

Juggling with Kim and Moon: Donald Trump's Diplomatic Copy Book

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Region: [USA](#)

Theme: [History](#)

*Cue the shots, take the snaps: US **President Donald Trump** was back entertaining his fetish with firm handshakes proclaiming the making of history in the last round of discussions with **Kim Jong-un**. The press were, despite periodic attacks of bafflement, ever obliging. The meeting of Trump with the leader of the DPRK was deemed historic, because everything the president does these days has to be, by definition, shatteringly historic. Respective handshaking took place across the demarcation line of North and South Korea before Trump "briefly crossed into North Korea, a symbolic milestone," [noted](#) the BBC.*

Kim, in turn, crossed into South Korea alongside Trump, cheeks bunched and aglow:

"I believe this is an expression of his willingness to eliminate all the unfortunate past and open a new future."

An hour-long discussion followed in the Freedom House. At one point, South Korea's **President Moon Jae-in** joined the gathering for a collegial cameo. Again "unprecedented", came the observations.



Trump and Kim meet Sunday before Trump became first US president to step on North Korean territory.
(White House photo)

Trump's diplomatic copy book is an untidy compilation of zigs and zags; amidst the lack of neatness lies a scratchy pattern. Each accommodating approach must come with its selective targets of incoherent demonization. Every hand shake on one side of the diplomatic ledger must be accompanied by the cold shoulder on the other, if not a good deal of spiked bile. There is Iran, which serves the purpose for potential military engagement and cartoon gangster pose, and China, which supplies the Trump administration with a target for hard bargaining.

As each day goes by, military digs and pokes are being directed at Tehran by US officials now more accustomed to poking tongues than using them. This is far from a bright move, but serves the object of brinkmanship Trump has managed to cultivate in Washington.

US policy on that front is that of the bull acting in disregard of the precious china. The china, for one, involved adherence by Iran to the restrictive nuclear agreement that saw the destruction of its plutonium reactor and an opening up to the peering eyes of inspectors for a period ranging between ten and twenty-five years. Economic losses would be made up by a more liberal trade regime with European powers. But Trump, consistently with his campaign promises on redrafting, if not tossing various agreements out altogether, was determined to find a marketable enemy. Evidence was less important than necessity, however confused.

The confusion towards Iran can be gathered by a stance that suggests criticism without sense or context; what is needed is the dangerous power, and any necessary accusation will be made to fit. A White House statement on July 1 [reads](#) like a patient after electric shock treatment, more than a touch addled.

It is holed with regrets and scolding references, striking a catty note.

"It was a mistake under the Iran nuclear deal to allow Iran to enrich uranium at any level."

Then the head scratching moment follows.

"There is little doubt that even before the deal's existence, Iran was violating its terms."

Trumpland allows such plasticine-like flexibility: terms can be violated before they come into existence.

It also leads to such grand theatrical gestures as the President's claim that the loss of 150 Iranian lives in US military strikes would have been disproportionate measures undertaken in response to the downing of a US drone. Good sense prevailed, so he says, leading to them being called off at the last moment. As Zvi Bar'el writing in *Haaretz* [noted](#) sourly,

"Such a humanitarian explanation would have been heartwarming if it hadn't come from the president still arming the Saudi military that's killing thousands in Yemen."

Far better, in the supposedly more reserved approach of the administration, to strangle the nation with the noose of sanctions, a form of economic warfare that is guaranteed to add to the butcher's bill while doing little to influence the leaders. (Economists Mark Weisbrot and Jeffrey Sachs [claimed](#) in an April paper for the Center for Economic and Policy Research that an estimated 40,000 deaths were caused by US sanctions imposed on Venezuela.)

Then there is China, whose relationship is one that moves between boiling anger and simmer filled resentment. Beijing is being given pride of place as the future enemy of the US imperium. The People's Republic is being beefed up to the status of ultimate threat.

On July 3, an [open letter](#) organised by **Michael D. Swaine** and signed by some 150 former officials and scholars insisted that Beijing was not "an economic enemy or an existential national security threat that must be confronted in every sphere." Beijing replacing the United States "as the global leader" was a matter of exaggeration. "Most other countries have no interest in such an outcome, and it is not clear that Beijing itself sees this goal as necessary or feasible."

The anti-China squad is ballooning in popularity on the Hill and elsewhere, making such reserved scepticism indigestible for the soft-headed members of the imperium. Democrat Senate Minority Leader **Chuck Schumer** made his enthusiasm for Trump's position clear in May. "Strength is the only way to win with China," he [tweeted](#). The naïve assumption of turning Beijing's authoritarians into liberal capitalists has been replaced by another: that US power is indefinitely enduring.

Hang tough on China, President [@realDonaldTrump](#). Don't back down.

Strength is the only way to win with China. <https://t.co/pZqeR346ov>

— Chuck Schumer (@SenSchumer) [May 5, 2019](#)

The central theme to Trump's copy book can be said to be this: to conserve a cosy position with one authoritarian regime necessitates a punitive approach to another. A calculus for the voter comes into play: you can only fool the electors some of the time. To that end, much has been leveraged on the anti-China sentiment and chest thumping before the Iranian mullahs. Just as much has been expended on the idea of Trump the peace maker in Northeast Asia, a situation that has yielded more ceremony than substance. If Trump can keep his weapons holstered, cool heads will prevail. Now that would be historic.

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