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READING KIM JONG UN'S LIPS: WHAT IS HIS PLAYBOOK AND INTENTION WITH NUCLEAR WEAPONS?

PATRICK MCEACHERN

DECEMBER 20 2017

I. INTRODUCTION

In this essay, Patrick McEachern argues: “Unlike his father and grandfather, Kim Jong Un began his reign with an unambiguous and tested first generation nuclear weapons capability. Contrary voices publicly articulating the trade-offs associated with varying approaches to the nuclear issue observable during his father’s term evaporated under Kim Jong Un. His regime would be unified in word and deed as Kim ordered a more capable nuclear deterrent, including the simultaneous development of a range of land- and sea-based ballistic missiles, thermonuclear weapons, more precise ballistic missiles better suited to counter-force targeting, and a deployed nuclear force on alert that he called useable in a contingency. More than his father’s focus on an existential nuclear deterrent to ward off foreign invasion on the Iraq model, Kim Jong Un has articulated additional goals include raising North Korea’s stature and safeguarding its freedom of action.” The paper concludes with a discussion of the meaning of the evolving North Korean nuclear doctrine for military planners and diplomats.

Patrick McEachern is a Council on Foreign Relations International Affairs Fellow in residence at the Wilson Center in Washington, DC. He has served as a Foreign Service Officer for 15 years, including diplomatic assignments in Seoul and Tokyo. He is co-author of *North Korea, Iran, and the Challenge to International Order* (Routledge, 2017), *Inside the Red Box: North Korea’s Post-totalitarian Politics* (Columbia University Press, 2010), and multiple journal articles on North Korea. He speaks Korean. Views expressed here do not necessarily reflect those of the U.S. government or the Department of State.

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The views expressed in this report do not necessarily reflect the official policy or position of the Nautilus Institute. Readers should also note that Nautilus seeks a diversity of views and opinions on significant topics in order to identify common ground.

Banner image: Kim Jong Un's Lips high resolution photo from here.

Update June 12 2018: Because the image linked above to AP-KCNA is claimed to be copyright by Agence France Presse via Getty Images, who purchase their images from Korea News Service, a North Korean controlled sales entity-based in Japan, and AFP-Getty do not recognize non-commercial and First Amendment protected use of imagery including artistic fair use, and also may be evading US and UNSC sanctions by paying KCNA for use of images of Kim Jong Un, and

demanded that we pay for use of this image, we replaced the original banner image with a composite of Kim Jong Un's lips taken from official White House and Blue House photos and videos.

Update June 16 2018: We replaced the KCNA image of Kim Jong Un's with those of Kim Jong Um, a Hong-Kong based impersonator who gave permission for us to use this photo.

II. NAPSNET SPECIAL REPORT BY PATRICK MCEACHERN

READING KIM JONG UN'S LIPS: WHAT IS HIS PLAYBOOK AND INTENTION WITH NUCLEAR WEAPONS?

DECEMBER 20 2017

Introduction

North Korea's nuclear and ballistic missile testing has accelerated to an unprecedented pace since the death of Kim Jong Il in December 2011 and transfer of power to his son, Kim Jong Un.[1] How should we understand Kim Jong Un's explicitly-stated and observable effort to qualitatively and quantitatively "diversify" his country's nuclear arsenal? Which North Korean statements are boiler-plate rhetoric and which reflect policy? This paper will address these questions and the continuities and differences between Kim Jong Il's and Kim Jong Un's efforts to develop a credible nuclear deterrent. The paper will examine North Korean statements, speeches, and official media commentary in the context of its contemporary actions to decipher Kim Jong Un's goals and "playbook" in developing and testing nuclear weapons and ballistic missiles, making nuclear threats, and issuing doctrinal statements related to the use of nuclear weapons. It will outline discernible organizational and ideological policy currents that may be observed, if any, in Kim Jong Un's nuclear weapons policies and statements. It will discuss the meaning for Kim Jong Un of the phrase "U.S. hostile policy" and whether this meaning has shifted since Kim Jong Il died. Finally, it will explore the relevance of this study for military planners and diplomats.

Background: The Three Kims and North Korea's Nuclear Development

The North Korean nuclear program has deep roots in the Kim family. Kim Il Sung first sought Soviet nuclear assistance in the 1950s,[2] obtained an IRT-2000 research reactor from the Soviets that began operations in 1965,[3] sought to diversify nuclear suppliers with requests for Chinese and Eastern European assistance in the 1960s and 1970s,[4] and rebuffed Moscow's pressure to join the 1968 Nuclear Non-proliferation Treaty pledging to forego nuclear weapons until 1985. Western and communist states alike were suspicious of Kim Il Sung's nuclear motives, but declassified documents show that even the CIA articulated until the late 1980s North Korea's nuclear program as primarily a civilian energy program that left the door open to future weaponization.[5] However, in 1989 overhead imagery intelligence of Yongbyon raised concerns about nuclear weapons capabilities, triggered a series of diplomatic meetings, and contributed to increasing pressure on the DPRK to allow IAEA inspections.[6] Until the last few years of his life, Kim Il Sung's nuclear program was marked by basic uncertainty about its intention and its technical ability to detonate a first generation nuclear device.

By the time of the first nuclear crisis in 1992-1994, Kim Il Sung told a western journalist that Kim Jong Il was running the country.[7] Kim Il Sung was ailing and died in the midst of the crisis, but Kim Jong Il was effectively running the government during the first nuclear crisis. The IAEA found discrepancies in North Korea's long-delayed report to the UN nuclear watchdog in 1992 and demanded a special inspection in February 1993. North Korea refused full compliance with the agency's inspection demand and announced in March 1993 its intention to withdraw from the NPT.

It removed in 1994 from its 5MW reactor at Yongbyon spent fuel rods that could be reprocessed for nuclear weapons.[8] Kim Jong Il showed an unambiguous intention to weaponize the nuclear program although his technical ability to create a functioning nuclear weapon remained uncertain.

