

JPWWS

JOURNAL OF PEACE AND WAR STUDIES

Inaugural Issue, March 2019



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The Peace and War Center, Norwich University, USA

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ISSN 2641-841X(Print) • ISSN 2641-8428 (Online)

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Dealing with North Korea's Nuclear and Missile Programs: A Chinese Perspective

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Abstract: This article addresses some of the key questions regarding China's deliberations on North Korea's nuclear and missile programs: What are China's views of North Korea's nuclear and missile programs? Where do Chinese and American interests converge and diverge? Who holds the key to North Korea's nuclear problem? How feasible is China's proposed "dual suspension" solution to the nuclear stalemate? I argue that the roots of the North Korea problem lie in the unfinished Korean War. The North Korea nuclear issue must be addressed in the broad context of changing conditions of East Asian security and US-China rivalry. Dialogue and diplomacy remain the best mechanism to tackle the North Korea problem. International cooperation to map out a future for the Korean Peninsula that does not harm the interests of major powers, but is also welcomed by the Korean people, is crucial for the final resolution of the North Korea crisis.

Keywords: *East Asian security, the Korean War, China-North Korea relations, US-China relations, international cooperation.*

Introduction

Since North Korea detonated its first nuclear device in 2006, Northeast Asian security has been seriously challenged. In the decade that followed, North Korea significantly improved its nuclear and missile technologies in spite of international sanctions, and by the end of 2017, it had successfully conducted six nuclear tests and launched an intercontinental ballistic missile. Meanwhile, relations between North Korea and both the United States and China deteriorated. However, developments in 2018, particularly reconciliation between North Korea and South Korea, President Donald Trump's softer approach to North Korea, and China's renewed high-level contacts with North Korea, offered a new opportunity for North Korea's denuclearization and improvement of its external relations.

China has more than 750 miles of borders with North Korea. North Korea's nuclear test sites, including the now demolished Punggye-ri site, are very close to Northeast China. Any accident, nuclear or conventional, would have a catastrophic spillover into

China. China is already surrounded by more nuclear powers and nuclear-capable states than any other country in the world. It is not in China's interest to have a nuclearized and intractable North Korea right next door. Since 2003, when China launched the Six-Party Talks, it has worked hard to achieve a nuclear-free Korean Peninsula, but when and how this objective can be reached depends on multilateral cooperation, especially US-China cooperation.

Moving forward, the international community must coordinate efforts and work together to integrate North Korea into the dynamic Asian regional political economy. Most importantly, the United States and China should address the root cause of the problem – the unfinished Korean War – and create conditions for a peaceful resolution of the North Korea nuclear issue.

What Is China's Position?

China's position on the North Korean nuclear issue has been clear and consistent. Broadly speaking, China has three main objectives: peace and stability in Northeast Asia, denuclearization of the Korean Peninsula, and peaceful resolution of the North Korea issue through dialogue and negotiation. Chinese foreign ministry officials and senior diplomats have reiterated such objectives on many occasions. For example, in January 2018, Cui Tiankai, China's ambassador to the United States, told *USA Today* that China wanted denuclearization of the entire Korean Peninsula, no armed conflict or chaos on its borders, and for any reunification to happen through diplomacy. He suggested China would respect the choice of the Korean people when it comes to the future of the Korean Peninsula, and it was up to them to adopt an independent foreign policy, even if a unified Korea were aligned with the West – as long as it is peaceful and does not threaten China's national security.¹

Some scholars have observed that China is split by the conflicting interests of the nation and the Communist Party. China's national interest and national security dictate that it must work hard to keep North Korea nuclear-free. Yet the Chinese Communist Party's primary interest is to stay in power, and keeping the Korean status quo helps the Chinese policy of resisting, reducing, and replacing the US power in East Asia.² Due to this inherent conflict, China will continue to walk the tightrope of keeping North Korea safe and alive while working with the United States and others to achieve peaceful denuclearization.

The Six-Party Talks that China led between 2003 and 2009 failed to curb North Korea's nuclear development. Realizing the serious situation on the Korean Peninsula, China has in recent years stepped up its efforts to implement United Nations (UN) sanctions against North Korea and tightened its border with North Korea. Meanwhile,

as a pragmatic step, it has proposed the “dual suspension” plan: North Korea suspends further nuclear and missile tests in exchange for suspension of joint US–South Korea military exercises. On this basis, denuclearization of the Korean Peninsula can be achieved peacefully and gradually. China does not like the crisis situation on the Korean Peninsula because it threatens a nuclear war, political turmoil, a massive refugee problem, and other unpredictable negative consequences right next door.

In addition to the nuclear program, North Korea has also developed biological and chemical weapons. Kim Jong-un’s half-brother Kim Jong-nam was apparently killed by North Korean agents with the use of the nerve agent VX at the Kuala Lumpur International Airport in February 2017. China generally opposes North Korea’s development of lethal weapons, especially nuclear weapons near its border area.

