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# Donald Trump's Securitizing Speech Acts and the United States Maximum-Pressure Strategy towards North Korea in 2017

Nida Rubini<sup>1</sup>, Yandry Kurniawan<sup>2</sup>

## Abstrak/Abstract

Intersubjective process of international communication may shape security issue which requires extraordinary policy. This article aimed to analyze how speech acts of a country leader securitize an issue and result in an extraordinary or distinct foreign policy. Donald Trump, the 45<sup>th</sup> President of the United States of America, demonstrated his blunt talkativeness through social media and formal speech acts, including on the North Korean nuclear issue during his presidency term. Despite of the regular focus placement of North Korea's nuclear in the United States' foreign policy since the 1990s, Trump leaves the issue during his campaign. Nevertheless, in 2017, the first year of his term, he shifted to expressing his enmity in line with the enactment of the maximum pressure strategy, which was the heaviest sanctions ever enacted on North Korea. This study applied the securitization theory by analyzing three assumptions that support Trump's political communication style: the centrality of the audience, co-dependency of agency and context, and dispositive and structuring forces of practices. Using the qualitative-deductive method, this article found that Trump's speech acts in 2017 securitized the North Korean nuclear threat as an unprecedented threat requiring an extraordinary policy of maximum pressure strategy.

*Proses intersubjektif dari komunikasi politik di level internasional dapat membentuk suatu isu keamanan yang membutuhkan suatu kebijakan khusus. Artikel ini bertujuan untuk melakukan analisis bagaimana-tindak tutur (speech act) pemimpin suatu negara dalam melakukan sekuritisasi terhadap isu tertentu untuk menetapkan kebijakan luar negeri yang berada di luar kelaziman. Donald Trump, Presiden Amerika Serikat ke-45, seringkali melakukan komunikasi internasional secara blak-blakan melalui media sosial maupun pernyataan formal, termasuk mengenai isu nuklir Korea Utara. Meskipun isu nuklir Korea Utara sudah menjadi salah satu fokus kebijakan luar negeri Amerika Serikat sejak 1990-an, Trump tidak menjadikan isu ini sebagai salah satu fokus selama kampanyenya. Meskipun demikian, setelah menjabat pada tahun 2017, ia mulai menunjukkan permusuhan dengan Korea Utara melalui pemberlakuan strategi maximum pressure, yang merupakan sanksi terberat yang pernah diberlakukan kepada Korea Utara. Studi ini menggunakan teori sekuritisasi dengan menganalisis tiga asumsi yang mendukung tindak tutur Trump: sentralitas audiens, saling-ketergantungan antara agen dan konteks, serta dispositif dan kekuatan struktur praktik. Dengan menggunakan metode kualitatif-deduktif, studi ini menemukan bahwa tindak tutur Trump pada tahun 2017 berhasil mengangkat ancaman nuklir Korea Utara ke level yang belum pernah terjadi sebelumnya dan membutuhkan kebijakan baru di luar kelaziman selama ini, yaitu strategi maximum pressure.*

## Kata kunci/Keywords:

Donald Trump; North Korea; speech act; securitization

*Donald Trump, Korea Utara, Speech act, sekuritisasi*

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## Introduction

The art of communication taken by particular statesmen to signal their threat perception will inherently imply the respective country's foreign security policy. Nevertheless, the scope and meaning of security threats cannot be determined *per se* objectively, but it will also depend on a specific discursive mechanism (Buzan et al., 1998, p. 25). An issue becomes a security issue through the securitization process. Speech influences the decision-making process and thus authorizes extraordinary actions to block the issue's threatening development (Buzan et al., 1998, p. 26). Within language theory, speech act manifests in three sequential actions: locutionary (to say something), illocutionary (to act in saying something), and perlocutionary

act (to bring something through acting in saying something or an act by saying something) (Balzacq, 2005, p. 175; Kurniawan, 2018, p. 21; Stritzel, 2007, pp. 259–260; Vuori, 2008, p. 175) 2005, p. 175; Kurniawan, 2018, p. 21; Stritzel, 2007, pp. 259–260; Vuori, 2008, p. 175. In line with this theory, the securitization approach analyzes how speech act manifest from perlocutionary act to illocutionary act (Buzan et al., 1998, p. 24). Such a language-based constructivism approach can suitably explain how different foreign policies deal with objectively similar security conditions (Howard, 2004, p. 205).

Even though North Korea has started its nuclear weapon development in the 1950s, its nuclear ambitions have only become a focus of US foreign policy since the 1990s. By the end of the Cold War, as Russia and China stopped their subsidized trade with North Korea and made this country experienced recession and famine, Pyongyang's nuclear has a new leverage function to deal with its traditional enemies: the U.S., Japan, and South Korea (Wertz, 2018, pp. 7–8). Afterward, the North Korean nuclear issue has always been one of the most critical issues in US foreign policy, although different administrations confront it with different policy options. Bill Clinton's administration chose a diplomatic way by signing the Agreed Framework in 1994 (Wertz, 2018, p. 8). George W. Bush preferred to take a comprehensive set of coercive policies on security, economic, and political issues, called the *bold approach* (Wertz, 2018, pp. 8–9). Barack Obama's administration deployed a passive strategy called *strategic patience* (Wertz, 2018, p. 12).