Given an uncertain nuclear weapon capability, credible threat of war on the peninsula with the United States, and a package of energy and economic incentives offered by an international consortium, Kim Jong Il's government accepted in 1994 limits on his pursuit of nuclear weapons -- a nuclear freeze. Although the Agreed Framework faced difficulties in implementation, including Pyongyang's early efforts towards a uranium enrichment path to the bomb, it verifiably froze North Korea's only established route to nuclear weapons for eight years. Given trade-offs, Kim Jong Il showed his nuclear quest could be moderated -- at least for a time. As diplomatic efforts floundered, Kim Jong Il advanced his nuclear weapons program to reduce uncertainty about his country's technical ability to make a nuclear weapon.[9] His first nuclear test in 2006 produced a low yield that did not demonstrate a clear ability to detonate a functioning nuclear device, but the higher yield second nuclear test in 2009 removed this ambiguity.[10] Before his death in December 2011, Kim Jong Il would bequeath to his son a limited but functioning first generation nuclear device.[11]

Kim Jong Un inherited a first generation nuclear device without uncertainty about its purpose and technical capability, and he accelerated the pace of nuclear and missile testing. In four years starting in 2013, Kim Jong Un has conducted four nuclear tests (2013, January 2016, September 2016, 2017) and over 80 ballistic missile launches.[12]

He has not engaged in sustained diplomatic efforts that would test his possible willingness to freeze or dismantle this program over a prolonged period of time like his father did. His regime has continued to produce fissile material for the quantitative expansion of the country's nuclear arsenal, tested higher-yield nuclear weapons that the regime claims are thermo-nuclear, and made progress towards longer-range and more precise missiles that can deliver such weapons.

Kim Jong Un did not have the same decision calculus as his father or grandfather to moderate his development of nuclear weapons. Kim Jong Un's nuclear weapons capability was not an aspirational capability as it was under his father, rather it was a tested one.[13] Kim Jong Un appeared uninterested in trading away his tested nuclear program at the price offered during the Six Party Talks when North Korea's nuclear program had not yet demonstrated the same level of functionality. Without an active diplomatic process to freeze or reverse his nuclear program, Kim Jong Un moved forward with developing a more sophisticated nuclear deterrent.

Table 1: North Korea's Nuclear Weapons Intentions and Capabilities by Leader

Leader	Nuclear Weapons Intentions	Nuclear Weapons Capabilities
Kim Il Sung	Opaque. Nuclear Energy With Futures Weapons Applications	Untested
Kim Jong Il	Clear. Weapons Pursuit.	Untested[13]
Kim Jong Un	Clear. Weapons Pursuit.	Tested

Kim Jong Un's Nuclear Weapons: Goals and Methods

Kim Jong Un inherited a tested nuclear device. In theory, he could reverse, sustain, or advance the program. *Reversing* North Korea's nuclear program in a "grand bargain" could generate substantial economic benefits and alternative security arrangements at the expense of a technical means to provide for the country's security. *Sustaining* the program with a capped number of nuclear

weapons might entice foreign partners to offer more modest security or economic rewards – or forego additional punishments – without completely abandoning a basic nuclear deterrent. *Advancing* the nuclear program would double down on the world's most powerful weapons for regime security. Kim Jong Un to date has chosen the third option to advance his regime's nuclear weapons capability.

The advancement of North Korea's nuclear weapons capability raises a number of questions. Why has the regime gone beyond a basic ability to impose unacceptable costs on its adversaries with a first generation nuclear device and singular means of delivery to provide a nuclear deterrent to pursuing thermonuclear devices and an array of missiles? Does the Kim Jong Un regime have additional goals in addition to existential deterrence, such as providing an insurance policy against retaliation for a more aggressive military approach to peninsular or regional objectives? What can we say about North Korea's budding nuclear weapons doctrine?

Even in open democracies, the strategic intentions of leaders in their employment of nuclear weapons is a closely guarded secret. North Korea's penchant for secrecy in many areas makes researching this question further challenging. Kim Jong Un has not met any foreign heads of government and interactions with Westerns has been especially limited. We cannot interview Kim Jong Un or even North Korean officials with credible access to the leader on these most sensitive questions. This is limiting, but it does not preclude the possibility of serious inquiry on these important questions.

Close consideration of what North Korea does *and* what it says in tandem is important. Some urge a focus on what North Korea does, not what it says. This is half right. Critical analysis always requires taking foreign leaders' comments with a grain of salt, deciphering motives and varying audiences, and drawing conclusions. Systematic review of North Korean public comments and instructions to North Korean policy practitioners, read critically and in context, can narrow our uncertainty about Kim Jong Un's intentions, goals, and tactics. Kim Jong Un's strategic speeches and specific on-the-spot guidance that continually refers to those speeches is binding and guides North Korean practitioners directly engaged on the country's nuclear and missile programs to implement policy according to his directive. It is in effect a government decree, and consistently repeated decrees from the country's top leader should be understood as the regime's policy. Especially when there is a strong correlation between the regime's stated strategy and observed actions, we can take reasonable confidence that this is Kim Jong Un's approach.

This article seeks to leverage this publicly available primary source information, but it is far from the last word. Context analysis is an art, not a science, and it can naturally lead to different conclusions. When combined with insights from official government contacts, Track II discussions, intelligence information, and other sources, "reading Kim Jong Un's lips" can add to a multi-dimensional understanding of his nuclear intentions.

Silencing Inter-institutional Debate and Pursuing Nuclear Weapons

In the first four years of his reign, Kim Jong Un urged unity of thought on the regime's approach to nuclear weapons. With a vague goal of advancing nuclear weapons development combined with the established technical means to do so, Kim Jong Un seemed not to entertain internal arguments voiced and adopted at times by his father to moderate the regime's quest for nuclear weapons. Under his father's leadership, one could see various views on approach articulated by different North Korean political institutions and media outlets.[14] But this internal debate had vanished under Kim Jong Un as the new leader seemed to put together his own nuclear playbook. He did not allow distinct views to be expressed publicly nor would he oscillate between competing objectives around the North's nuclear program. Although it would only become clear with the luxury of time to

note a pattern, Kim Jong Un would come to articulate a more sophisticated nuclear doctrine based on diversifying in quantity and quality the regime's nuclear forces and tangibly advance those stated goals.

In December 2011, North Korean media commentary and speeches from all quarters rallied around the new leader after the announcement of his father's death. Kim Jong Il died, the party commentary claimed, due to overexertion in his duties to enhance the principles of the DPRK, including pursuing unification and resisting the U.S. imperialists and their South Korean "puppets" while working to improve the lives of its inhabitants through socialism. Kim Jong Un would be among the bloodline of those "heaven-sent great men of Paektu" to continue the cause. The North Korean people must "unite around the great Comrade Kim Jong Un and loyally uphold his leadership."[15] A series of party commentaries would repeat the same themes, and the Cabinet's staple, *Minju Joson*, as well as the Party daily, *Rodong Shinmun*, would criticize South Korea and the United States, respectively, for suggesting increased political uncertainty in the North amid the succession.[16] Cabinet and Party editorials along with a Foreign Ministry statement objected to the U.S.-ROK joint military exercises and the Chief of the Korean People's Army General Staff would continue to note the importance of "the bloodline of Paektu."[17] The DPRK closed ranks.

