

МЕЖДУНАРОДНЫЕ СРАВНИТЕЛЬНЫЕ ИССЛЕДОВАНИЯ

UDC 324

**Permanent campaigning as an issue
for foreign policy analysis: A comparison of Nixon-China and
Trump-Korea policies****D. A. Lanko, I. S. Lantsova*St. Petersburg State University,
7–9, Universitetskaya nab., St. Petersburg, 199034, Russian Federation**For citation:** Lanko D. A., Lantsova I. S. Permanent campaigning as an issue for foreign policy analysis: A comparison of Nixon-China and Trump-Korea policies. *Vestnik of Saint Petersburg University. International Relations*, 2018, vol. 11, issue 4, pp. 404–414. <https://doi.org/10.21638/11701/spbu06.2018.406>

The article seeks to extend the limits of applicability of permanent campaigning as a concept helpful in understanding politics in the field of foreign policy analysis. It should start with exploring how applicable the saying “it took Nixon to go to China” is not only to foreign policy analysis, but also to the studies of public and even business administration. In early 1970s Nixon’s reputation of a tough anti-Communist helped him win domestic support to his policy towards Communist China. In a similar manner, in 2017 Trump sought a reputation of a fierce critic of North Korea, by means of publicly threatening the latter with ‘fire and fury’, in order to not only convince North Korea’s Kim to make concessions, but also to gain domestic support to possible change in U.S.-North Korean relations. The Trump-Korea situation differed significantly from the Nixon-China situation, which limited Trump’s ability to win domestic support to possible rapprochement with North Korea by means of permanent campaigning. However, the article argues that the very attempt deserves further exploration of the opportunities and challenges that permanent campaigning poses to the practice of foreign policy, and to foreign policy analysis.

Keywords: foreign policy analysis, permanent campaigning, United States, Richard Nixon, Chinese People’s Republic, Donald Trump, North Korea, South Korea.

As soon as rumours about possible summit meeting of U.S. President Donald Trump and North Korea’s leader Kim Jon Un spread, American mass media rushed into comparing the meeting with the 1972 summit meeting of U.S. President Richard Nixon and People’s Republic of China’s leader Mao Zedong. Few research articles based on the compari-

* Research behind this article was supported by the Core University Programme for Korean Studies through the Ministry of Education of the Republic of Korea and Korean Studies Promotion Service of the Academy of Korean Studies (AKS-2016-OLU-225002).

son were published in 2018 [1], with more articles of the kind expected in the near future. American mass media compared the two summits on the day of the Trump-Kim summit, June 12, 2018 [2]. It did so before and after the summit took place. Such mass media accounts of the Trump-Kim summit sought to compare both international and domestic environments of the two summits. Internationally, some of the mass media accounts attempted to estimate the probability “that North Korea could flip allegiances, just as China did in 1972... when President Richard Nixon visited Beijing that year, [after which] Mao Zedong further distanced China from the Soviet Union in favour of friendship with the United States” [3].

Most of the comparisons focused on the situation inside the U.S., however. The National Interest, for example, concluded that while “Nixon wanted Chinese help exiting a long, difficult war... Trump faced no such... domestic pressure” [4]. Often, comparisons of domestic situations in the U.S. in 1972 and in 2018 employed the adage, “it took Nixon to go to China”. The adage refers to notable phenomenon of U.S. foreign policymaking, when the establishment and the public opinion in the U.S. tends to welcome initiative to cooperate with a rival nation proposed by a hawkish president, while tending to reject a similar initiative proposed by a dovish president. In the words of a Bloomberg’s opinion, “[it] took a committed anti-communist to open relations with Communist China... perhaps it will take a president who threatened ‘fire and fury’ to open ties to the leader he called ‘little rocket man’” [5].

Two major explanations of the Nixon-Goes-To-China phenomenon in U.S. foreign policymaking can be found in literature: one explaining the phenomenon from the establishment viewpoint, while another explaining it from the public opinion viewpoint. Multiple authors, most notably Roberts [6; 7], focused on the role of the establishment in U.S. foreign policymaking during the Cold War, while other authors, for example, Parmar [8; 9], provided with insights into transformation of the establishment after the end of the Cold War. From the establishment viewpoint, “[hawks] can pursue diplomatic compromises because there will be few people who are even more hard-line to attack them for being too soft and they can be confident that their more dovish opponents will give support... [a] classic example [being] President Richard Nixon’s outreach to China” [10].