The Chinese debate is inconclusive in terms of whether China should continue to support North Korea or not. For example, Jia Qingguo, a prominent international relations scholar at Peking University, noted in 2017 that the omens of war on the Korean Peninsula loom larger by the day: “When war becomes a real possibility, China must be prepared. And, with this in mind, China must be more willing to consider talks with concerned countries on contingency plans.”³ He suggested, “Beijing may have no better choice than to start talking with Washington and Seoul” on issues such as who should control North Korea’s nuclear weapons arsenal in the wake of North Korea’s collapse, whether the US troops can cross the 38th parallel, and how to deal with the expected North Korean refugees. This is a rare public call by an influential Chinese scholar to boost coordination with the United States and South Korea in preparation for North Korea’s collapse even at the risk of alienating or upsetting North Korea.

Jia’s comments triggered strong responses from Zhu Zhihua, vice chairman of the Zhejiang Association of Contemporary International Studies, who wrote an article calling Jia’s comments nonsense and criticizing his overall stance as being pro-American. Zhu asserts that Jia’s arguments completely depart from the socialist core of China’s diplomacy and seriously harm China’s national interests and image, as well as subverting China’s consistent principles and bottom line regarding the North Korea issue. Zhu used unusually harsh words, attacking Jia personally, and argued that especially in his position as a professor at the highly acclaimed Peking University, Jia should not openly express a view on the North Korean issue that deviates from the Chinese government position, as this would mislead the public opinion and cause trouble for society.⁴

Jia responded with equally rough words, criticizing Zhu for not being objective and being insulting. The Peking University professor claimed that instead of seriously engaging in a discussion on how to deal with the external threat, Zhu prefers to point the gun at his fellow citizens. Furthermore, Jia accuses him of treating scholars as suspects,

a bad habit probably acquired during his prior work at the Public Security Bureau of Zhejiang province.⁵

The Jia-Zhu debate reflects the lack of consensus in China regarding how to deal with North Korea now. However, increasingly, many scholars in China believe that North Korea's nuclear weapons program is a direct threat to China and regards the Kim regime as a liability. Shen Zihua of East China Normal University in Shanghai is one of the scholars highly critical of China's North Korea policy. For example, in one speech, he suggested that China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) will not succeed if conflict breaks out in North Korea, just like the United States will not be able to implement its global strategy if there is chaos in its backyard.⁶

Citing Chairman Mao Zedong's famous saying "who is our friend and who is our enemy, this is the primary question for our revolution," Shen asked North Korea and South Korea, who is our friend and who is our enemy? His answer: South Korea is our possible friend, and North Korea is our latent enemy.⁷ Shen believes the fundamental interests of North Korea and China are different. He is also critical of the People's Republic of China (PRC)-Democratic People's Republic of Korea (DPRK) Friendship Treaty, calling it "weird." In his logic, after the PRC-Republic of Korea (ROK) diplomatic ties were established in 1992, the PRC-DPRK alliance was officially over.

On the other hand, as researcher Anny Boc notes, many in China believe that the United States has the sole responsibility for the current crisis on the Korean Peninsula. They are sympathetic to North Korea's security concerns, claiming that the U.S. reluctance to remove its troops from South Korea after the Korean War and its frequent and large scale military exercises with Seoul over the years have left North Korea no other choice but to pursue the development of nuclear weapons. Moreover, they emphasize the official Chinese stance that the United States and South Korea hold the key to solving the North Korean issue and should talk to North Korea directly, as China does not have any decisive influence to do so.⁸ Indeed, China has been supportive of North-South reconciliation and US-DPRK rapprochement since the beginning of 2018, and China even provided air transportation for Kim Jong-un's trip to Singapore for the Trump-Kim meeting in June 2018.

Comrades in Broken Arms?

The Sino-North Korean Mutual Aid and Cooperation Friendship Treaty (中朝友好合作互助条约, 중조우호협력상호원조조약) was signed in Beijing by Kim Il-sung and Zhou Enlai on July 11, 1961. Article 2 of the treaty declares the two nations undertake all necessary measures to oppose any country or coalition of countries that might attack

either nation.

Though some suggest that the treaty remains in effect and is automatically renewed every 20 years, in reality, the status of the treaty is highly ambiguous. In recent memory, no high-ranking Chinese official has mentioned this treaty. Some Chinese scholars privately admit that the 1961 treaty is just a piece of dusty paper.⁹ Other scholars or retired PLA officers have publicly stated that China is not obligated to defend North Korea now. For example, retired Chinese naval colonel Li Jie said, “It is hard to say how China would assist North Korea militarily in case of war, since North Korea is developing nuclear weapons, an act that might have already breached the treaty between the two nations,” noting that the treaty says both nations should safeguard peace and security. If North Korea initiated an attack, China would not be obliged to get involved, said Professor Cai Jian of Fudan University. Antony Wong Dong, a Macau-based military analyst, said that when the treaty was last renewed, China warned North Korea that it must take responsibility for its own behavior. “There won’t be a second Korean war,” claimed Wong. In addition, the *Global Times*, which is published by the official *People’s Daily*, said in an editorial that the best option for North Korea and Kim Jong-un was for the country to give up its nuclear program, and China would protect North Korea if it did. “As soon as North Korea complies with China’s declared advice and suspends nuclear activities... China will actively work to protect the security of a denuclearized North Korean nation and regime,” said the *Global Times*.¹⁰