On February 29, 2012, the DPRK Foreign Ministry Spokesman announced that the DPRK had reached a deal with the United States that reaffirmed the commitments in the September 19, 2005 Joint Statement of the Six Party Talks and recognized the armistice — diplomatic code for committing in principle to reactivate the denuclearization process and refrain from provocations against South Korea in exchange for improving U.S.-DPRK relations, cultural exchanges, nutritional assistance, and assurances that sanctions and Light Water Reactors would be topics for discussion in the future. The DPRK's publication noted that the DPRK "agreed to a moratorium on nuclear tests, long-range missile launches, and uranium enrichment activity at Yongbyon and allow the IAEA to monitor the moratorium on uranium enrichment while productive dialogues continue."[18] At least on paper, the two sides had reached the first concrete agreement on a way forward on the nuclear issue in five years. Kim Jong Un had been in power formally for only three months and seemingly showed a willingness to move forward with even controversial aspects of his father's policy that were in process before Kim Jong Il's death.

Yet the Leap Day Deal would not show Kim Jong Un committed to reversing his country's nuclear program in exchange for security, political, and economic benefits. Despite warnings that any launch would violate the negotiated deal, the DPRK Foreign Ministry noted its interpretation that the February 29 "Leap Day Deal" applied only to missile launches and not rockets configured as satellites. It said North Korea had a sovereign right to explore space, necessary for scientific advancement and national economic gains, and even noting that the DPRK invited foreign press and officials of the U.S. civilian space agency, NASA, to observe the launch.[19] The Leap Day Deal would fall apart in record time.[20] Despite the significance of the shift in the DPRK approach to these issues, there was no observable, public debate within the regime on policy options.

The DPRK attempted to launch the rocket on April 13 — two days before the much-anticipated celebration of the 100th anniversary of Kim Il Sung's birth. The DPRK acknowledged that the launch failed, and the UN Security Council condemned the launch as a violation of previous UN Security Council Resolutions prohibiting the DPRK from engaging in launches that involve ballistic missile technology. The DPRK Foreign Ministry criticized the United States' "overreaction" to the DPRK's "satellite" launch and responded to subsequent criticisms of the DPRK's launch in various fora, while the Party daily moved on to focus on the important celebrations marking the 100th anniversary of Kim Il Sung's birth and regular promulgations against American and South Korean actions and statements.[21] No institution within the regime sought to defend or prop up the Leap

Day Deal publicly. Within months, the DPRK inscribed in its constitution its self-proclaimed status as a nuclear state.[22]

When the U.S., South Korean, and Japanese defense officials met at the Shangri-la Dialogue in Singapore and criticized North Korea's April missile launch,[23] the Party daily took up the mantle to defend the decision.[24] As the matter moved more publicly away from diplomatic channels and towards defense responses, particularly augmentation of U.S. naval and missile defense assets in Northeast Asia, the Party daily began to enhance North Korea's public messaging against the U.S-ROK "arms build-up."[25] Though a limited data point, the move suggested perhaps a new type of division of labor between the institutions. The Foreign Ministry could handle these diplomatic statements, new sanctions, and the DPRK's pro-forma responses, but the Party would get engaged when it turned to substantial new security moves that involved the United States in particular. But a new institutional division of labor was not in the making.

Major mouthpieces of the regime in the first year of the Kim Jong Un government neither articulated coherent policy platforms nor seemed fully informed on the pending decisions from the top. In mid-July 2012, *Rodong Shinmun* published that South Korea was "boisterously circulat[ing…] absurd claims" about a pending North Korean nuclear test.[26] Four days later, the Foreign Ministry announced the DPRK would "totally reexamine the nuclear issue" given increased concerns about the U.S. "hostile policy" in the wake of an alleged infiltrator demolishing statues in the country and harming the leader's dignity.[27] Three days later the Party daily caught up, referring to foreign allegations of a possible nuclear test and noting the U.S. hostile policy would prompt the regime to "strengthen our self-defensive nuclear deterrent."[28]

North Korea's major mouthpieces returned to safe ground for the next six months. The Foreign Ministry and the Cabinet's daily, *Minju Joson,* criticized diplomatic remarks in Seoul by the U.S. Special Representative for North Korea policy, who reiterated standard U.S. positions that the DPRK should implement its obligations under the September 19 joint statement.[29] The Party daily stayed quiet on the nuclear issue as it shifted to welcoming inter-Korean cooperation ahead of the South Korean presidential election.[30]

On December 12, 2012, the DPRK launched another rocket with the Party, Cabinet, and Foreign Ministry each separately claiming success.[31] Foreign sources widely confirmed the DPRK's claim that the satellite launch had successfully reached orbit, followed by another UN Security Council Resolution and new sanctions.[32] The DPRK Foreign Ministry again took the lead condemning the UN denunciation and threatening "physical countermeasures at our discretion to expand and strengthen the self-defensive military power, including nuclear deterrent, both qualitatively and quantitatively."[33] The National Defense Commission and Party daily followed, reiterating the nuclear test threat more explicitly, and the Cabinet daily warned about the impact on the inter-Korean agenda.[34] North Korea's main institutions remained united.

Politburo member Kim Ki Nam followed with a speech noting the Party's importance to upholding the general principles of the DPRK under the leadership of the Kims, prioritization of defense, economic self-reliance, and scientific advancement "as a dignified nuclear state and a legitimate space power." Consistent with the broad themes in the speech, Kim Ki Nam cited Kim Jong Un as saying, "Only when the party cells, which are the basic organization of the party, are reinforced and their role is enhanced is it possible to unite extensive circles of the masses around the party, reinforce the party's militant might in every way, and thus turn our country into a politically and ideologically powerful state, a militarily powerful state, and an economically powerful state."[35] The Party's role in DPRK politics, Kim Jong Un instructed, is the traditional role of providing strategic instruction in all fields, including the economy, under the leader's guidance to achieve the general, ideologically-defined goals of the regime. The Korean Worker's Party under Kim Jong Un would

start to look and act more like the Party under Kim Il Sung.