When a certain decision is supported by a considerable consensus among political elite, the elite can ignore public opinion on the decision [11]. When, however, the establishment fails to arrive at consensual opinion on a foreign policy issue, the role of public opinion in foreign policymaking grows considerably. In 2016 Donald Trump’s voters elected him President on an anti-establishment ticket; thus, public opinion is expected to play a higher role in foreign policymaking under Trump administration than at average in American foreign policy. At the same time, what is true in relation to foreign policy establishment is also true in relation to public opinion: “voters are more supportive when a hawkish leader tries to reconcile with an enemy than when a dove extends the olive branch” [12].

During his press conference in Singapore in the immediate aftermath of the summit with Kim, Trump said that “at that time, we needed, perhaps, fire and fury” [13], referring to the tough rhetoric targeting North Korea that he had used prior to the announcement of the upcoming U.S.-North Korean summit. Trump perceived the tough rhetoric an important factor of success of the summit. On one hand, tough rhetoric was needed to con-

vince Kim to make as many concessions during the summit as possible. On other hand, the tough rhetoric was needed to convince American public that the new foreign policy towards North Korea of Trump administration is in no way a concession. The aim of this article is to demonstrate how President Trump attempted to convince American public in that he had been tough on North Korea in order to gain the public's support to the compromise that he would find with North Korea at the Singapore summit in the situation, when the establishment viewed all his foreign policy initiatives with suspicion.

Nixon-Goes-To-China: The Story Behind the Adage

Nixon administration marked not only a change in U.S.-Chinese relations, but also an important change in the relation in the triangle formed by the President, the establishment, and public opinion in U.S. foreign policymaking. Public opinion played a greater role in foreign policymaking under the Nixon administration than under any other administration before. Most scholars examining the role of public opinion in U.S. foreign policymaking before Nixon administration agreed that public opinion, though influential in domestic affairs, is volatile and incoherent, when it comes to foreign policy, and thus it has little impact on foreign policy. That agreement became known as the "Almond-Lippmann consensus" [14]. Widespread opposition to the Vietnam War in university campuses across the U.S. appeared to be stable and coherent, thus influencing the shift in U.S. foreign policy towards full withdrawal from Vietnam, which began during last months of Lyndon Johnson administration, which gained momentum under Nixon administration, and which completed under Gerald Ford administration. That made Vietnam a classical case of public opinion informing foreign policy, most notably, in the writings of Zaller [15; 16].

Vietnam played an important role during 1968 presidential campaign in the U.S.: Nixon campaign's promise to provide new leadership in the war contributed to his popularity among voters in the summer, and Johnson's suspension of bombing in Vietnam narrowed the gap in voters' support to Nixon and his main rival Hubert Humphrey, and Nixon even allegedly attempted to "spoil Johnson's Vietnam peace talks" [17] in order to secure his lead. After having narrowly won the presidential race, Nixon took aim at reducing public attention to foreign policy issues in general and to Vietnam in particular, which helped him winning public acceptance of any feasible Vietnam settlement [18], including through rapprochement with Communist China. As a result, during 1972 campaign, the settlement with China was only debated at Republican primaries, with John Ashbrook opposing the settlement, thus underlining "how alienated many on the right were from Nixon" [19, p. 25], but not during the general campaign.

Though Nixon's reputation as an anti-Communist provided with growing domestic support to improved relations with China by summer of 1972, it was unclear whether the public would support it in summer of 1971, when Nixon surprised America and the entire world with the announcement of his planned visit to China early following year. Neither was it clear whether the establishment would support the move. Thus, Nixon and his National Security advisor Henry Kissinger planned the President's trip to China in secrecy. Rodman recalled that "when Kissinger set out on an around-the-world trip in July 1971, only some members of his travelling party knew of the secret two-day detour from Pakistan into China" [20, p. 53] aimed at preparing Nixon's visit into the latter country.

According to Komine, secrecy is the key to understanding the road toward U.S.-China rapprochement under Nixon administration [21].

By having kept preparations to the China visit in secrecy, Nixon made both the establishment and citizens discuss (and vote) the visit retrospectively, which some scholars regard necessary for the Nixon paradox (the paradox that “right-wing politicians sometimes can implement policies that left-wing politicians cannot, and vice versa”) to hold [22]. The Nixon paradox contributed to emergence of the Nixon-Goes-To-China adage, which proliferated beyond common wisdom into research of both public and business administration [23]. Even after Nixon’s resignation from office in 1974, most “American presidents... presumed that ‘successful China’ would be good for the United States” [24]. That presumption suffered crisis twice in the 45 years between 1972 and 2017: in 1989 after the Tiananmen massacre and recently, with election of Donald Trump President.