Indeed, if North Korea is willing to denuclearize, its relations with China will immediately improve, as evidenced by the fact that shortly after President Donald Trump and Chairman Kim Jong-un agreed in early March 2018 to talk about the nuclear issue face-to-face, Kim was welcomed to visit Beijing and met with President Xi Jinping in late March 2018. Though the visit was labelled as “unofficial,” both sides claimed the friendly relationship must be maintained and strengthened. Xi even accepted Kim’s invitation to visit North Korea “at a convenient time.”¹¹ Kim subsequently paid two additional visits to China in May and June 2018. Some people suggested that the Trump-Kim direct meeting may marginalize China’s role in Korean affairs. Kim’s visits to China not only bolstered his bargaining position vis-à-vis Trump, but also essentially returned China to the center stage of East Asian security.

It is clear that Kim initiated rapprochement with South Korea, China, and the United States in 2018 through his New Year’s speech, and Xi promptly grabbed the opportunity to normalize relations with North Korea and reassert China’s influence on the Korean Peninsula. Perhaps the pressures from international sanctions were too much for Kim, or perhaps he really wanted to change policies and turn North Korea into a modern and normal state. For whatever reason, his objective cannot be achieved without China’s support and cooperation. For Xi, President Trump’s threat of a trade war with China

made him rediscover the value of North Korea. Just like the United States often plays the “Taiwan card” at critical junctures of US-China relations, China could play the “North Korea card.” For example, China could choose to either tighten or loosen sanctions on North Korea depending on developments in US-China relations. Unfortunately, both Taiwan and North Korea are likely to fall prey to the fluctuations of US-China relations, and playing the Taiwan and North Korea cards may not be in the long-term interests of the United States and China, respectively.

Sino-DPRK relations greatly improved in 2018. On July 27, 2018, Kim Jong-un visited the cemetery of Chinese soldiers who died during the Korean War. To mark the 65th anniversary of the signing of the armistice, Kim eulogized sacrifices from both China and North Korea during the War and hailed the Sino-DPRK friendly relations as “unprecedentedly special and solid.”¹² In comparison, there were no public official activities in China to commemorate the occasion. Interestingly, South Korean media reported that on the same day a Chinese reconnaissance aircraft entered South Korean Air Defense Identification Zone (ADIZ) that partially overlaps with China’s ADIZ.¹³

The improved Sino-DPRK relations in 2018 were a sharp contrast to previous years, and relations became extremely tense after Kim Jong-il died in 2011. In theory North Korea and China are still “allies”; in practice the relationship is more ambiguous and complex. There are no basic trappings of an alliance. For example, there have been no defense exchanges or joint military exercises between China and North Korea. No North Korea military delegates or students are being trained at China’s National Defense University, which routinely hosts military personnel from dozens of countries from Asia, Africa, and Latin America. Cool feelings towards each other could be detected at the societal level. The Chinese generally look down upon North Korea’s recalcitrant policy and feel sympathetic for North Koreans living miserable lives. The North Koreans reportedly despise the Chinese who, in their views, betrayed North Korea in 1992 when Beijing established diplomatic relations with Seoul. Interactions between North Korea and China also significantly decreased in the past decade. For example, Air China, the only international airline that flies between North Korea and the outside world, suspended its regular flights between Beijing and Pyongyang in November 2017. Regular flights were only resumed in mid-June 2018 as the situation on the Korean Peninsula improved.

Radio Free Asia reported that in early 2018, North Koreans organized assemblies and public speeches to condemn China’s participation in the new UN sanctions against their country. The regime is instilling anti-China feelings among the public, blaming China for betraying the nation and causing economic adversity in North Korea. In one such assembly, one high-level official from Songpyong claimed that though Japan is Korea’s enemy for 100 years, China is Korea’s enemy for 1,000 years.¹⁴ Without doubt, China-North Korea relations significantly deteriorated between 2011 and 2017. The relationship between China

and North Korea used to be dubbed as close as “lips and teeth,” but they were more like “comrades in broken arms” during the first few years of Kim Jong-un’s rule.¹⁵

North Korea has been skilled in manipulating relations between big powers since the 1950s. Declassified documents suggest that North Korea played China and the Soviet Union against each other before, during, and after the Korean War. It swung between China and the Soviet Union during much of the Cold War. For post-Cold War North Korea, the biggest blow was undoubtedly the establishment of diplomatic relations between the PRC and the ROK in 1992. Chinese foreign minister Qian Qichen was dispatched to Pyongyang in July 1992 to explain the situation and to soothe North Korean leaders. Kim Il-sung reportedly went berserk and had the shortest of all the meetings he had had with a Chinese delegation.¹⁶ Kim Il-sung would never set foot in China again.

According to a high-ranking North Korean economic official who defected to South Korea in 2014, after Xi Jinping’s July 2014 visit to South Korea and meeting with then-South Korean President Park Geun-hye, Kim Jong-un called Xi a “son of a bitch” at a meeting with senior officials, adding that his father Kim Jong-il warned him to stay independent from China.¹⁷ Deteriorating China-North Korea relationships in recent years indicate that China’s clout over North Korea might have been overrated.