Since 2016 North Korea's missile and nuclear technology has experienced rapid development. Nonetheless, Trump has never mentioned this issue as one of his priorities during his campaign. However, not very long after his inauguration, Trump's speech acts showed a different focus on the issue. Trump's intense rhetoric on North Korea in 2017 expressed hostility towards North Korea openly through his speeches on social media and formal remarks. Trump personally called North Korean supreme leader Kim Jong Un as 'little rocket man' while repeatedly referring to North Korean nuclear as 'a big-big problem.' Furthermore, Trump several times expressed *maximum pressure* as the necessary strategy to overcome North Korean nuclear while emphasizing that 'the era of strategic patience with the North Korea regime has failed.'

In 2017 North Korea's military capabilities were increasing in many aspects. Several ballistic missiles and nuclear tests conducted throughout 2017 demonstrated the advancement of North Korea's nuclear weapons and long-range missile technology (Arms Control Association, 2020). At the same time, North Korea's submarine missiles and short-range artillery capabilities were also increasing significantly (Chanlett-Avery et al., 2018, p. 2). In addition, The US Defense Intelligence Agency assessment reported that

the launch of the North's intercontinental ballistic missile and the successful test of the thermonuclear device shows that North Korea has sufficient entry capabilities to produce nuclear weapons capable of reaching the US mainland (Nikitin, 2022, p. 1).

The Trump administration followed suit by campaigning the maximum pressure and engagement policy (Arms Control Association, 2020). *Maximum pressure* tightened US economic sanctions on North Korea both bilaterally and multilaterally. North Korea was back to the list of state-sponsored terrorism in September 2017 and consequently received additional sanctions. Through the United Nations Security Council (UNSC), the US also imposed four additional sanctions against North Korea in 2017. Under the *maximum pressure strategy*, sanctions against North Korea have become the toughest US bilateral and multilateral coercive sanctions.

Trump adopted the maximum pressure as a noticeably different foreign security policy built on his hostile rhetoric against North Korea. Such a policy becomes very striking compared to the strategic patience strategy undertaken during the Barack Obama administration and even to Trump's own policy in the subsequent years. In the strategic patience policy, the US government will only act based on the North's behaviors. The US will sanction North Korea's hostile behaviors and only return to high-level talks if Pyongyang demonstrates a serious commitment to denuclearization (Wertz, 2018, p. 12). Meanwhile, following the 2017 maximum pressure strategy, Trump demonstrated more lenient speech acts, including referring to North Korea in friendly terms while deploying a different strategy of summitry that lasted from 2018 to 2019.

Previous studies which were discussing US foreign policy on the North Korean nuclear issue focused on either comparing the US administration's policy towards North Korea or analyzing each US policy's meaning on this issue. Thus, this study is significant in filling two gaps found in the previous studies in this research field. First, no research has studied the process and supporting factors that lead to applying the maximum pressure strategy by the Trump Administration. The second gap lies in the absence of studies examining the security threat from North Korea's nuclear as construction of intersubjective understanding in US foreign policy.

When securitization utterances can shape social reality, the securitizing actor has the linguistic power to convince his audience; thus, the securitization succeeded in taking place. In the process of foreign security policy decision-making, especially in an established democracy such as the US, an actor's speech-act ability to convince the audience of a threat will depend on his linguistic power. This article will explore the congruence of securitization theoretical assumptions supporting Trump's securitization in analyzing the securitization process. Based on the ex-

plained background, this research questions how Donald Trump's speech-act securitizes the North Korean nuclear issue in 2017 to implement the maximum pressure strategy.

## Literature Review

### *Preceding Studies on US Foreign Policy toward North Korea*

There are four groups of preceding studies discussing the US foreign policy on the North Korean nuclear issue. The first cluster consists of studies evaluating the effectiveness of different foreign policy choices, despite of one similar policy objective: North Korea's denuclearization (Anderson, 2017; Husenicova, 2018). The second, third, and fourth cluster is a group of studies analyzing US policy choices to confront North Korean nuclear. Cluster two emphasizes coercive foreign policy measures or a militaristic approach to confronting the North Korean nuclear (Kim & Snyder, 2019; Riyanto, 2019; Watterson, 2019; Zimmer & Pandya, 2020). The third cluster consists of studies that analyze diplomacy and negotiation policy options to deal with the North's nuclear issue (Bakich, 2020; Dian, 2018; Ludvik, 2019; Moon, 2019; Moore, 2008). Cluster four is a group of synthesized studies between coercive and negotiation (Syahrin, 2018) and between the fulfillment of material security and the adjustment of the US foreign policy discourse (Hagström & Lundström, 2019).

The studies in the first cluster have provided a comprehensive overview of foreign policy options under one main objective of denuclearization. While Meanwhile, studies in clusters two, three, and four analyze specific foreign policy options, albeit through different means. However, these studies do not explain the process or factors that made the US government chooses a specific policy on the North Korean nuclear issue. Almost all previous studies also view North Korea's nuclear threats as objective security threats. The exception is Hagstrom and Lundstrom's article, which uses a synthesis approach between objective material security and intersubjective foreign policy discourse (Hagström & Lundström, 2019). Therefore, these prior studies overlook how a foreign security policy is shaped, particularly through the securitization of the politicians' speech act.