The Foreign Ministry again broke the news that the DPRK formally acknowledged its third nuclear test on February 12, 2013, which seismic data from national governments and the Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty Organization confirmed.[36] The DPRK again was unapologetic but still sought to justify its move as within the international norm and criticize the United States for leading an international effort to portray the nuclear test as dangerous. The Foreign Ministry voiced the DPRK's threat to conduct "more intense second and third responses," again articulating a hardline position.[37] The Party daily upped the rhetorical ante, threatening the United States directly: "The various satellites and long-range rockets to be launched in the future, and the nuclear test of high level we will conduct, will target the United States, the sworn enemy of our people."[38] The Party and Cabinet dailies published poems threatening "the destruction of the U.S. imperialists with the nuclear explosion of justice."[39] The DPRK could "turn not just Seoul, but even Washington, into a sea of fire" through a "precision nuclear strike," the Party daily claimed.[40]

The North Korean defense establishment announced the DPRK would scrap unilaterally the 1953 armistice agreement: "the KPA Supreme Command will completely and totally nullify the enforcement of the Korean Armistice Agreement that has existed at least for form's sake.

Without being held back by the Armistice Agreement, we will carry out precision strikes on any targets at any time without limit and at will and will thereby hasten the completion of the great cause of the fatherland's reunification."[41] The DPRK had entered a more confrontational phase, and there were no consistent and outward signs of internal voices counseling restraint or evidence of inter-institutional debate.

Kim Jong Un also reduced the role of North Korea's military in national politics. His speech in August 2013 laid out a new interpretation of "military first politics" that did not include the military's enhanced political roles that it enjoyed under his father. Kim Jong Un referred to the military first ideology as originating with Kim Il Sung, emphasizing a narrower interpretation of the idea as prioritizing resources for the military. But "the army of the leader [must be] boundlessly faithful to the cause of the WPK (Workers' Party of Korea)." Kim acknowledged that his father modified this conception of military-first by establishing the NDC as a "new state administrative structure," but Kim did not indicate he would rule primarily through this institution or afford the military the type of political role it enjoyed under his father.

The KPA, Kim Jong Un continued, "with importance being attached to military affairs and primary efforts directed to building up the army" should focus its energies on its particular sphere rather than have a hand in all national decisions and their implementation. The 1990s was a particular time of crisis for North Korea, Kim Jong Un explained, and his father would adapt the ruling ideology to focus more on the military as an institution to get through that particularly difficult time. But the foundation of the regime had been restored, suggesting these special measures would no longer be necessary: "The officers and men of the KPA should burn their hearts with a single idea, a single determination, to support only the Party and the leader."[42] The speech marked a subtle but steady effort to reduce the military's roles in national policy that would culminate three years later in the abolition of the National Defense Commission.[43]

Kim Jong Un's speech did not come out of the blue. Senior military leaders had already been refocusing more exclusively on military affairs in public comments. For example, a month before Kim's speech, Korean People's Army General Political Department Director Choe Ryong Hae delivered a speech focused exclusively on military affairs,[44] providing additional data points suggesting that the prior Cabinet and military roles in high-level political affairs had been receding.

However, exceptions remained that showed the military taking on new roles on particular policy issues, most notably the NDC's newfound role dealing with South Korea on inter-Korean affairs and even making new diplomatic offers to the United States. As inter-Korean conflict over the Kaesong Industrial Complex (KIC) came to a head, the NDC was the institution that issued a statement threatening to close the complex. The Cabinet Premier toured coal, iron, and energy facilities as its mouthpiece reiterated finger pointing at the ROK for any closure of the KIC.[45] The Party daily entered the fray only to reiterate what the NDC had already articulated.[46]

Short-lived Diplomatic Interludes on the Nuclear Issue under Kim Jong Un

Despite Kim Jong Un's emphasis on unity and pursuing nuclear weapons, his regime has offered to engage in talks with the United States.[47] This cannot be sourced to a particular institution within the DPRK as the regime retained its outward unity. However, these offers do undermine any thesis that Kim Jong Un is unswervingly loyal to nuclear advances without consideration of competing objectives. Empirical reality is more complex than neat theories allow, and Kim's words and deeds provided mixed messages.

In a March 31, 2013 speech before the Party's Central Committee Plenum, Kim Jong Un re-introduced the concept of *byungjin*, defining it as "a new strategic line on carrying out economic construction and building nuclear armed forces simultaneously… [expanding upon the] original [*byungjin*] line of simultaneously developing economy and national defense." Kim noted *byungjin* is permanent and not intended as a political bargaining chip. The "nuclear shield" is for self-defense, and "the nuclear armed forces should be expanded and beefed up qualitatively and quantitatively until the denuclearization of the world is realized." He instructed the KPA to integrate nuclear weapons into its "war strategy" and "combat posture."[48] Two days later, a spokesman for the DPRK's General Department of Atomic Energy, citing Kim's speech, announced that it would restart both the uranium enrichment and 5MW reactor at Yongbyon.[49] The regime inscribed the guidance in the 2013 Nuclear Weapons State Law.[50]

Yet in June, the NDC urged "senior level talks" between the DPRK and the United States and noted, "The denuclearization of the Korean Peninsula was behests of President Kim Il Sung and leader Kim Jong Il and a policy task which the party, state, army and people of the DPRK have to carry out without fail."[51] The NDC repeated a similar diplomatic offer publicly to the United States in October 2013.[52] The DPRK relaxed its super-inflated rhetoric on the United States, but unclassified satellite data showed in September that amid the offers to negotiate that the DPRK had restarted its 5MW reactor at Yongbyon, which had been disabled for six years.[53] Ultimately, these offers did not materialize into sustained negotiations that could test Kim Jong Un's seriousness about denuclearization.

In 2014, the DPRK launched new name-calling against foreign leaders, including sexist and racist slurs, but did not return to the rhetoric focused on nuclear strikes found the previous spring. The DPRK did not conduct additional nuclear tests in 2014 and moderated some of its rhetoric. Though outliers are notable,[54] the DPRK settled into a more comfortable rhythm of expanding its fissile material production and advancing its nuclear and ballistic missile technology through less explicitly provocative means such as shorter-range missile launches. The DPRK returned to boiler-plate rhetoric and criticized the United States' "strategic patience" approach as allowing that the DPRK's "nuclear deterrent will only become more elite" and urged the U.S. to change its approach to the nuclear issue.[55] The U.S. Director of National Intelligence visited Pyongyang to secure the release of two American citizens in November 2014, and North Korean officials would later note their disappointment that this did not provide a diplomatic opening.[56] There was no public DPRK debate on approaches to dealing with the Americans or the nuclear issue as they continued to develop their nuclear capability.

