development and deployment of Nuclear weapons in Korean peninsula is a maximin solution for both Trump and Kim since it is a next best thing to happen to them in comparison to the extreme positions of CVID and status quo respectively. The maximin solution reduces the cost of continuous Nuclear testing for Kim while reducing the cost on deterrent action for Trump.

## 6. Conclusion

In Singapore, Trump gave up, Kim did not yield any ground. Both avoided what was the best/worst outcome and went for the next best i.e DF-DF which is maximin. The Maximin outcome compels Trump to lower his Minimum Reservation Price (RP) further, to get a quicker peace deal which enables US to reduce the cost of maintaining deterrence in the Korean peninsula. The Trump-Kim negotiations at Singapore was about sharing the gap between the RPs of Trump and Kim. If he senses Trump's giveaway at Singapore, it is likely that Kim would lower his reservation price. This means Kim gives up far less than what he thought he might have to, prior to the Summit. This is complemented by efforts to change the game from an infinite repeat to a finite repeat one. It is also a fact, that Trump's high impatience level causes him to desire to squeeze out the minimum desirable from Kim in a few negotiation rounds (than extract his best outcome of CVID). As far as Kim is concerned, given his relatively higher discount rates as compared to Trump and his lower impatience level, a double freeze regime that is reversible is desirable than moving towards a deep freeze that will take him closer to CVID. However Kim realizes that this outcome is not easy to extract nor enduring, given the manner in which CVID is entrenched in US foreign policy and the manner in which it would out-survive the Trump Presidency. Therefore Trump's offer of double freeze will be acceptable to him. Thus, to sum up, "double freeze" appears to be the emerging scenario in the Korean peninsula.

**Notes:**

1. Neoconservatism is a confusing ideology. It is conservative while also being a mish mash of Aristotlean thinking with Trotskyism thrown in.
2. As Wright (2017) pithily summarizes Trump's big asset in 2016 'was the sense among many low-income whites that there are two Americas: an America of affluent metropolitan elites and a low-income stratum of Middle America that those elites don't care about'.
3. Nicholas Burns who served both the Bush Administration as Under Secretary of State for Political Affairs and as US Ambassador to NATO during the Clinton Administration, is of the view that Kim will not abandon his N ambitions as this is his only card he and perhaps his only option to avoid a Gaddafi type fate(Abigail Tracy,2018).
4. Tillerson's affinity for career diplomats could however be questioned, since his effort to redesign the State Department with the help of outside consultants who had no clue of State Department has been criticised for not having been productive (Kraleov,2018). Further Tillerson believed that private sector professionals brought in more skills to Washington DC than what Government bred officials could provide and that re-design was greater transformation than simple re-organization (Rollert, 2018.).
5. A case in point is the statement issued by a chastened Pompeo after his parleys in Pyongyang in that his discussions had been productive and conducted in good faith, but he allowed that much more work needed to be done. (Associated Press, 2018).
6. A classic instance of official level belligerency is the pre Singapore Summit Statement of Pompeo before the House of Representatives Foreign Affairs Committee that "A bad deal is not an option," and further that 'American people are counting on us to get this right. If the right deal is not on the table, we will respectfully walk away'. (Lesley Wroughton, Patricia Zengerle, 2018).
7. For the theoretical roots of neo-realism, see Waltz (1979) and Mearsheimer, 2014
8. As Robin Wright (2018) states Trump has disrupted the global order more than the domestic order.
9. Entous (2018) adduces Trump's unusual efforts at changing the configuration of the world order by referring to his advocacy for Russia's re-admission to G8 at Montreal in June and his startling defence of Russia's interests in Crimea. Read this with reports about Saudi Arabia and UAE joining together to make investments in Russia , one can see how strange the realignment can be to countries still rooted in the pre-Trump world of international politics.
10. See Damodaran, 2010 for a discussion on Condelezza Rice's viewpoints on transformational diplomacy centred on diffusion of American values that The George W Bush Administration was committed to.
11. Richard Nixon was perhaps the other President who had discounted the State Department and career diplomats. Nixon, like Trump after him, successfully tried extraordinary, stealth diplomacy manoeuvres to break from the shackles of State Department thinking on China through Henry Kissinger, then National Security Advisor. Thus 'commenced 'ping pong diplomacy 'in July 1971 when Kissinger secretly visited China for a meeting with Chairman Mao Ze Dong. This meeting was to open the doors of the People's Republic of China (PRC) to a visit by a US President to the country, the first of its kind since the formation of the PRC (Devoss, 2002). Until 1971. Nixon was better perceived as an uncompromising hawk towards USA's cold war rivals. Paradoxically Trump with his aggressive retaliatory tariff action against Chinese goods has swung in the opposite direction from the days of bonhomie that Nixon had inaugurated in the 1970s.
12. As Reynolds (2007, p.399-400) says, the whole point about Diplomatic Summits which are one-to-one meetings is the direct contact between leaders and possibilities of securing quick agreements. The negative part of one-to-one Summit meetings is that ill-informed leaders may