### *Speech Act and Securitization*

*Speech act studies debate debating in the field of international security swing between analysis on solely the speech act and analysis of the speech act and the social context of the actor. Didier Bigo believes believed that speech act studies should also analyze the speaker's social position in his environment (Bigo, 2016, pp. 54–59). Meanwhile, Buzan et al. (1998), who conducted the speech act analysis as part of securitization theory, explained that the focus of research only needs to be done on the speaker, the securitizing actor, and the carried discourse (Buzan et al., 1998, p. 26). The Copenhagen School defines defined securiti-*

*zation as speech acts carried out by actors against certain audiences in a discursive process to present an issue as an existential threat that requires extraordinary actions (Buzan et al., 1998, pp. 23–24).*

*Within the subsequent theoretical development, several scholars critique criticized The Copenhagen School's securitization on at least three aspects: focus placement between performative power of security speech or social processes in securitization (Booth, 2007; Stritzel, 2007); the clarification of audiences (McDonald, 2008; Salter, 2008); the setting and context of securitization process (Salter, 2008). Based on these debates, Balzacq (2011, p. 8) developed new theoretical notions and assumptions to accommodate intersubjectivity, context, and practice. Balzacq (2011, p. 3) defines defined securitization as:*

*“the articulated assemblage of practices whereby heuristic artifacts (metaphors, policy tools, image repertoires, analogies, stereotypes, emotions, etc..) are contextually mobilized by a securitizing actor, who works to prompt an audience to build a coherent network of implications (feelings, sensations, thoughts, and intuitions), about the critical vulnerability of a referent object, that concurs with the securitizing actor's reasons for choices and actions, by investing the referent subject with such an aura of unprecedented threatening complexion that a customized policy must be undertaken immediately to block its development”.*

By applying Balzacq's definition, this article follows one particular strand in securitization studies which emphasizes the process of threat construction. Hence, this is a study on “the discursive process through which an intersubjective understanding is constructed within a political community” (Buzan & Wæver, 2003, p. 491). In this article, we emphasized securitization as a speech act process and analyzed it “as a linguistic form or the words that refer to [...] a particular issue [which] gradually contribute to the threat construction, and therefore to securitization” (Coskun, 2011, p. 159; Kurniawan, 2018, p. 205).

In explaining the process of how the speech act succeeded by the enactment of *maximum pressure* strategy, the exploration of Balzacq's three theoretical assumptions becomes an essential part of this study. These assumptions are (1) audience centrality; (2) co-dependency of agency and context; (3) dispositive<sup>1</sup> and structuring force of practices (Balzacq, 2011, pp. 28–40). The elab-

<sup>1</sup>*Dispositif*, as a term to explain various mechanisms which enhance and maintain the exercise of power within the social institution, derived from Michael Foucault (1980) work in French. The term variably rendered as *dispositif*, *dispositive*, *apparatus*, or *deployment* in English research and writings. This research will use this variant spelling of *dispositif* to be in line with Balzacq (2011) usage of the term in his securitization theory strand.



oration of such assumptions is essential to building a coherent analysis of Trump's speech act securitization of North Korean nuclear issues.

The first assumption shall define which audience groups are in the intersubjective process of securitization. Because the securitization process requires the audience's approval of the claims of the securitizing actors, Balzacq emphasized that the audience must be defined as empowering audience. An empowered audience is that with a direct cause-and-effect relationship with the issue and can enable securitizing actors to take steps to address the threat (2011, pp. 28–29). To enact the *maximum pressure* strategy at the national level, Donald Trump needed the public and Congress's approval. At the international level, the sanctions issued by the UNSC would need the approval of at least all five permanent members of the Security Council. The approval of the *maximum pressure* strategy demonstrates the securitization process's intersubjectivity process with the empowering audiences.

The second assumption explains that following the repetition of security semantics, the success of securitization will lie in using a combination of textual meanings (oral and written) and cultural meanings. Cultural meanings would include contextual conditions of interactions that have occurred and the current situation. The speech act of the securitizing actor must follow the context in which the securitization is carried out to convince the audience that the reference subject is a threat (Balzacq, 2011, pp. 31–35). In explaining the second assumption, this article would explore how Trump's rhetoric tuned to the audience's perception within the context of North Korea's nuclear development around 2017.

The third assumption is the dispositive and structuring force of practices. This assumption explains that securitization does not always have to go through planning with a predetermined agenda before carrying out the process. Instead, it is a process that occurs in intertwining security practices and tools. Such a set of security practices and tools will form a dispositive system of linked practices and tools that enhance or sustain the exercise of power in social institutions (Balzacq, 2011, p. 4). In this line, this study would analyze the regulations and capacity instruments of sanctions used by the Trumps administration to address North Korea's nuclear threat.