Viewed retrospectively, American public was consistent in its opposition to the Vietnam War by the end of Johnson administration. However, public interest towards the war started declining already in the last months of Johnson administration, when it seemed to the public that the war was coming to its end. It continued declining throughout Nixon administration, thus making it easy for the administration to convince the public that rapprochement with China is necessary also because it is an element of pulling out from Vietnam in the situation, when the establishment was divided on both withdrawal from Vietnam and rapprochement with China. Below we will demonstrate that contemporarily American public is not consistent in its opinion on the situation on the Korean peninsula, while the establishment is united in viewing any foreign policy initiative of Trump administration suspiciously. Thus, it appeared to be impossible for Trump administration to gain public support to the meeting with Kim without initially creating the impression of Trump being tough on North Korea.

American Opinion and Rhetoric on North Korea Early under Trump Administration

Another similarity between Nixon and Trump is that both were accused of violation of the Logan Act prohibiting unauthorized persons to negotiate with foreign governments for the alleged activities that the two then presidential hopefuls undertook during their campaigns in 1968 and 2016 respectively. Clark Clifford, Defence Secretary in Johnson administration, considered it to be a violation of the Logan Act Nixon’s alleged outreach to South Vietnamese aimed at postponing of signing of the Paris Peace Accord expected to end violence between North and South Vietnam until after the election day in order to attract more votes [25, p.582]. Thomas Vilsack, Secretary of Agriculture in Obama administration, considered it to be a violation of the Logan Act Trump’s public expression of hope that Russia had hacked into Hillary Clinton’s e-mails [26]. The difference between Nixon and Trump was that accusations against Nixon had not been revealed to the general public until after his resignation from office, while accusations against Trump were thrown publicly even before the latter took his oath of office.

Another difference between Nixon and Trump was that Nixon already had a reputation of a tough anti-Communist before he was elected President, while Trump had not had a reputation of a tough critic of North Korea’s regime before being elected President;

thus, he had to quickly earn the reputation after inauguration. U.S. media in opposition to Trump recalled that before being elected President Trump expressed controversial opinions on North Korea in general and Kim Jong Un in particular [27]. In 2016, on presidential campaign trail, Trump expressed his willingness to negotiate with Kim [28]. However, throughout 2017, Trump expressed very critical opinions of North Korea's regime, partly in order to present himself being tough on North Korea to domestic audiences. His rhetoric concerning North Korea significantly changed after March 8, 2018, when Chung Eui-Yong, South Korea's National Security Advisor, announced for the first time that Kim had invited Trump to meet in person, and that Trump had agreed to meet [29].

Trump-Kim summit influenced American public opinion on the situation on the Korean peninsula. According to a Gallup poll conducted in early February 2018, i. e. before plans to hold Trump-Kim summit were revealed to general public, 51 % of respondents named North Korea "the greatest enemy" of the U.S. [30]. According to another Gallup poll conducted in early July 2018, i. e. after Trump-Kim summit already took place, only 46 % of respondents named North Korea an "enemy" of the U.S., and another 33 % of respondents named the country "unfriendly", while only 17 % named it "ally/friendly" [31]. In the longer run, the number of Americans, who viewed North Korea positively, has been declining throughout early 21st century, while the number of Americans, who viewed South Korea positively, has been increasing. According to the Gallup poll conducted in early February 2018, i. e. days before opening of the 23rd Winter Olympic Games held in Pyeongchang, South Korea, 77 % of American respondents viewed South Korea positively, while only 6 % of them viewed North Korea positively [32].

The President is the primary newsmaker in the U.S., when it comes to national security issues, thus President's statements and actions influence public opinion significantly; however, U.S. foreign policy establishment is an important group of people, whose statements on national security issues also influence public opinion. The establishment is predominantly anti-North Korean, thus, many its representatives perceived Trump-Kim summit suspiciously. For example, Ed Royce, Chair of the U.S. House Committee on Foreign Affairs, stated in July 2018, "even if Kim denuclearizes, the North will never see meaningful investment so long as regime gulags remain open and brazen killings continue" [33]. Bob Corker, Chair of the U.S. Senate Committee on Foreign Relations, condemned Trump's assessment of Kim Jong Un as "talented, and... [loving] his people" in the situation, when "one in 10 North Koreans are living in slavery today, one in five children are stunted due to malnutrition" [34].