It was reported, but not confirmed, that then-Chinese president Hu Jintao met with Kim Jong-un’s uncle Jang Song-taek in Beijing in August 2012, just months after Kim Jong-il’s death. Jang told Hu he wanted Kim Jong-nam to be the country’s new leader. The meeting was secretly taped by Zhou Yongkang, a standing committee member of the Chinese Communist Party politburo, who allegedly tipped off Kim Jong-un. Months later, Jang was executed for treason. And several years later, Kim Jong-nam was assassinated in Malaysia in 2017. Zhou was sentenced to life in 2015 for bribery, abuse of power, and “leaking state secrets.”¹⁸ North Korea began to distrust the Chinese leadership after learning they had done nothing to prevent what it saw as a move to overthrow its government. Meanwhile, Beijing grew suspicious of Pyongyang for purging Jang, who had previously acted as an intermediary between the two countries.

China is often depicted as a country holding the key to North Korea’s survival. Many people suggest that if China cut off the oil supply to North Korea, the Pyongyang regime would collapse within months. Even if it is true, China is unwilling to completely abandon North Korea not because it supports Pyongyang’s nuclear program, but because it is afraid of the consequences of a failed North Korea. North Korean refugees, for example, would inundate China’s northeast region, creating social, economic, political, and security challenges to China’s border areas.

Despite the deep freeze in the relationship between 2011 and 2017, Sino-DPRK relations seem durable, especially when international situations change and when the

two countries need each other. Interestingly, even before Kim Jong-un's surprise March 2018 visit to China that repaired bilateral relationship to a great extent, Beijing's *Global Times*, in an editorial, asserted that friendly Sino-DPRK relationship should not be disrupted by South Korea, the United States, and Japan. It suggested that North Korea was a country to be respected since it "has high degree of independence and autonomy," which is very rare in Northeast Asia now. The editorial also argued that maintaining friendly relations was in the interest of both countries. For China, North Korea is part of its strategy of good-neighbor diplomacy, and keeping good relations with North Korea will give China "space to turn around" (回旋空间) in Northeast Asian affairs.¹⁹ As tensions between the United States and China increase, the editorial may be reflecting the Chinese government's position, and it is a clear indication that China may wish to play the North Korea card, especially when its relations with the United States worsen.

US and Chinese Interests: Convergence and Divergence

The United States and China may have a common interest in denuclearizing North Korea, but they have different visions for the future, particularly regarding the US troops in Asia after North Korea denuclearizes. Until now, the United States and China have not seriously discussed the roadmap for North Korea's future. Distrust between the United States and China has prevented them from fully cooperating on the issue. What limits US-China cooperation is the divergence of their interests. There are two major differences: the cause or nature of North Korea's nuclear program, and the final solution.

Regarding the cause or nature of North Korea's nuclear program, the Chinese government believes that both North Korea and the United States are partially to blame with their erroneous policies, but the United States believes it is all North Korea's fault. North Korea's *songun* (military first) policy runs against the global trend of focusing on economic development after the Cold War. The more North Korea develops nuclear and missile programs, the more isolated it will be.

It is worth mentioning that the United States did not pursue the so-called cross-recognition policy after Russia and China recognized the Republic of Korea in 1991 and 1992, respectively. The United States and Japan did not follow up by recognizing DPRK in exchange, as tacitly agreed upon. Many in the West believed that North Korea would collapse or implode soon after the Cold War. They did not take the young and untested Kim Jong-un seriously either, when he succeeded his father in 2011. The United States considers North Korea a "rogue state" and has been moving North Korea on and off the US list of "state-sponsors of terrorism." North Korea's insecurity derived from the unfinished Korean War has not been properly acknowledged and addressed by the United States and its allies.

Regarding the final solution to the North Korea problem, China has consistently proposed peaceful means while the United States largely prefers sanctions, with occasional threats to use military force against North Korea. Over the years, the Chinese government has attempted various peaceful means, including the Six-Party Talks and most recently the “dual suspension” proposal. Basically, both the United States and North Korea need to take a step back and change the Cold War-style approach and establish a peace mechanism. However, various US administrations believe that maximum pressure through toughest sanctions, backed by joint US-ROK military drills, will bring North Korea to its knees.

Over the past two decades, the US policy towards North Korea has not been consistent. In 1994 the two countries reached the Agreed Framework for North Korea to terminate its nuclear program in exchange for two light-water nuclear reactors from the United States. It turned out that neither side kept its end of the bargain. During the Bill Clinton administration, the US-North Korea relationship was relatively cordial, with President Clinton himself planning to visit Pyongyang after dispatching his Secretary of State Madeleine Albright there in October 2000. Albright was warmly received by Kim Jong-il in Pyongyang, and the atmosphere in both countries was optimistic. Commenting on Albright’s visit, President Clinton said, “We have some hope of resolving our outstanding differences with North Korea and looking forward to the day when they will truly close the last chapter in the aftermath of the Korean War.”²⁰ The prospect of Clinton’s making such an important foreign visit so late in his presidency to a state the United States had charged with supporting terrorism raised mixed reactions and a heated discussion even within his own administration.²¹ In the end, Clinton did not visit North Korea before he left the White House in January 2001, but he did travel to North Korea at the invitation of Kim Jong-il in August 2009 as a former US president to help secure the release of two American journalists detained by North Korea.