Finally, this research argues that the enactment of a heavier strategy of *maximum pressure* is the success indicator of Trump's securitization of North Korea's nuclear. Hence, this article would explain various sanctions against North Korea under the *maximum pressure* strategy to further elaborate on such an outcome. The explained sanctions will cover all US bilateral sanctions on North Korea and multilateral sanctions enacted by the UNSC.

### Research Methodology

This research studied North Korea's nuclear securitization through Donald Trump's speech acts, resulting in the *maximum pressure* strategy

in 2017. The study employed securitization theory to explain the construction of North Korean nuclear as a security issue in a higher threatening degree requiring an extraordinary policy. To elaborate on the theoretical assumptions in the context of Trump's speech acts securitization of North Korea's nuclear, this research utilized the qualitative research method using a deductive approach.

Qualitative research uses soft data (words, sentences, photos, symbols) to study cases and contexts and their cultural meaning to generate new hypotheses or describe causal mechanisms or processes for a set of cases (Neuman, 2014, pp. 167–168). This research used the qualitative method to explain the securitization process by detailing three supporting assumptions: (1) audience centrality; (2) agent-context co-dependency; (3) dispositive and structuring force of practices (Balzacq, 2011, pp. 28–40). Meanwhile, the deductive approach entails that this study uses a theoretical securitization framework and its three assumptions to draw on the research results.

In conducting analysis, this study used primary and secondary data sources. The research used primary data of Donald Trump's speech acts, United States federal laws, executive orders, UNSC resolutions, and other related documents available at the official websites of each institution. Primary data of Donald Trump's speech acts collected for this research is limited in two ways. First, the speech act texts are limited to speeches, remarks, press briefings, call readouts, meeting readouts, and tweets of Trump's Twitter account (@realDonaldTrump<sup>2</sup>) related to North Korea nuclear obtained from U.S. Whitehouse archive and Twitter websites. Second, these texts are restricted to the 2017 timeframe, corresponding initially to Donald Trump's inauguration on 20 January 2017 to the end of his first-year term.

This research applied the 'North Korea' query in [trumpwhitehouse.archives.gov](http://trumpwhitehouse.archives.gov) and 'North Korea' or 'Korea' or 'Kim' or 'nuclear' queries in the @realDonaldTrump Twitter account to search for the related speech acts. We manually scrutinized all North Korea-related speech acts to avoid duplication and discarded speech acts enacted by other persons within the Trump administration. As a result, this research concluded 155 speech acts (n = 155) as the subject of analysis, which consists of forty-three tweets and one-hundred-twelve speeches, remarks, and readouts.

To further elaborate on the assumptions of the Donald Trump speech acts securitization of North Korean nuclear in 2017, this study also used secondary data from prior studies, scientific journals, and reports. This research limited the studied data timeframe to 2017, i.e. the first year of Donald Trump's presidency when the *maxi-*

<sup>2</sup> All tweets used in this research downloaded from Twitter in December 2020, before Twitter permanently took down @realDonaldTrump account.

*maximum pressure* strategy was employed. Lastly, we deployed triangulation to conduct data verification and validation in answering the research question. Triangulation is a research method that requires research to use more than one method, data sources, theoretical perspectives, or observers to ensure validity in studying a social phenomenon (Bryman, 2012, p. 392). In such an effort, in conducting analysis, we cross-checked the data used in this article from different primary and secondary data sources to reduce bias and ensure the accuracy of the conducted study.

## Results and Discussion

### *The Blunt Enmity of 2017 Donald Trump's Speech-Acts on North Korean Nuclear*

Even before running as a presidential candidate, Donald Trump has been a talkative and social media person. Being inaugurated as the 45<sup>th</sup> American President, Trump did not reduce his outspokenness on domestic and foreign issues related to the United States. This section examines how Donald Trump's speeches serve as securitizing speech acts which enable him to enact the *maximum pressure* strategy. After analyzing the primary data of Trump's speech acts, this article argued that Trump's speech acts on North Korea's nuclear in 2017 express three characteristics: (1) hostility rhetoric, (2) more immense threat depiction, and (3) new policy urgency.

The first characteristic is hostility rhetoric, including all speech acts attaching negative labels to North Korea. To the North's leader Kim Jong Un, Trump labeled him as a "*madman*" in his tweet on 22 September. Trump also called Kim Jong Un "*Rocket Man*" in his 24 September and 30 November tweets and even in his speech addressing the UN General Assembly on 19 September (Trump, 2017i). Trump, in his speeches to other heads of government, referred to North Korea's behavior as "*destabilizing*," "*hostile*," and "*menacing*" (Trump, 2017f, 2017i, 2017h). Furthermore, Trump's speech acts about North Korea nuclear framed its development as "*unlawful*," "*illegal*," and "*very hostile and dangerous*" (Trump, 2017l).