In 2016, Trump won presidential elections in the U.S. on anti-establishment ticket. First two years of his presidency demonstrated lack of understanding of his foreign policy among not only Democrats, but also fellow Republicans among the establishment. Similarly, the two years demonstrated lack of effort on behalf of Trump administration to explain his foreign policy to the establishment. As a result, in the procedural sense, U.S. foreign policymaking under Trump administration differs significantly from the consensus established under Nixon administration. Under Nixon administration, "the procedural consensus rested on the widely shared assumption that the president was the ultimate authority in making foreign policy commitments" [35, p. 13], and "the establishment both embodied and helped to construct the... consensus" [35, p. 15]. Under Trump administration, the establishment demonstrated willingness to deprive the President of his authority in national security issues. An example is adoption by Congress of the Countering Amer-

ica's Adversaries through Sanctions Act, which limited President's power to lift sanctions, and which concerned sanctions against not only Russia, but also Iran and North Korea [36], in the summer 2017.

Permanent Campaigning: For Home Use Only?

After having made a deal with China, Nixon did his best to convince the establishment that the deal should be honoured even after a new U.S. President is elected. As explained above, his reputation as anti-Communist helped him doing so. Moreover, he did his best to convince American public that if at some point the establishment begins leaning towards defection from the deal with China, the public should remind the establishment about the value of the deal. Since then, the U.S. has been honouring the deal for almost half-a-century, despite some offensive realists, first and foremost, Mearsheimer [37] called for more pro-active U.S. response to rising China's power. Even after the Tiananmen massacre of 1989, U.S.-China relations returned to "business as usual" very fast. According to Brent Scowcroft, National Security Advisor under George H. W. Bush, "it was geopolitics, basically" [38] that helped U.S.-China cooperation established under Nixon administration survive the Tiananmen massacre.

In 2016 Trump won presidential elections partly thanks to his promise to bring jobs back into the U.S. by means of what some considered a "threat to the liberal international order" [39], because Trump's plan involved reconsidering almost all existing trade pacts, to which the U.S. is a party, not only U.S.-Chinese trade relations. On campaign trail, he did not provide with details of his plan, however [40]. After being elected President, Trump used his executive powers to impose higher trade barriers, which did not only hit interests of some U.S. businesses (though some other U.S. businesses benefited from it) and even some research institutions [41], but it obviously posed a challenge to U.S.-China cooperation established under Nixon. To that, some members of the U.S. foreign policy establishment responded with proposing of a bill that would limit presidential authority to impose trade barriers for national security reasons [42]. Time will show, whether U.S.-China cooperation will restore after Trump or whether Trump administration will mark the end to the order of things established under Nixon administration. Similarly, it is too early today to speak of the future of the deal made at Trump-Kim summit.

Time will show, first and foremost, if Kim will honour the deal with the U.S. If he will, however, time will also show, whether the U.S. will honour Trump's deal with North Korea. Time will show, whether Trump will manage to convince the establishment that the deal must be honoured after a new U.S. President is elected. And time will show, whether Trump will manage to convince American public that if the establishment does not honour the deal, the public should remind the establishment of the value of honouring international commitments in general and that one in particular. It is public opinion that can play a crucial role here, given the on-going conflict between Trump and the establishment on a wide array of national security issues. The kind of relationship in the triangle formed by the President, the establishment, and public opinion, when the President actively seeks public approval of his policy in order to obtain elite's approval of the policy fits into the framework of the permanent campaign model, first introduced by Sidney Blumenthal, Senior Advisor to President Bill Clinton, in early 1980s [43].

The permanent campaign model has two legs: governing thanks to permanent campaigning and governing by permanent campaigning. Blumenthal's book mostly spoke of the disappearing border between campaign periods and in-between campaign periods, when elected officials concentrate on governing, but it is far from claiming that campaigning prevents governing. Rather, permanent campaign is a tool of governing [44]. Presidential rallies are not only aimed at own re-election or at election of a supporter to certain elected post, but also at passing of particular legislation by means of convincing the public, which, in turn, will pose pressure on its representatives in the legislative body, where the legislation is expected to pass. Permanent campaigning peaked in the U.S. under Clinton administration and in the United Kingdom under Prime Minister Tony Blair [45], while the experience of George W. Bush administration demonstrated that presidents' "efforts at persuading the public may also decrease their chances of success in bringing about changes in public policy" [46].