After 9/11, President George W. Bush immediately named North Korea part of the “axis of evil,” together with Iran and Iraq, and the US-North Korea relations froze during the rest of his term. President Barack Obama exercised “strategic patience” towards North Korea, essentially waiting for the North Korean regime to collapse. And the Donald Trump administration has sent out mixed signals—from punishing North Korea with “fire and fury” to abruptly accepting Kim Jong-un’s invitation to meet fact-to-face. It is interesting to ask: Who is more unpredictable, Trump or Kim?

Meanwhile, the Trump administration does not seem to have a consensus regarding its North Korea policy. In January 2018, media reports revealed that Victor Cha’s nomination to be the US ambassador to South Korea was scrapped by the Trump Administration due to Cha’s disagreement with the so-called “bloody nose” strategy favored by some Trump Administration officials. In a *Washington Post* op-ed piece,

Cha outlined his logic against a preventive US military strike that may trigger a nuclear war. He cautioned that Kim Jong-un may remain undeterred by a “bloody nose” while hundreds of thousands of American lives will be in danger. “To be clear: The president would be putting at risk an American population the size of a medium-size US city – Pittsburgh, say, or Cincinnati – on the assumption that a crazy and undeterrable dictator will be rationally cowed by a demonstration of US kinetic power,” asserted Cha, let alone millions of Koreans who may perish in a nuclear war.²² It may never be known what exactly cost Cha his potential job as the US ambassador to Seoul, but it is clear his view is not shared by the Trump Administration.

Coincidentally, Joseph Yun, the US State Department's top diplomat in charge of North Korea policy, suddenly announced his retirement at the end of February 2018. Yun joined the Foreign Service in 1985 and is in his early 60s. Yun's unexpected departure raises questions and adds to uncertainty over President Trump's North Korea policy. The veteran diplomat had a reputation as a proponent of dialogue when it comes to dealing with North Korea. “He was a great advocate for dialogue and for diplomacy, and I think it's unfortunate that his voice will no longer be in the conversation inside the US government,” said Abraham Denmark, a former US deputy assistant secretary of defense for East Asia who worked closely with Yun.²² With voices from moderates such as Yun being shrugged off, it is unclear to what extent the Trump Administration is committed to diplomatic efforts to peacefully solve the North Korea nuclear crisis.

China, on the other hand, generally considers North Korea a distraction from its main foreign policy objective of implementing the Belt and Road Initiative. Foreign Minister Wang Yi repeatedly warned that China would not permit war or chaos on its border. China is apparently preparing for the worst. There was a growing sense of crisis in China in the past few years. Jilin Province is close to North Korea's nuclear test site. The December 6, 2017 edition of the province's Communist Party newspaper, *the Jilin Daily*, ran a full-page feature headlined, “Knowledge about and protection from nuclear weapons.” The piece included various illustrated instructions: close windows and doors if there is no time to evacuate, to reduce radiation exposure; when going out, wear surgical masks and coats; take iodine immediately; and so on. The paper did not say why it carried those guidelines, which are obviously precautions for an emergency on the Korean Peninsula.

The Chinese government also instructed northeastern provinces, including Jilin and Liaoning, to start preparing to open camps that could absorb an expected influx of displaced North Koreans, according to Chinese Communist Party insiders. The sources said multiple planned facilities would have an estimated capacity of up to 500,000 people. Stockpiling of food and tents had apparently begun as of the end of 2017.²³

For a long time, the United States has insisted that North Korea give up its nuclear program before the two countries can talk. The Trump administration showed some flexibility. Former Secretary of State Rex Tillerson suggested in December 2017 that the United States was ready to talk without preconditions. But the White House quickly backtracked, saying US policy towards North Korea remained unchanged. Tillerson was replaced by the CIA director Mike Pompeo in March 2018 right after a Trump-Kim meeting was announced. Pompeo has made several trips to North Korea since then, emerging as a top advocate of engagement with Pyongyang.

In February 2018, during the Pyeongchang Winter Olympics, Vice President Mike Pence was reportedly planning to meet with the North Korean delegation including Kim Jong-un's sister, but North Korea cancelled the meeting at the last minute. Before and during the Olympics, Pence emphasized that there was no daylight between the United States and its allies on the need to isolate North Korea diplomatically and economically until it abandons nuclear and ballistic missile programs.²⁴ Still Pence told journalists on his way back to the United States that the United States and South Korea agreed on terms for further engagement with North Korea – first by the South Koreans and potentially with the United States soon thereafter. The frame for the diplomatic path forward is this: The United States and its allies will not stop imposing steep and escalating costs on North Korea until it takes clear steps toward denuclearization. But the Trump administration is now willing to sit down and talk with the regime while that pressure campaign is ongoing.²⁵ Such shifting and sometime conflicting positions reflect a lack of consensus within the US government on how to deal with North Korea.