Such a callout and labeling are not new within generally US foreign policy and specifically toward North Korea. President Bush in 2002 and President Reagan in the 1980s also mentioned North Korea as an "*evil*" (Hagström & Lundström, 2019, p. 101). However, Trump's frequency of such expressions and his choices to convey them through personal and formal speeches create a wider echo of the messages. Trump and his administration also prefer to use strong language with negative connotations to express their enmity against North Korea (Hagström & Lundström, 2019, p. 101). Within the securitization context, such hostility rhetoric becomes the securitizing actor's frame to show the referent subject as an unprecedented and existential threat. After presenting North Korea as hostile, Trump's speech acts try to depict North Korea's nuclear as a high

degree of threat which this research defined as the second characteristic of his 2017 speech acts. In March 2017, Trump mentioned the US commitment to stand with Japan and South Korea to face "*the serious threat of North Korea*" (Trump, 2017a). He spoke the same tone of portraying the North Korean nuclear as a regional threat to the head of Asia-Pacific countries, including to President Joko Widodo of Indonesia in which both agree to "*...continue to coordinate closely on other threats to international security, including North Korea's nuclear and missile programs*" (Trump, 2017e).

Trump further intensified the North Korean nuclear rhetoric on the international level by mentioning it as a global threat. To the African countries' leaders, Trump mentioned how "*the world faces enormous security threat from North Korea regime*" (Trump, 2017j). In his statement on 29 August, Trump perceived the North's missile launch test as a clear and loud message that "*signaled its contempt for its neighbors, for all members of the United Nations, and for minimum standards of acceptable international behavior*." (Trump, 2017m).

By doing the abovementioned framing, Trump portrayed North Korea as a threat on another level that served in his last speech acts characteristic. In this third characteristic, Trump's speech acts express an urgent need for a special policy, namely a *maximum pressure* strategy, to block North Korea's nuclear development. For instance, on his 2017 Asia trip Trump remarked that one of the trip's objectives was to bring the world together to act against North Korea's increasing threat (Trump, 2017m). Trump campaigned this strategy by frequently reiterating the importance of all nations to apply and maintain maximum pressure on North Korea as "*the toughest-ever sanctions...in an unprecedented effort to isolate North Korea*" (Trump, 2017b).

The need for maximum pressure as the new policy requires explanations on why the previous policy has failed and thus needed to be changed. Trump's speech acts within the last characteristic also criticized previous US policies on North Korea's nuclear. In his 1 July tweet, Trump said that Obama's policy of *strategic patience* has been over and failed. Trump also went further by pointing his finger at the negligence of previous administrations as the leading cause of the North's growing threat (Trump, 2017n). On 9 October, Trump tweeted the failure and zero results of twenty-five years of US past policies. By claiming the growing threat of North Korea's nuclear development as a fruit of past failed policies, Trump presented another frame for the need for a new policy.

Trump's speech acts do not securitize the North Korea nuclear issue in a vacuum condition or '*divorced from the real world*' (Walt, quoted in Balzacq, 2005, p. 178). The three assumptions of audience centrality, context, and practices should be congruent to achieve the intended outcome of

securitization (Balzacq, 2005, p. 174) 2005, p. 174. The following sections will elaborate on these assumptions to explain the process of Trump's securitization of North Korea's nuclear in 2017.

#### **Audience Centrality: Trump-Audience Tuned Speech Acts**

Securitizing speech act must tune the audience's experience to securitize an issue and achieve a perlocutionary effect successfully. A securitizing actor must be able to persuade the audience to have the same perspective on the threatening degree of the referent subject through his speeches and supported by his "*gesture, tonality, order, image, attitude, idea.*" (Balzacq, 2011, p. 28). In analyzing Trump's securitization of the North Korea nuclear, this research found three primary audiences for Trump's securitizing speech acts: the US public, US Congress, and The UN Security Council.

The US public becomes the first primary audience for the securitizing move as their disapproval may counter the expected result. Even though the public provides more moral support to most security policies, their support is still generally necessary (Balzacq, 2011, p. 9). Trump's background as an entrepreneur and public figure provides advantages on this matter. Trump gets used to providing what people would buy as an entrepreneur while also getting used to saying what people would like to hear as a public figure.

Trump's triumph in the 2016 US election shows that his communication style receives a good deal of receptiveness from the US public. Therefore, in his first year of presidency, when the public support was relatively still high for a democratically elected president, Trump had the advantage of having an already high resonance with the public to conduct securitization. Trump won by promising changes under the banner of "Making America Great Again." Exit poll during the election shows that Trump's voters gave their voices because Trump was perceived to bring about change to America (Chomsky & Polychroniou, 2021, p. 6). In the case of North Korea's nuclear, Trump's speech acts blamed the North's growing threat emanating from the failure of past US policies. This identification of bringing about change in North Korea's nuclear policy is similar to his campaign attribution, which succeeded in getting him the presidential seat.

Trump's word choice in his speech acts also resonates with those of his American public audiences. Trump uses mostly daily phrases in his speech acts, making the public understand the threat in a more straightforward frame. For instance, in 11 April tweet he said, "*North Korea is looking for trouble....*" Meanwhile, after the North conducted a missile test, he tweeted, "*... Does this guy have anything better to do with his life?*" In addition, Trump's privilege of being a previously public figure and not a mere politician means the segmentation of news and media highlights will be much broader. In his favor, news

and social media help to amplify Trump's rhetoric on North Korea (Sigal, 2020, p. 164).