Permanent campaigning literature focuses on home affairs due to "uniquely presidential status in natural disasters, terrorists' acts, and national security issues" [47]. When observers speak of permanent campaigning in the context of international politics, they most often mean the non-stop series of elections taking place in different countries, of which each can change foreign policy course of particular country thus challenging multi-lateral cooperation frameworks uniting all those countries [48]. Or, they sometimes speak of leaders of great powers addressing not leaders of partner and rival nations all over the world, but addressing directly their peoples, a kind of public diplomacy [49]. Closer look at U.S. foreign policy under Trump administration allows proposing another use of the term: permanent campaigning in the context of international politics can also mean addressing own population in an effort to make it pose some influence on the establishment in order to convince the establishment of the necessity to change foreign policy course.

Conclusion

Donald Trump's turn from speaking of "fire and fury" as probably most effective means to deal with North Korea to agreeing to participate in the first summit meeting ever held between a sitting President of the United States of America and a sitting leader of the Democratic People's Republic of Korea looks controversial at first glance only. As demonstrated above, Trump's tough North Korea rhetoric during his first year in the White House addressed not only at North Korea's leadership, but also at American public and the establishment. That provides multiple observers, including authors of this article, with another reason to compare the Trump-Kim summit meeting with the summit meeting, which took place 46 years before between U.S. President Richard Nixon and Chairman of the People's Republic of China Mao Zedong, and which appeared to be the first summit meeting ever held between a sitting U.S. President and a sitting leader of Communist China.

In early 1970s, Nixon's reputation of a convinced anti-Communist helped him to convince the U.S. foreign policy establishment and American public that improvement of relations between the U.S. and Communist China correspond to American interest. In a similar manner, in 2017, Trump attempted to build himself a reputation of a tough critic of North Korea expecting that such reputation will help him convincing the U.S. foreign

policy establishment and American public that improvement of relations with North Korea correspond to American interest. This article, however, finds more differences between the Nixon-China and the Trump-Korea situations than it finds similarities. First, while Nixon enjoyed the reputation of tough anti-Communist by 1968, when he was elected President for the first time, Trump had not had a reputation of fierce critic of North Korea before his inauguration in 2017. Second, while U.S. foreign policy establishment in early 1970s considered President the ultimate authority in making foreign policy commitments, in late 2010s the establishment demonstrated willingness to limit President's authority in the field of national security.

Third, while U.S. public opinion on the threshold of 1960s and 1970s was very consistent in its relations to the war and Vietnam and rapprochement with Communist China as part of withdrawal from Vietnam, the public opinion in late 2010s was volatile in its relation to North and South Korea, despite most Americans viewed North Korea negatively and South Korea positively in those years. Thus, even if Trump manages to reach a deal with North Korea, and even if the latter honours the deal, it will be extremely difficult for Trump administration to convince U.S. foreign policy establishment to honour the deal after he moves out of the White House. In particular, Trump will hardly be able to do so through campaigning: by means of, first, convincing the public in the importance of the deal, and, second, expecting the latter to pose pressure on the establishment through political participation mechanisms. However, though Trump administration will hardly gain domestic support to its foreign policy, in particular, towards Korea by means of permanent campaigning, the latter will remain an issue for consideration of scholars in the field of foreign policy analysis.

Calvin Coolidge became the first U.S. President to address the nation on radio. Franklin Roosevelt was not only the U.S. President, who actively used radio in his campaigning, but he was also the first U.S. President to address the nation on television. One consequence of use of radio and television in U.S. politics was growing public awareness about foreign policy issues that characterised the 20th century. In early 21st century social media provide with both opportunities and challenges for both the practice of foreign policy, including opportunities and challenges to Donald Trump and his administration, and for international relations as an academic discipline. Scholars in the field of diplomacy studies will continue exploring the role of a nation's leader addressing not only leaders of other countries, but also the public of those countries directly. In a similar manner, scholars in the field of foreign policy analysis will continue exploring the role of a nation's leader addressing that same nation's public in order to gain support to foreign policy change or its needlessness.

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Received: August 30, 2018

Accepted: October 1, 2018

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