

# TIMES COLONIST

## Talking to North Korea: Trump's latest shift from Republican orthodoxy

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WASHINGTON - Republicans ridiculed rookie senator Barack Obama eight years ago for his stated willingness to sit down and talk to the leaders of rogue regimes like North Korea.

It's now becoming their own party policy.

Donald Trump has declared himself open to discussions with the so-called hermit kingdom — yet another departure from recent Republican orthodoxy by the party's presumptive 2016 nominee.

"I would speak to him," Trump said of the North Korean leader Kim Jong Un during a Reuters interview this week.

"I would have no problem speaking to him."

The news surfaced as Trump prepared to meet Wednesday with Henry Kissinger, the purveyor of a utilitarian, interests-above-ideals vision of foreign affairs who four decades ago helped establish U.S. relations with Communist China.

Yet Trump's recent comments put him squarely at odds with the neoconservative wing of the Republican party that promotes using force to spread democratic values.

In one speech, he blasted U.S. interventions in Iraq and Libya: "(It was a) dangerous idea that we could make Western democracies out of countries that had no experience or interest in becoming a Western democracy. We tore up what institutions they had and then were surprised at what we unleashed — civil war, religious fanaticism, thousands of American lives... lost."

He called U.S. foreign policy an unmitigated disaster.

Contrast that with the final presidential speech by George W. Bush in 2009, a few days before he left office. The last Republican president argued that fighting for democracy was in America's interest.

"Freedom is the universal gift of almighty God, and that liberty and justice light the path to peace," Bush said.

"This is the belief that gave birth to our nation. And in the long run, advancing this belief is the only practical way to protect our citizens. When people live in freedom, they do not willingly choose leaders who pursue campaigns of terror."

Trump's statement about North Korea actually puts him on the side of Obama in 2008.

As a first-time candidate, Obama expressed a willingness to meet without preconditions with the leaders of North Korea, Iran, Cuba and Syria — which prompted sharp rebukes, in the primaries from his then-opponent Hillary Clinton, and again in the general election from a more hawkish Republican, John McCain.

The U.S. now has quasi-normal relations with Cuba, has negotiated a nuclear deal with Iran and still maintains a policy of isolation with North Korea.

The White House declined to get drawn into comparisons between Obama's position and Trump's — but this week's comments have stoked debate among Republicans.

One suggested Trump had the foreign-policy grasp of a chimpanzee. Another neoconservative suggested people like herself might be tempted to abandon their party.

"I think you're going to see a lot of Republicans for the first time in their lives — yes — voting for Hillary Clinton. Because she's not insane," right-wing commentator Jennifer Rubin told MSNBC.

"I've got a lot of complaints about Hillary Clinton's foreign policy — but I don't think she's going to start giving nuclear weapons to the Koreans, or pulling out of NATO."

That was a reference to Trump expressing annoyance over the U.S. paying for the security of Asian countries, and wondering why they didn't get their own nuclear weapons.

On the other hand, some conservatives suggest Trump could provoke positive changes. Doug Bandow of the libertarian Cato Institute welcomed his challenging the bias toward military activism.

Yet he called Trump an imperfect messenger for the cause.

Bandow alluded to the contradictions and impractical conclusions of a candidate who, in one breath, pledges less military engagement, and in the next proposes bombing the Mideast and taking the oil.

"Who knows if (Trump) means what he says about much of anything?"

He's performed the ultimate flip-flop — even on North Korea.

Nowadays he says he might talk to Kim Jong Un. Just a few months ago, he floated the idea of killing him: "I would get China to make that guy disappear in one form or another very quickly," told CBS this year.

The show host asked whether that meant he was calling for an assassination and Trump replied: "Well, you know, I've heard of worse things, frankly... I mean, this guy is a bad dude.