While moral support is necessary for a successful securitization, formal support is both necessary and sufficient. The securitizing actor must seek formal support from institutions that enable the adoption of specific extraordinary policies as the outcome of securitization (Balzacq, 2011, p. 9). Domestically, Trump must seek formal support from the US Congress to pass legislation sufficient to enact the maximum pressure strategy, implement related international agreements, and appropriate necessary diplomacy funds (Manyin, Chanlett-Avery, et al., 2021, pp. 1–2).

In 2017, Trump shall have an easy entry to acquire formal support from Congress as he experienced a federal government trifecta. Trump's party, the Republicans, held the majority seat within both chambers of US Congress. However, Trump still struggled to have Congress's solid support for his North Korea strategy due to internal Republican divisiveness regarding policy-making (Lee, 2018). In his 29 November tweet, Trump called Democrats to stop threatening shutdown because North Korea's frequent missile tests made it more crucial to fund the US government and military. Trump also expressed his complaints while signing Countering America's Adversaries Sanctions Act, claiming that Congress ignored most of his inputs and that the bill decreased his authority to negotiate (Trump, 2017g).

Nonetheless, despite of the dynamics in gaining legislative support, in 2017, the US Congress passed three new bills that shaped US policies towards North Korea, which Trump signed into federal laws (Manyin, Nikitin, et al., 2021, pp. 11–18). These acts were then translated into Executive Order, Proclamation, and sanctions, which were altogether part of the *maximum pressure* strategy. The US Congress thus has provided necessary and sufficient support for the securitization of the North Korean nuclear threat in 2017.

Trump said that in 2017 the US successfully led the Security Council to increase and expand sanctions on North Korea (Trump, 2017k). In line with this claim, presenting the North's nuclear threat on the international stage and more intensively towards the UNSC members' public and government became essential. *Maximum pressure* would not be adequate to corner Pyongyang to the end that the US government aimed if North Korea still had options to survive, through even the narrower opportunity given by other states. Other countries' relaxation of the given sanctions on North Korea would blunt the effectiveness of the overall economic pressure (Kim & Snyder, 2019, pp. 83–84). Among the Security Council's permanent members, China and Russia are North Korea's most relied-on neighbors diplomatically and economically (Ifft, 2020, p. 103). Therefore, China and Russia's involvement in pressuring North Korea was required, while



their absence would force the US to rely on its coercion tool unilaterally (Anderson, 2017, p. 159; Husenicova, 2018, pp. 79–80; Kim & Snyder, 2019, pp. 83–84) relations to North Korea could be categorized primarily under this umbrella. However, the issue of North Korean political system also plays role as it belongs to the other important, more normative category of U.S. foreign policy which is the protection of human rights and spreading of democracy and liberal values. In addition, the North Korean issue influences U.S. relations and interests in broader region of Northeast Asia, its bilateral alliances with South Korea (Republic of Korea, ROK).

Nevertheless, unpredictability has become one of Trump's main foreign policy features, including on US rivals and allies in Asia (Aini & Kurniawan, 2021, p. 263; Husenicova, 2018, p. 66) which preferred to maintain its security cooperation with Japan under the General Security of Military Information Agreement (GSOMIA. This feature manifests in Trump's speech acts about China as they shift between explicitly noting U.S.-China geopolitical rivalry and China's critical role in Pyongyang's nuclear issue. Trump stated his disappointment towards China by tweeting on 17 March, "... *China has done little to help!*" In the meantime, on other occasions, Trump repeatedly requested for China's support on the North's issue. Furthermore, Trump noted Russia's essential role by raising the need for "... *the best to resolve the very dangerous situation in North Korea*" in his meetings and calls with the Russian President (Trump, 2017c).

Both Russia and China's support for passing international sanctions in line with the *maximum pressure* strategy became necessary within the Security Council mechanism because their negative votes would fail the effort. Therefore, as the Security Council has provided necessary and sufficient support by unanimously passing the four resolutions for North Korea in 2017, Trump delivered specific appreciation for Russia and China (Trump, 2017i, 2017l, 2017m).

#### ***Co-Dependency of Agency and Context: The Development of North Korean Nuclear Weapon as the Right Time to Build Fitting Context***

North Korea has frequently performed nuclear and missile tests since 2016 and even on a larger scale in 2017. Trump securitization on the nuclear threat executed within this context. The security speech act will instruct the audience to construct and interpret the situation by referring to a selected context and overlooking others (Balzacq, 2005, pp. 13–14) 2005, pp. 13\\uc0\\u8211}14. Basing our argument on this assumption, the development of North Korea's nuclear in 2017 becomes an appropriate context for Trump securitization. Using this context, Trump emphasized the threat to have the audience consent for his *maximum pressure* strategy.

In his 2017 New Year Speech, Kim Jong Un boasted about North Korea's nuclear weapon de-

velopment and its state of being in the final stage of preparing for an inter-continental ballistic test (Manyin, Nikitin, et al., 2021, p. 10). Throughout 2017, North Korea conducted nineteen missile and rocket tests and one thermonuclear device test. North Korean officials declared that the tested intercontinental ballistic missile could be equipped with a large and heavy warhead capable of striking the whole US mainland (Manyin, Nikitin, et al., 2021, p. 15,18).