In December 2014, U.S. authorities noted that the DPRK conducted a cyberattack on Sony Pictures. North Korea seemed to want to pressure the studio to not release a comedy that took aim at Kim Jong Un and insulted the dignity of their leader in their view. The United States responded with new sanctions and a counter-cyberattack against the DPRK.[57] While the incident exemplified a worrying trend of new security challenges, it did not appear to be related directly to the long-standing issues in the U.S.-DPRK relationship.

Indeed, in the same month that the United States imposed new sanctions on the DPRK for the Sony hack, the DPRK offered a moratorium on nuclear tests for a discontinuation of joint military exercises.[58] The United States rejected the DPRK offer; the DPRK Foreign Ministry concluded, "The Obama Administration will have to disappear from the arena" before Pyongyang found an interlocutor in Washington it judged it could work with.[59] Kim Jong Un injected new uncertainty on whether he was simply unwilling to negotiate on limiting his nuclear weapons program or the two sides simply had far different expectations about the nature of a possible deal.

Later that month, President Obama discussed in a YouTube interview the limited policy options against North Korea, including recognition of the marginal impact of new sanctions. He noted the value of more information in the Internet age reaching North Korea to produce change and that "over time" regimes like North Korea collapse.[60] The party rejected new sanctions as another indication of America's hostility towards it but neither the presidential assessment nor the hack response prompted a substantial DPRK move.[61] Neither side seemed ready to narrow the wide gap on diplomatic expectations.

Return to Nuclear and Long-range Missile Testing

By September 2015, the DPRK appeared poised to revert to more explicitly public and provocative behavior. North Korean technocrats, including the Director of its Atomic Energy Institute and representatives of its National Aerospace Development Administration, noted publicly that the DPRK had restarted in plutonium and uranium enrichment facilities at Yongbyon and cited the merits of sovereign outer space activities.[62] The pronouncements raised the near-term specter of more visible DPRK nuclear and missile flight tests but did not expose any internal debate within the regime motivating one policy approach over another.

DPRK nuclear suggestions paused as the nation celebrated the 70th anniversary of the Korean Workers Party with great fanfare, including welcoming a senior delegation from China.[63] The regime held family reunions with South Korea in October 2015 and Kim Jong Un mentioned in his 2016 New Year's Day address that he sought to focus on improving the economy and inter-Korean relations while not focusing on the nuclear program substantially in the speech.[64] That address would prove a stunningly inaccurate signal as the DPRK would conduct its fourth nuclear test in just days.

North Korea conducted its fourth nuclear test on January 7, 2016, and party newspaper published on the front page the next morning a picture of Kim Jong Un personally signing the order for the hydrogen bomb test.[65] The DPRK also held an "army-people joint meeting," including speeches by the top representatives of the party, military, and cabinet institutions to herald the nuclear test.[66] Senior representatives for all three institutions would accompany Kim Jong Un to congratulate North Korea's nuclear scientists and attend a ballistic missile launch drill in separate events two months later.[67]

In mid-January 2016, the DPRK Foreign Ministry reiterated the country's offer to suspend nuclear tests for a suspension of U.S.-ROK joint military exercises and noted its continued desire to negotiate a peace treaty with the United States ending the Korean War.[68] It is unclear if the offer

was an opening salvo, a tactical effort to water down UN Security Council sanctions under consideration, or both. The proposal did not gain traction, and the Foreign Ministry made no outward signs of pushing the agenda within the regime.

The DPRK moved towards its next long-range missile test in February. Kim Jong Un would again publicize his photo personally signing the order to launch.[69] The UN Security Council and national governments imposed new sanctions as the DPRK showed no signs of internal dissent. The DPRK Foreign Minister and National Defense Council jointly rejected the latest UN response, UN Security Council Resolution 2270, and refocused criticism on the U.S.-ROK joint military drills and heightened criticism of the South Korean president.[70] The DPRK continued with additional ballistic missile launches with corresponding criticisms from the UN Security Council and unilateral sanctions and missile defense augmentation by surrounding governments.[71]

North Korea's Nuclear Doctrine and The Seventh Party Congress

The Korean Workers Party held its Seventh Congress in May 2016 – the first in 36 years. While the Sixth Congress in 1980 officially debuted Kim Jong Il as his father's successor, the Seventh Congress would come after Kim Jong assumed his new roles. Nevertheless, it showed Kim Jong Un's desire to resurrect party institutions that his grandfather used and his father sidelined. During and following the Congress, North Korea's institutions publicly spoke with one voice. Kim Jong Un's opened the Congress noting the importance of "single-hearted unity of the Korean Workers Party, the army and the people around the leader," blamed the "imperialists'" hostile policy and sanctions for economic woes, heralded the most recent nuclear test and rocket launches, and focused on increasing domestic production for economic growth.[72] He closed the Congress with a more ideological speech, stressing the centrality of "establishing the monolithic leadership system of the party" under his guidance.[73] Kim did not assign specific responsibility for issue sets to individual institutions, rather articulated the importance of the guiding role of the Korean Workers Party under his leadership – a goal this study shows he has attempted to resurrect since his assumption of power after his father's death.

