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**Van Jackson**, *Rival Reputations: Coercion and Credibility in US-North Korean Relations*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2016. 228 pp. ISBN: 9781107133310 (HB).

The period since the succession of Kim Jong Un as Supreme Leader of the Democratic People's Republic of Korea (DPRK) has presented an ever-more complicated challenge to US policymakers tasked with formulating White House policy for dealing with Pyongyang. It is in this context that Van Jackson's publication of *Rival Reputations: Coercion and Credibility in US-North Korean Relations* provides an outstanding, in-depth analysis of the dynamics that underpin Washington-Pyongyang interaction under conditions of crisis. In meeting the research objectives for his book, Van Jackson does credit to his institute, the Asia Pacific Center for Security Studies in Hawaii, as well as the wider international community of North Korea researchers. At the same time, however, *Rival Reputations* does not entirely fill the gap in the literature insofar as the period since the succession of Kim Jong Un is concerned.

Jackson's central argument is that both the US and North Korea determine the credibility of the threat posed by the other side based on past incidents and crises. He identifies several instances of US-North Korean interaction that may be considered especially susceptible to a dangerous escalation of tensions and hostility. This work is particularly timely as the US is set to inaugurate a new President, Donald Trump, seen by most commentators as lacking in diplomatic experience and nuance in world affairs.

Jackson's work begins with a meticulous examination of the theoretical literature, from which he builds a theoretical framework for the purpose of analyzing how the reputation of states and their rivals affects their decision-making calculations. His review of the literature is thorough and exhaustive, and this shows both in the development of his theoretical framework and in the case studies that he chooses. Particularly fascinating is his discussion of the 'pessimist' and 'optimist' variants of reputation in assessing the extent to which reputations influence the decision-making of states vis-à-vis their interactions with each other. He undertakes in-depth analysis of the cause-and-effect relationship between states' reputations in the eyes of their prospective adversaries, and their resulting actions within the context of a crisis. The result is a theoretical framework that is comprehensive in scope and precise in its analysis; it also has the potential to be applied in various geostrategic contexts.

A similarly rigorous level of scholarship can be seen in Jackson's five case studies: the USS Pueblo Crisis (1968), the shooting down of a US reconnaissance aircraft (1969), the Ax Murders Incident (1976), and the crises arising from North Korea's nuclear weapons programme since the early 1990s (broken down into two case studies). Van Jackson analytically reviews and critiques the full range of alternative explanations for North Korean actions in these case studies, before emphasizing how these patterns of North Korean actions fit into his theoretical framework.

At the same time, however, it is unfortunate that the work falls short in one key respect, namely, in downplaying the role of individual personalities in explaining the outcomes of US-North Korean interaction. Jackson himself acknowledges this limitation, and counters with the caveat that

the reputations observed in US-North Korea relations accrue at the state level [for reasons that include]... the actions of statesmen are part of what constitutes the actions of states ... the logic of rivalries tends to encourage the statesmen within the rival states to view those in the other through a *realpolitik* lens. (p.23)

This caveat is effective in respect of Jackson's first three case studies, as their occurring during the Kim Il Sung era functions as a control variable. However, this reviewer is not fully convinced that the caveat comprehensively grounds his analysis against the more recent developments since the succession of Kim Jong Il in 1994, and Kim Jong Un in 2011. Such an omission is unfortunate, as it is apparent that the outlook of the North Korean political leadership has evolved since the death of Kim Il Sung.

Kim Il Sung's successor, Kim Jong Il, adopted the *Songum* (Military First) doctrine, granting increased influence to the North Korean military establishment, presumably in an effort to strengthen the military's loyalty to his regime. More recently, Kim Jong Un's *Byungjin* (Parallel Track) doctrine has called for the concurrent development of nuclear weapons alongside economic revival. The twin objectives of *Byungjin* suggests that Kim Jong Un, whilst fearing the prospect of a US-led war of regime change (hence the rationale for the nuclear programme), is also hedging against the prospect of an 'Arab Spring'-like scenario of internal collapse occurring in North Korea. The Arab Spring demonstrated that state repression may no longer suffice in safeguarding regimes against domestic dissent; the economic component of *Byungjin* indicates an effort to improve the country's standards of living and thus further

the regime. Such a shift in the thinking of the North Korean leadership may prove influential in analyzing the decision-making process of Kim Jong Un, given that Kim evidently wants to have both his nuclear cake and his economic pie. Yet, so long as US sanctions over the nuclear weapons programme remain in place, it is difficult to imagine how Kim Jong Un will be able to bring to North Korea the kind of foreign investment that would be needed to revive the DPRK economy.

In this regard, the period since the succession of Kim Jong Un has been replete with numerous episodes that could have been incorporated into *Rival Reputations* to provide an even more interesting survey of the likely security challenges that Kim Jong Un's North Korea will continue to pose. The 'Leap Year' Agreement of February 2012 collapsed shortly thereafter with Pyongyang's testing of another long-range rocket; March 2013 saw a 'War of Words' with Seoul and Washington, marked by an unprecedented level of vitriolic rhetoric; December 2013 saw the execution of Jang Song Thaek, who, as Vice Chairman of the National Defence Commission, was a critical figure in the North Korean government under Kim Jong Un. None of these events, or the *byungjin* doctrine, was incorporated into Jackson's book; Kim Jong Un himself only receives two mentions. A case study examining the period since Kim Jong Un's succession to power would have furthered the impact of this book at a time when the US is itself set to unveil a new president, Donald Trump, whose leadership style appears to be based on personality rather than policy (though, to be fair to Jackson, his book went to press shortly before the outcome of the 2016 US Presidential Election).

Overall, however, these omissions do not detract from Jackson's excellent work; rather, this reviewer commends this significant analysis of the impact of reputations on US-North Korean interactions under conditions of crisis. This reviewer looks forward to reading further publications by Van Jackson that build on his research findings in *Rival Reputations*, particularly in framing the patterns of US-North Korean interaction under Kim Jong Un.

*Er-Win Tan*  
*Senior Lecturer*  
*Department of International and Strategic Studies*  
*University of Malaya*