Such development has alarmed US policy-makers. The ballistic missile which was tested in July and capable of traveling 10.400 km, made Los Angeles, Denver, and Chicago within a nuclear strike reach. Pyongyang's September nuclear test also increased significantly estimated yield to 250 kilotons from its 2016 test, which only reached up to 25 kilotons (Anderson, 2017, p. 153). The acquisition of the two technologies: the intercontinental ballistic missile and thermonuclear warhead, puts North Korea in the more forward stage of having the US within reach of its nuclear weapon (Kim & Snyder, 2019, p. 81; Ludvik, 2019, p. 92). The American public was also aware of the situation as the media coverage exposed. Washington Post firstly raised the issue on 25 July 2017 by reporting the assessment of the US Defense Intelligence Agency on the North's nuclear development (Nakashima et al., 2017). Such a situation brought a sense of heightened vulnerability to the referent objects: the US and the world security (Ifft, 2020, pp. 89–90).

In this context, Trump's securitizing speech acts become the instructions for his audience to look around into the alarming situation of North Korea's nuclear development. As the securitization speech act shall move the audience's attention toward a development taken as hazardous (Balzacq, 2005, p. 13) 2005, p. 13, Trump's speech acts make his audience focus on an alarming nuclear weapon development from an enemy country which should be blocked immediately.

Within the Security Council, the context of Pyongyang's nuclear weapon development also becomes the appropriate context for Trump securitization. In a situation of more frequent and stronger nuclear and missile tests, Trump called for China and Russia's commitment to take part in pressuring North Korea. Trump's speech act activates the frame that North Korea's nuclear weapon is a global threat, no less to China and Russia.

For China, North Korea's nuclear development heading toward the brink of open conflict with the US would disrupt its interest in regional stability (Sulaiman, 2020, pp. 115–116). Hence, China prefers preferred to go along with the US campaign to pressure North Korea. Meanwhile, Russia, which tries to raise its image as a benign superpower for its neighbors, including North Korea (Syawfi & Cahyadi, 2021, p. 70), can no longer ignore the escalating Pyongyang – Washington conflict. Putin's concern about the conflict escalation, which he calls called the mili-



tary hysteria leading to catastrophe (BBC, 2017), has convinced Russia to join in adding pressure on the North. China and Russia's support for UNSC Resolutions shows that their long reluctance to coerce North Korea has finally eased.

#### ***The Dispositive and Structuring Force of Practices: Regulatory and Capacity Instruments***

Securitization can exist without priory designed processes and goals. This argument assumes that the discursive process of securitization takes place in a decisive process of security practices. Security practices are mainly the result of policy tools. Altogether, security policy tools and practices will form a dispositive system of linked practices and tools that enhance or sustain the exercise of power in social institutions (Balzacq, 2011, p. 4,15-16).

Analysis of security tools is essential as it provides background knowledge about a threat and ways to address it for security decision-makers. Nonetheless, despite of the similar patterns, security tools will also reflect different policy preferences and directions as it is also a political decision. Thus, the success of securitization also rests on the political symbolism of the preferred security tools and how they gain sufficient political mobilization (Balzacq, 2011, p. 17).

Trump's securitization goal was to gain support for enacting a *maximum pressure* strategy toward North Korea. Regulatory and capacity tools within the US government had to support Trump to deploy his securitizing move successfully. Regulatory instruments within this assumption are those regulations that permit certain practices to reduce the threat, prohibit certain types of political activities, and promote specific threat perceptions (Balzacq, 2011, p. 17). In 2017, Trump implemented a *maximum pressure* strategy under three new US federal acts (Manyin, Nikitin, et al., 2021, pp. 10–17). These regulatory instruments alone permit the US President to enact sanctions to reduce the threat from those specified as adversaries, prohibit nuclear weapon proliferation, and promote North Korean nuclear as a national security threat.

Hagstorm and Lundstrom (2019, p. 98) argued that nuclear weapon capabilities would bring both deterrence function and status of great-power-ness to the owner. Using the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty, the United States and other nuclear-weapon states focus on policing the world to halt proliferation rather than disarm themselves (Masni, 2021). The US always acts on revisionist states willing to break the nuclear taboo, particularly those who are not their allies. The actions would will range from enacting economic sanctions to deploying military actions. North Korea's nuclear weapon development challenges the US ambition of non-proliferation (Husenicova, 2018, p. 67). This fact and the long enmity of the Korean War residue make the US confront North Korea with denuclearization through different administrations (Anderson, 2017, pp. 154–155).

As such regulatory tools influence, Trump brings his securitization to promote North Korea's nuclear within this threat perception.

Regulatory instruments in the US also enable the US President to enact sanctions on certain adversaries. For North Korea, the US government has used economic sanctions since the end of the Korean War in 1950 under the US Trading with The Enemy Act of 1917. Following the first nuclear crisis in 1993 of the IAEA finding of two undeclared nuclear sites in North Korea (Manyin, Chanlett-Avery, et al., 2021, p. 2), the US also sanctioned for pressuring the North to abandon its nuclear weapon program. The US government uses sanctions to narrow the choice for North Korea between its people's prosperity and nuclear development (Kim & Snyder, 2019, p. 76; Sigal, 2020, p. 163).