Though not a centerpiece of wide-ranging Party Congress, Kim Jong Un's comments provided the best single sketch available for the regime's nuclear doctrine. North Korean leaders, including Kim, would continually reference his Party Congress speech following significant missile and nuclear tests in subsequent years as implementing actions for that vision. Summarizing the work of the Party Central Committee at the Congress, Kim Jong Un said, "As long as nuclear threats and the tyranny of imperialism continue, we will permanently adhere to the strategic line of simultaneously pushing forward economic construction and the building of nuclear armed forces. As long as the aggressive hostile forces do not infringe upon our sovereignty with nuclear [weapons], our Republic, as a responsible nuclear state, will not use a nuclear weapon first, as already elucidated; will faithfully carry out the obligation, assumed before the international community, to prevent nuclear proliferation; and make effort to achieve the denuclearization of the world."[74]

Kim Jong Un seemed to adopt a "no first use" doctrine of sorts, which would be later refined and clarified. He articulated a nuclear doctrine that included securing an existential nuclear deterrent and engaging in global nuclear arms control efforts as a nuclear weapons state. Results of the Party Congress provided additional detail on the goals and methods of North Korea's nuclear pursuit. The Congress stressed the regime's nuclear weapons were intended to safeguard the country's sovereignty, independence from imperialism, and removal of foreign bases from other countries.[75] Interestingly, the party decided not to specify "imperialist" threats to the DPRK alone or the removal of U.S. troops from South Korea, but couched its ambitions in much more grandiose and global terms.[76]

More specifically, the Party concluded, “Let us turn our country into a matchless nuclear power by bolstering up the Juche-based nuclear force in quality and quantity to mercilessly stamp out the enemies challenging us, whether they are in the sky or underground or on the sea.”[77] In subsequent years, the DPRK would indeed pursue a variety of land- and sea-based missile programs simultaneously as well as advance efforts to develop higher yield nuclear weapons and consistently cite these actions as working towards the nuclear doctrine articulated at the Party Congress.

At North Korea’s National Defense University a month after the Congress, Kim Jong Un provided on-the-spot guidance that reiterated his goals for North Korea’s nuclear program. He went beyond existential deterrence as the singular purpose of the North’s nuclear program, indicating the nuclear program was also tied to the regime’s power and prestige as a regional power. “The respected and beloved Comrade Kim Jong Un said that the basic duty of the National Defense University is to more excellently train greater numbers of future leaders who further consolidate and glorify the status of military-first [North] Korea as a great nuclear power and the most powerful military state of the East.”[78]

The call to create the most powerful military in the region could be dismissed if a single data point, but Kim Jong Un made it a theme. Celebrating the launch of a ballistic missile and giving binding on-the-spot guidance to the regime’s rocket scientists, Kim urged continued diversification in the regime’s nuclear and missile forces without a clear end in sight. “Kim Jong Un said that the preemptive nuclear strike capabilities should be constantly expanded and augmented, and a variety of strategic attack weapons should be continuously researched and developed [to create] a militarily powerful country that is equipped with the most powerful nuclear deterrent and is the most invincible under heaven.”[79] North Korea’s Foreign Ministry spokesman likewise responded to UN criticism of the North Korean missile launch by noting the pursuit of diversified missile capabilities. “As long as the U.S. persists in its hostile policy toward the DPRK, the latter will further bolster its nuclear deterrence for self-defense in quality and quantity and will continue to exercise its legitimate right to develop space for peaceful purposes no matter what others may say.”[80]

The DPRK noting nuclear “preemption” as part of its doctrine appeared to contradict Kim Jong Un’s promise not to use nuclear weapons first. Kim Jong Un had previously stated this no first use pledge would apply *if* the United States did not infringe on North Korea’s sovereignty with nuclear weapons. Kim could broadly interpret (or ignore) the required condition of a violation of its sovereignty for the no-first use pledge, limiting the meaning of the statement. Indeed, Kim noted that he ordered a ballistic missile drill to practice preemptive attacks: “The drill was conducted by limiting the firing range under the simulated conditions of making preemptive strikes at ports and airfields in the operational theater in south Korea where the U.S. imperialists nuclear war hardware is to be hurled” and praised “developing diverse type ballistic rockets.”[81]

Kim Jong Un also lauded the importance of nuclear technology to the DPRK’s position on the global stage. Following the test launch of a Submarine Launched Ballistic Missile, he noted operational specifics and wider implications: “we have joined in a dignified manner the ranks of the military powers that perfectly possess nuclear attack capabilities… no matter how hard the United States may deny it, the US mainland and the Pacific operational theater are now definitely in our hands…. [which will] uphold in practice our party's plan for the construction of a powerful country of rockets.”[82] Kim Jong Un expressed a sense that joining the ranks of the nuclear weapons states would establish his country as a global power better able to influence a range of security matters. The DPRK conducted its fifth nuclear test days later.[83]

Later that month, speaking at the UN General Assembly and referencing the Seventh Party Congress, North Korean Foreign Minister Ri Yong Ho urged an end to the U.S. “hostile policy.” He called for an end to U.S.-ROK military exercises, conclusion of a peace agreement, and withdrawal of

U.S. forces from Korea that would allow the two Koreas to find a mutual solution to outstanding differences and pursue unification. Absent this, North Korea needed "to take measures to strengthen its national nuclear armed forces in both quantity and quality" to deal with U.S. nuclear threats.[84] By the end of 2016, Kim Jong Un still hit the same theme, telling a conference of party committee chairs that the regime's nuclear and missile efforts were "remarkably increasing the strategic position of the DPRK… the DPRK bolstered up its nuclear force both in quality and quantity by succeeding in developing Korean-style latest strategic weapons."[85]

Kim personally ordered and observed the test launch of a surface-to-surface ballistic missile in February 2017, claiming the North's "nuclear attack means" now extended "to most accurately and most rapidly perform its strategic mission at any place -- underwater or on the land." He couched the technical development in terms of nationalism, highlighting the indigenous nature of the developments, and its role in preserving the DPRK's freedom of movement in foreign affairs: "[This] proves that nothing can frustrate the unswerving faith and revolutionary will of our army and people who accomplish what they decide to do to the end."[86] Given North Korea's revolutionary ambitions and demonstrated willingness to use force especially against South Korea, a self-perception of greater freedom of action in conventional military affairs afforded by its nuclear program is concerning.

Kim Jong Un observed military drills to utilize nuclear weapons against U.S. bases in Japan while repeatedly referring to the DPRK's "retaliatory strike" capability, again suggesting a second-strike warfighting role for North Korea's nuclear arsenal. He provided on-the-spot guidance to "Hwasong artillery units of the KPA Strategic Force tasked to strike the bases of the U.S. imperialist aggressor forces in Japan in a contingency."[87] He later celebrated the regime's "nuclear deterrence" to counter American nuclear blackmail and military intimidation efforts. "The most perfect weapon systems in the world will never become the eternal exclusive property of the U.S.," he said, expressing the belief that "the day when the DPRK uses the similar retaliatory means will come."[88] The party daily the following day further noted that the North would rely on its nuclear arsenal to end confrontation with the United States but not start it.[89]

Diversifying North Korean missile capabilities would be useful in combat and enhance deterrence, Kim argued. Claiming to put U.S. military assets in Alaska and Hawaii in range and aim for deployable nuclear weapons, the party daily described the latest ballistic missile test as "carried out with the objectives to make a final validation of the technical indexes of the overall weapon system of the "Pukku'kso'ng-2" model surface-to-surface medium long-range strategic ballistic missile, sufficiently examine the adaptability in different combat environments, and deploy the missiles to military units for actual warfare…. The supreme leader reemphasized that we have to more expeditiously make our nuclear armed forces diverse… to strongly consolidate the country's self-defensive national defense capabilities and nuclear deterrent."[90] Kim Jong Un would similarly instruct the development of precision ballistic missiles with quick launch for use in warfare[91] and development of forces for use in a contingency, not a first strike.[92] The binding nature of this guidance provided directly to missile and security practitioners suggests it reflects the regime's nuclear doctrine.