commit mistakes either on account of not grasping the issues well enough or not having the patience for detailed thinking-through. Indeed, Reynolds speaks of the goof-up made by Neville Chamberlain in his one-to-one meetings with Hitler in 1938 (at Berchtesgaden, Godesberg and Munich, resulting in the disastrous Munich agreement which gave Hitler the license to invade Sudetenland, Czechoslovakia and Poland) and Brezhnev making a mess of arms-controlled discussions in his talks with Nixon in 1972. At Singapore, Trump displayed his relative aversion for details as compared to the priority of securing a direct deal with Kim Jong Un.

13. Trump summarizes his business negotiations mantra in the following seven words “Use your leverage, think big, fight back” (Trump et al, 1987).
14. See Berkeley (2018) for a discussion on Trump’s hardened stand towards NAFTA , Trans-Pacific Partnership and China on trade matters as well as his strident stand against the Paris Agreement on Climate Change
15. In Kim’s case , while the political desirability of status quo is high ‘the economic costs of status quo is crushing since the situation requires him to undertake continuous Nuclear testing, the exorbitant costs of accelerated nuclear weaponization and the social costs of accompanying UN sanctions on the North Korean State. The dramatic progress of North Korea’s accelerated nuclear weaponization programme lies in the rapid progress of the striking range of North Korean missiles commencing from Masudan (tested in June 22,2016) with 3000 km horizontal range to Hwasong 14 with a range of 6500 kms that was tested hardly a year later in July 4, 2017 . The latter had the ability to strike Alaska (McCurry, Justin, 2017).
16. A few days before the Singapore Summit, Trump raised doubts about the summit in talks on Tuesday with South Korean President Moon Jae-in, who came to Washington to urge Trump not to let a rare opportunity with reclusive North Korea slip away. It could be that Trump was not truly backing away from the summit or was a strategic ploy to coax North Korea to the table. Around this time, Mike Pompeo was to say that “A bad deal was not an option”. Kim also played a blow hot blow cold game after the Singapore Summit. Immediately after the Singapore Summit, in the wake of Mike Pompeo’s visit to Pyongyang, North Korea went on a tirade against the US for making gangster like demands for de-nuclearization. The attack was on Mike Pompeo than on Trump. As a matter of fact the North Korean statements made a conscious effort to keep Trump out of controversy. Rather they stated that they maintained their **trust** toward President Trump,” and warned Washington against allowing “headwinds” against the “wills of the leaders.”//[www.apnews.com/805d302b95704d2e8644f28876ac1be8](http://www.apnews.com/805d302b95704d2e8644f28876ac1be8)). The legacy of the blow hot blow cold approach to US-North Korean relations go back to the pre-Trump days of US-RoK alliance when the allies adopted the diplomatic policy of delicate balance between ‘pressure and counter-pressure’ more as a deterrence strategy that eschewed the zero sum approach (see Draudt and Warden ,2017).

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