China has always encouraged the United States and North Korea to directly talk to each other. In a phone conversation with Trump on March 9, 2018, President Xi Jinping said he appreciated Trump's desire to resolve the North Korea issue politically and hoped all sides could show goodwill to avoid doing anything that might affect or interfere with the improving situation on the Korean Peninsula.²⁶ Though the Chinese government has long argued that the nuclear issue is a problem between the United States and North Korea, when the United States and North Korea were planning to talk directly to each other, some analysts fear that China is being sidelined or marginalized in the process, which may lead to China's decreasing influence over the future of the Korean Peninsula. Other analysts believe that China still plays a crucial role in the denuclearization process. One summit between Trump and Kim would not be enough to break the nuclear stand-off. "The nuclear and missile issues require more protracted talks," said Fudan University professor Wei Zongyou. "In this process, China will be an active supporter and promoter of denuclearization."²⁷ China's assistance has been appreciated by the United States. On many occasions, President Trump has praised China for working together to deal with the North Korea challenge.²⁸

Does China consider North Korea a “buffer zone?” Yes and No. Modern military technology makes a buffer in conflict meaningless since one can easily launch missiles over the buffer zone and hit the target far away. However, the existence of North Korea still serves Chinese interest diplomatically to some extent. China “is the umbilical cord that keeps North Korea alive,” Scott Snyder, a Korea expert at the Council on Foreign Relations, has observed. “But their main interest is in stability on the peninsula. So they’ve got leverage that they can’t use, essentially. Because if they use the leverage, they’re going to generate instability.”²⁹ Such a dilemma has prevented China from taking a more aggressive approach toward denuclearizing North Korea.

Options

After the Trump-Kim meeting in Singapore in June 2018, expectations grew regarding North Korea’s denuclearization. However, no substantive progress has been achieved since then due to US and North Korean differences on the sequencing of steps that must be taken by both sides. There will be no easy or simple solution to the problem. With rising tensions between China and the United States on trade, Taiwan, the South China Sea, and other issues, China is likely to maintain strong relations with North Korea in the near future, which will make denuclearizing North Korea more complex. Some interpret this as China’s support for North Korea, without realizing that for its own security, China basically has to ensure that the North Korean regime will not suddenly collapse. And one should not forget that the North Korea issue is inextricably linked to US-China relations. One way for China or the United States to get out of the tense US-China rivalry is to improve relations with North Korea so as to exert pressure on the other side. In other words, both China and the United States could play the North Korea card to express their dissatisfaction with each other and force the other side to change its policy.

So what can be done about North Korea from China’s perspective? Most importantly, North Korea’s denuclearization must proceed peacefully, and dialogue at the bilateral and multilateral levels must be promoted. Though the Six-Party Talks failed in 2009, as a conflict resolution mechanism, this multilateral framework may still be useful. It may be difficult to bring all the six parties together again, but bilateral and multilateral talks and negotiations between and among members of the group can still take place.

As part of the “dual suspension” approach, the Chinese government has proposed a deal in which North Korea suspends its rapidly advancing nuclear and missile programs in exchange for the United States and South Korea suspending their joint military exercises, as a prelude to negotiations to eventually rid the North of nuclear weapons. The easing of tensions between North Korea and South Korea after the 2018 Pyeongchang Winter Olympics could be attributed to this model. North Korea refrained

from conducting any missile or nuclear tests during the Olympics and the United States and South Korea postponed their military drills. During the annual meeting of the National People's Congress in Beijing in March 2018, Chinese foreign minister Wang Yi reaffirmed China's position that "suspension for suspension" was the initial step to achieving peace on the Korean Peninsula. He called upon the United States and North Korea to talk to each other directly. Such bilateral negotiations, supported by the international community, would create favorable conditions for denuclearization and peace in the region.³⁰ The June 2018 Singapore meeting between Trump and Kim apparently also followed the logic of "dual suspension."

The United States, China, and all other stakeholders must seriously address the North Korea nuclear issue from the broad context of post-Cold War Asian security and political economy. There is no simple solution, and a package of agreements and frameworks will likely be the outcome of such serious discussions among all players involved. It is unrealistic for the United States to expect North Korea to swiftly denuclearize right after the Trump-Kim meeting.

Kim Jong-un's father Kim Jong-il reportedly told Madeleine Albright when the former US Secretary of State visited Pyongyang in October 2000 that in the 1970s, Deng Xiaoping, the Chinese leader, was able to conclude that China faced no external security threat and could accordingly refocus its resources on economic development. With the appropriate security assurances, Kim said, he would be able to convince his military that the United States was no longer a threat and then be in a similar position to refocus his country's resources.³¹ This can perhaps serve as a starting point: If we want North Korea to give up its nuclear program, can we guarantee its security? Without anything substantive in return, why would we expect North Korea just willingly abandon the nuclear and missile programs? More importantly, what does the international community plan to do to help North Korea integrate into the regional development, such as China's BRI or the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP)?