Contrary to early test flights developing a capability to range U.S. forces in the region, Kim said the Intercontinental Ballistic Missile launch on July 4, 2017 targeted the U.S. mainland with nuclear-tipped missiles. He claimed his country had achieved a nuclear deterrent, would not negotiate it away, and would further bolster its nuclear force unless the U.S. changed its "hostile policy." The DPRK would "neither put its nukes and ballistic rockets on the table of negotiations in any case nor flinch even an inch from the road of bolstering the nuclear force chosen by itself unless the U.S. hostile policy and nuclear threat to the DPRK are definitely terminated.[93] The ICBM launch had

"fundamentally changed the strategic position of our Republic and the structure of global politics" and advanced the guiding nuclear goals set forth at the Seventh Party Congress.[94] In a congratulatory banquet for the North's rocket scientists, Kim again ordered the continued qualitative and quantitative "bolstering" of its strategic weapon systems.[95]

The war of words between the United States and North Korea escalated.[96] In August 2017, the U.S. President warned North Korea that continued threats would be met with "fire and fury" and a North Korean military spokesman responded by threatening that Kim Jong Un could review options of "encircling fire around Guam."[97]

On September 2, 2017, *Rodong Shinmun* explained that thermonuclear weapons would give the DPRK a capability for high-altitude Electro-magnetic Pulse (EMP) attacks. It appealed to nationalism, stressing the indigenous development of these weapons, but did not clearly articulate the purpose of an EMP capability.[98] Citing the Seventh Congress goal of "completing the state nuclear force," Kim Jong Un the following day signed an order to conduct a hydrogen bomb test.[99] Pursuit of EMP and hydrogen bombs were part of the Seventh Party Congress goal of diversifying the regime's nuclear forces. The UN Security Council imposed more sanctions.[100]

North Korea fired a missile over Japan, noting its strategic aim focused on the United States. In on-the-spot guidance, Kim again called for deployed nuclear weapons that can be used in war: "all drills should become meaningful and practical ones for increasing combat power of the nuclear force like the current drill in the future, and the order to deal with nuclear warheads should be strictly established suited to their deployment for actual war." In his view, a nuclear warfighting capability makes the DPRK a nuclear peer of the United States and aids deterrence: "our final goal is to establish the equilibrium of real force with the U.S. and make the U.S. rulers dare not talk about military option for the DPRK."[101]

The U.S. and North Korean leaders traded personal barbs in late September, and the North Korean Foreign Minister raised the possibility of an atmospheric nuclear test over the Pacific Ocean.[102] In mid-November, three American aircraft carrier strike groups, augmented by South Korean and Japanese forces, conducted the first drill of its kind in a decade,[103] and the United States re-designated North Korea a state sponsor of terrorism and promised new sanctions.[104] North Korea launched an ICBM on November 28 that it said could strike anywhere in the United States and presented as an effort to defend the peace. The statement also noted the launch advanced Kim Jong Un's "line on the simultaneous development of the two fronts," referring to the *byungjin* policy of economic and nuclear development.[105]

North Korean Demands: Ending U.S. "Hostile Policy"

For decades, the DPRK has called for an end to what it terms Washington's "hostile policy." It has usually remained vague and articulated as part of the regime's blaming the United States for its economic woes or need to mobilize North Korea society for defense. Countering the U.S. "hostile policy" is part of the DPRK's *raison d'etre*. The DPRK is standing up to the imperialists and protecting the Korean nation and its independence, they claim. Yet the DPRK has defined in specific terms what it means by the "U.S. hostile policy" during the Kim Jong Un reign, and reviewing even this static description of an evolving concept can help us understand North Korea's comprehensive goals vis-à-vis the United States as they articulate them.

In a lengthy Foreign Ministry memorandum in 2012, the DPRK describe the U.S. "hostile policy" as the "root cause" of tensions on the Korean Peninsula that stimulated North Korea to pursue nuclear weapons "and therefore, only when the U.S. abandons its hostile policy, will it be possible to resolve the issue." The DPRK Foreign Ministry documented examples from the last two decades of U.S.-

DPRK interactions to specify its meaning. The U.S. taking issue with North Korea's satellite launches given dual-use missile concerns while ignoring other countries' space exploration efforts, breakdown of the 1994 Agreed Framework and inclusion of the DPRK in the "Axis of Evil" speech, failure to deliver on the Six Party Talks and provide North Korea a Light Water Reactor (LWR), and sanctions on a uranium enrichment program needed to fuel a LWR all show a hostile American approach to North Korea, it claimed.

The Foreign Ministry continued that the last twenty years represented only the tip of the iceberg. U.S. hostility towards North Korea extends much further into the past before the nuclear issue came to the fore. The United States has refused to recognize the DPRK even as it recognized other socialist bloc states during the Cold War and the UN admitted North Korea as a member state in 1991. The U.S. denied a unified Korean nation by hastily drawing the 38th parallel in service of its Cold War objectives over the interests of the Korean people and threatened nuclear attack on the DPRK almost since its inception.

The two countries remain technically in a state of war since they have not signed a peace treaty, and Four Party Talks aimed at resolving this failed. The continuation of the armistice situation prolongs the stationing of U.S. troops on the Korean Peninsula and allows it to continue to conduct with South Korea "aggressive" military exercises. The United States sanctions the DPRK based on its threat to regional stability, terrorism, human rights, WMD proliferation, and communist and socialist state status. The DPRK Foreign Ministry counted over 40 overlapping sets of sanctions that made piecemeal sanctions relief unappealing to Pyongyang. For example, the United States agreed to remove the DPRK from the Trading with the Enemy Act sanctions that had been imposed for more than a half century but later imposed similar restrictions with a series of Executive Orders that nullified the sanctions relief's effect.