Even though economic sanctions are allowed by the US regulatory tools and have become a standard security practice within its foreign policy, Trump politically chose to execute such sanctions differently. As the theoretical assumption suggests, securitization political and symbolic attribution will be embedded more profoundly than its technical aspect. Trump symbolically differed *maximum pressure* from previous US sanctions by presenting it as the heaviest ever and had to be enacted due to the failure of the past administrations.

The second security policy tool which supports securitization is capacity tools. According to Balzacq (Balzacq, 2011, p. 17), capacity tools are skills and necessary resources that enable securitizing actors to make certain decisions or act out specific activities to attain certain policy purposes. As the US President, Trump had the necessary resources to enact sanctions. The US Defense and Intelligence Agencies, the State Department, and the Treasury Department provide the President with sufficient data on military activities, human rights issues, and illicit economic and financial activities used as sanctions basis to North Korea. Thus, Trump had sufficient capacity to base the sanction on the provided data. Such data also makes the Trump administration capable of closely monitoring the sanctions practice in the field. Such intelligence and data reporting capacity serve as capacity tools supporting Trump's securitization aim of *maximum pressure* strategy.

#### ***Maximum Pressure Strategy: The Heaviest Sanctions Collection for North Korea***

Maximum pressure is the policy that Trump frames as an urgent choice to coerce Pyongyang to choose between its economic and nuclear weapon development. The maximum pressure strategy was successfully applied to North Korea throughout 2017 as the goal of Trump's securitization. As the most extensive sanctions regime on North Korea, this strategy became the distinct urgent policy of securitization (Stritzel, 2007, p. 347) that Trump raised through his securitizing speech acts.

Domestically, under the *maximum pressure* strategy, Donald Trump signed three new laws in 2017. Consolidated Appropriation Act, which was signed on 5 May, regulates the prohibition of fund appropriation for direct assistance or reparations for North Korea, the assistance for its refugees, and the maintenance of its gulags and prisons data. On 2 July, the signing of the Countering America's Adversaries through Sanctions Act provides requirements and limitations for the President to impose sanctions on North Korea and other adversaries. Lastly, on 12 December, Trump signed National Defense Authorization Act for the fiscal year 2018. The act provides several regulations related to defense authorization against North Korea (Manyin, Nikitin, et al., 2021, pp. 10–18).

Trump also derived rules by the executive capacity to sign Executive Order 13840, which declares the continuation of a national emergency regarding North Korea (Trump, 2017d). Consequently, the US Government may also sanction North Korea based on its National Emergencies Act 1976. In September 2017, Trump also signed a Proclamation on Travel Ban, which applies more restrictions for North Korean individuals traveling to US. Additionally, Treasury Department enacted nine sanctions packages to individual and business entities from North Korea as well as from other states who conduct illicit economic activities with North Korean entities (Manyin, Nikitin, et al., 2021, pp. 10–18).

The UNSC passed four resolutions regulating sanctions for North Korea within the international sphere in 2017. Resolutions 2356, 2371, 2375, and 2397 provide a massive expansion of military, diplomatic, and economic sanctions against North Korea. Combined with two resolutions adopted in 2016, the sanctions banned more than seventy-five percent of Pyongyang's exports and imports (Manyin, Chanlett-Avery, et al., 2021, p. 11). UNSC also has other four resolutions on sanctions against North Korea in effect since 2006, after the North's first nuclear test.

## Conclusion

During Donald Trump's first year of presidency in 2017, the world witnessed his intense rhetoric against North Korea on social media and in formal speeches. Trump delivered the speech acts to securitize the North Korean nuclear issue in order to legitimize the maximum pressure strategy, i.e. a distinct policy to block the North's threatening development. Trump's speech act on North Korea display three main characters. First, the speech acts try to reinstate North Korea within the enmity frame. Next, the speech acts put the North's nuclear threat in a more alarming stage. Lastly, Trump's speech acts urge a more comprehensive strategy of maximum pressure to block the threat.

Trump's securitization successfully occurs within the congruence of three factors: intersubjectivity, context, and practices. Trump received support from the US public, US Congress, and UNSC states which intersubjectively agreed with the threat perception of North Korea depicted by Trump's speech acts. These empowering audiences provided necessary and sufficient support for Trump to enact *maximum pressure* against North Korea. Contextually, the North Korean nuclear development in 2017 also provided a fit context for Trump to securitize the issue as it was growing on a bigger scale. Meanwhile, security practices of regulatory and capacity instruments within the US Government enabled and supported Trump as the President to securitize North Korea's nuclear threat and drop sanctions as its foreign policy tools.

While it is conclusive to say that Trump's securitizing speech acts on North Korea's nuclear are successful to legitimize the issuance of maximum pressure strategy in 2017, a comparison to Trump's speech acts in 2018 is essential to be explored. Trump preferred another distinct strategy by deploying the engagement strategy of summitry in 2018. Further study on Trump's speech acts in 2018 on the same issue will be necessary to see the speech acts framed from securitization and de-securitization theoretical perspectives.

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