Denuclearization is an objective, not a pre-condition, of peaceful talks. Without security guarantees from the United States or others that North Korea will not be attacked after it gives up nuclear weapons, it might be wishful thinking to expect North Korea to voluntarily denuclearize. A softer approach towards the North that takes its concerns into account has the potential to achieve this ultimate objective. According to former US Secretary of State Rex Tillerson, the United States had consulted with China about ways to handle refugees and contain North Korea's nuclear weapons if a conflict breaks out. "[T]he most important thing to us would be securing those nuclear weapons they've already developed and ensuring that...nothing falls into the hands of people we would not want to have it. We've had conversations with the Chinese about how might that be done," he said. The two sides were believed to have discussed these matters during the bilateral security dialogue in Washington in June 2017. That was around the time when Beijing

issued the instructions on the refugee camps. Tillerson also said the US had assured China that, if American forces invade North Korea across the military demarcation line, they will withdraw once certain conditions are met.³² Now that Tillerson is out, it is unclear whether the United States and China have continued such dialogues.

Broadly speaking, there are three approaches to addressing North Korea's nuclear issue: continuation of the sanction-based policy to force North Korea to surrender its nuclear program; military actions to destroy North Korea's nuclear facilities and perhaps the North Korean regime once and for all; and returning to negotiation table and seeking a mutually acceptable solution.

Between 2006 and 2017, the UN Security Council adopted 10 resolutions regarding North Korea, with the latest one unanimously passed in December 2017 banning over 90 percent of the DPRK's foreign trade, limiting its imports of crude oil to under 4 million barrels a year, and shutting down its overseas companies. Meanwhile, the US and its allies have imposed additional, unilateral sanctions while increasing military pressure on the DPRK. Sanctions, backed up by military preparedness, have been the approach preferred by the United States. Such an approach has seriously restricted North Korea's economic activities but failed to stop its nuclear and missile programs.

China has supported UN resolutions to sanction North Korea's defiant behavior, but at the same time has argued that sanctions must be aimed at promoting talks. "Pressure without talks would lead nowhere," commented Fu Ying, a senior Chinese diplomat.³³ In her view, all UN resolutions must be faithfully and completely abided by, in conjunction with specific steps to talk to North Korea.

On the other hand, any military action will have unbearable consequences for all parties, especially the Korean people. As US Secretary of Defense James Mattis put it, the war on the Korean Peninsula will be "catastrophic" and "the worst kind of fighting in most people's lifetimes."³⁴ South Korean President Moon Jae-in has insisted that no US-led war on the Korean Peninsula will be allowed without South Korea's consent. So the only viable option is to return to the negotiation table despite its many shortcomings.

Demanding North Korea to abandon its nuclear program first before negotiations can begin between the United States and North Korea is like putting the cart before the horse. However, the international community, including China, is very adamant: North Korea must denuclearize. Given the situation, China's "dual suspension" proposal is probably the most realistic and pragmatic way to get the ball rolling. Denuclearization will not take place overnight; it will be a phased and long process that may last for years.

Some people in Washington, DC do not support US engagement with North Korea since they believe talking to a rogue regime is to reward its bad behavior. Such a condescending

attitude is not conducive to peaceful resolution to any disputes. Diplomacy is an art of reaching a mutually acceptable solution to a dispute without resorting to war. Negotiators do not have to like each other, but they share the same purpose of finding a solution to a problem through peaceful means. A successful resolution is not guaranteed through negotiations, but as Winston Churchill once said, “meeting jaw to jaw is better than war.”³⁵

Conclusion

A blind spot in the current debate about North Korea is a fundamental question that is barely asked: Why does North Korea want to develop nuclear weapons in the first place? If the international community can create conditions under which North Koreans feel it unnecessary to develop nuclear weapons, then this problem may automatically disappear.

Possessing nuclear weapons does not necessarily make North Korea more dangerous; it's the intention to use them that does. As Kim Jong-un's 2018 New Year's Day message reveals, North Korean leaders are not irrational or suicidal. They are unlikely to use nuclear weapons without provocation.³⁶ With diplomatic, political, and economic incentives, North Korea is more likely to change its nuclear policy and join the international community. Developments in 2018, including Kim Jong-un's active diplomacy and summits with Xi Jinping, Moon Jae-in, and Donald Trump, are encouraging. Kim has also focused his attention on North Korea's economic development through his *byungjin* policy. Major powers should not let this rare opportunity of welcoming North Korea into the international community slip by.

Like many observers in and outside of China, Fu Ying, the veteran Chinese diplomat, called upon the United States to switch its strategy and talk to North Korea directly without pre-conditions. She suggested that the United States and its allies tend to pay more attention to possible restrictions on North Korea than addressing its security concerns in exchange for abandoning its nuclear program.³⁷ President Trump's meeting with Kim Jong-un in June 2018 is a positive step in the right direction. Despite criticisms that the Trump-Kim meeting in Singapore has not produced much substantive progress in denuclearization, the peaceful approach is preferable to conflicts and wars. At the minimum, such meetings help build trust that is severely lacking between the two sides.