For the DPRK, removing the U.S. "hostile policy" is a far-reaching objective and their only articulated quid-pro-quo to the complete resolution of the nuclear issue. In maximalist form, the DPRK Foreign Ministry suggests that ending the U.S. hostile policy would include comprehensive sanctions relief, a legally binding peace treaty, an end to U.S.-ROK military exercises and U.S. Forces Korea, diplomatic recognition, acceptance of North Korean space activities, and provision of nuclear energy assistance.

However, the DPRK Foreign Ministry noted that it did not expect Washington to heed its demand: "The U.S. hostile policy pursued by the U.S. [*sic*] makes the prospect of denuclearizing the Korean peninsula all the more gloomy. At present stage, there is no possibility of the U.S. giving up its hostile policy towards the DPRK." It concludes that the DPRK did not develop nuclear weapons to trade them away and these weapons remain fundamental to the country's security as long as the perceived American threat remains.[106]

In short, ending the "U.S. hostile policy" is realizing the full corpus of North Korea's strategic goals vis-à-vis the United States. It is a high bar, and the same fundamental demands have transgressed administrations in the DPRK. It is North Korea's version of comprehensive foreign demands of North Korea to denuclearize, ends its ballistic missile programs, reduce tensions with South Korea, and radically improve its human rights and humanitarian situation, including the resolution of the abduction issue. Ending the "U.S. hostile policy" is the ultimate North Korean maximalist demand, rooted in the regime's founding ideology, and, by their own account, unlikely to be achieved.

The maximalist demands from both sides are useful starting points. Foreign analysts do not need to speculate on what North Korea really wants, just as North Korean analysts should be able to piece together the comprehensive demands of the United States and its allies and partners. From those maximalist demands, the two sides can work backwards to craft tangible and reciprocal actions to

address sustainably the other's concerns. The history of diplomatic progress with the DPRK has focused on more discreet and phased objectives to each side's significant demands of the other.

Conclusions

Unlike his father and grandfather, Kim Jong Un began his reign as the top leader in North Korea with an unambiguous and tested first generation nuclear device. He showed early signs of doubling down on the nuclear program as fundamental to national security. Contrary voices publicly articulating the trade-offs associated with varying approaches to the nuclear issue observable during his father's term evaporated under Kim Jong Un. His regime would be unified in word and deed at least publicly as it advanced its nuclear weapons capabilities. Though Kim Jong Un's North Korea oscillated between boisterous nuclear threats and relatively quiet nuclear development that included offers for diplomatic engagement on the nuclear issue, the nuclear program has continued to progress. This is not simply a quantitative growth of North Korea's nuclear arsenal, rather Kim Jong Un has articulate and his regime has pursued a more advanced nuclear deterrent.

Kim Jong Un's speech at the Seventh Party Congress and subsequent clarifications provide the most important contemporary outlines of the regime's nuclear doctrine. North Korea does not seek a simple nuclear deterrent with a first-generation nuclear weapon and single means of delivery that raises the risks to a foreign invader. Rather, Kim has sought the simultaneous development of land- and sea-based ballistic missiles, more precise ballistic missiles, and thermonuclear weapons.

The DPRK's increasingly diverse set of road-mobile and submarine-launched missiles that are difficult to find and preempt as well as Kim's focus on quick launch weapons are consistent with an effort to develop a second-strike capability for nuclear deterrence. Kim has also continued to note the North's nuclear weapons are motivated by and targeted at the United States, including its military bases in the region and in Alaska and Hawaii. While the regime maintains counter-value rhetoric of threatening populations centers such as Seoul and Washington, DC, the move towards more precise ballistic missiles and more powerful nuclear weapons, including a thermonuclear capability that can compensate for imprecise missiles, is consistent with efforts to disrupt military targets that are more hardened and smaller targets than population centers.

In addition to a robust nuclear deterrent, the regime has articulated a lofty goal of utilizing the nuclear program to raise its stature as a peer of the nuclear weapons states. According to Kim, the nuclear program helps preserve North Korea's sovereignty and independence. Kim notes that the nuclear force should not only deter U.S. invasion but also safeguard the regime's freedom of action in the theater. Seoul would have the most to lose in this scenario if Pyongyang believes Washington less willing to respond to North Korean aggression with military retaliation.

Kim Jong Un's achieved and stated future nuclear ambitions have implications for military planners, diplomats, and national policymakers alike. As difficult as the question of U.S. military preemption was during the Kim Jong Il period, it has grown considerably more difficult today. When Kim Jong Il prepared to flight test its Taepo Dong-2 long-range rocket for the first time in 2006, former and future secretaries of defense advocated striking the missile on the launch pad. The advocacy was controversial over the question of North Korea's response rather than confidence in destroying the missile on the launch pad.[107] The challenge for military planners seeking to target North Korea's capabilities have grown considerably as those weapons have become more survivable, and the prospects for successful preventative strikes on North Korea has grown even dimmer.

Nuclear deterrence is robust, and Kim Jong Un's nuclear advances have not changed his ability to be deterred. However, the Korean Peninsula houses two adversarial and heavily armed sides with a history of lethal encounters. Unwanted escalatory spirals are possible, and North Korean

propaganda heralding the merits of nuclear use, even though fanciful, further raises this risk.[108] Military planners have an obligation to plan for unlikely, high impact events and get ahead of the threat curve. This study shows that Kim's nuclear doctrinal statements have forecasted his regime's nuclear advances reasonably well and can provide some insight for military planners looking over the horizon seeking to contain those threats.

Finally, North Korea has noted that only ending the U.S. "hostile policy" could lead to denuclearization. This helps identify the critical actors and maximalist demands that Pyongyang sees as central to the nuclear issue. Neither South Korea, through inter-Korean dialogue, nor China, through economic and diplomatic leverage, have the wherewithal to address the repeatedly-stated North Korean core purpose in going nuclear and sustainably resolve the nuclear issue. North Korea's "hostile policy" demands are expansive, but hearing the demands as they articulate them is a better analytical starting point than speculating from the outside on what they seek.

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Nautilus Institute
608 San Miguel Ave., Berkeley, CA 94707-1535 | Phone: (510) 423-0372 | Email: nautilus@nautilus.org