Moving forward, North Korea's legitimate security concerns must be addressed. If the international community can integrate North Korea into the international system, North Korea will not have the intention to use those weapons. The United States and China, as the two leading players in the region, have yet to move beyond the Korean War and draw up a future for the Korean Peninsula acceptable to the Korean people. Without coordinated efforts by regional powers, denuclearization of North Korea will be

wishful thinking. Continued US-China cooperation is crucial. As former Asian affairs senior director on the National Security Council Jeffrey Bader remarked before the 2018 Trump-Kim meeting in Singapore, the United States must consult with allies and partners regarding North Korea, and Chinese president Xi Jinping needs to be consulted early and often.³⁸

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The North Korean Nuclear Weapons and Ballistic Missile Threat: An American Perspective*

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Abstract: North Korea's nuclear weapons program has grown surprisingly fast in recent years. The program has gone from small explosions in testing to well over 100 kilotons, even in conservative estimates. As their nuclear weapons capability has grown, so have their capabilities of the platforms that carry it. North Korea now has nuclear capable missiles that can target nodes all over the Asia-Pacific region and parts of the United States. Often forgotten in the rhetoric of the press all over the world regarding the North Korean threat is proliferation. Yet, this is a proven threat that is a danger to security and stability of nation-states in regions all over the world – but especially in the Middle East. Thus, once again, despite America's hesitance to address the North Korean threat, Pyongyang's nuclear weaponization and ballistic capabilities are at the top of Washington's policy agenda. The Trump administration appears to be using both the carrot and the stick – agreeing to talks between the leaders of the two nations yet maintaining what appears to be effective sanctions and other important pressure initiatives against the DPRK.

Keywords: *North Korea, nuclear proliferation, missile proliferation, nuclear weapons, ballistic missiles, foreign policy*

Introduction

North Korea's nuclear weaponization program has been under world scrutiny since the first nuclear crises ended up being "solved" by the Agreed Framework in 1994. But even from the very beginning of the on-again-off-again nuclear crisis that North Korea has created for the international community, for the most part, North Korea was never at the top of the agenda for the United States. In the 1990s, as war raged in Bosnia and a plethora of issues existed all over the world that were in Washington's interests, despite the growing threat of North Korea's Weapons of Mass Destruction (WMD), the US rarely put North Korean issues at the top of its agenda. When the attacks of 9/11/01 occurred, this situation became exacerbated. For the rest of the following decade, the United States was focused first on Afghanistan and then on both Iraq and Afghanistan. But things have changed. When President Barak Obama briefed then President-elect Donald Trump on the most compelling security issues he would confront, most analysts agree that they were speaking of the North Korean threat – largely arising from nuclear weapons and the platforms that would carry them. In fact, according to

press sources, President Obama told President Trump that North Korea was the most urgent problem he would face.¹ As of August 2018, this has not changed.

There are many reasons why the views of American policy makers toward North Korea have changed. Key among these reasons are the evolving and developing capabilities of North Korea's weapons systems. Of course, key among these systems are the nuclear weaponization program and the platforms that would carry nuclear weapons – largely ballistic missiles. When the North Koreans conducted their first nuclear test in 2006, it was considered a threat, but the actual threat it could present to the United States was more ambiguous. That is not the case now. Thus, it is important to cover how North Korea's nuclear weaponization program has evolved to the capabilities it possesses in 2018.

While North Korea's nuclear weaponization development is compelling and important when evaluating the threat we face from that rogue state, a nuclear weapons system is only as good as the platforms that will carry it. Thus, I will evaluate North Korea's ballistic missile programs and the almost lightning-fast speed at which they have been developed. There are a variety of reasons that analysts have assessed for the very fast growth in North Korea's ballistic missile programs – particularly in the Kim Jong-un era.² I will address all of this and will also address alternative platforms that North Korea could use to conduct an attack against the United States or one of our allies.

There has been a great deal of publicity surrounding North Korea's nuclear and ballistic missile programs – particularly from 2016 to 2018. But most of this publicity has revolved around the threat that these systems present to the region or to the United States. Very little has been reported on North Korea's threat to the United States and its allies through military proliferation. This article will address this exact security threat. North Korea is a proven proliferator of nuclear weapons to the Middle East (Syria and possibly Iran). And North Korea is also a proven proliferator of the platforms that could carry nuclear weapons in these countries (ballistic missiles).³ Thus, I will address this very important but largely unreported aspect of the nuclear and ballistic missile threat that North Korea presents to the United States and its interests worldwide.

All of these issues are important in the consideration of the US perspective surrounding the North Korean threat and how to address it. While there is disagreement among pundits, analysts and policy makers – often based on which end of the political spectrum one views the world from, I will use the evidence as it is presented in this article to conclude with policy recommendations.

The Evolving and Advancing North Korean Nuclear Weaponization Programs

There is no doubt that most analysts now assess North Korea to have a small number of nuclear weapons – up to 30-60 weapons is the number many analysts project.⁴ While it seems routine that North Korea is now regarded as a nuclear power, it can be easy to forget that just 12 short years ago, there was much ambiguity surrounding North Korea's nuclear

weaponization programs, the types of nuclear weapons that Pyongyang actually held in its possession, and what platforms were viable to carry this threat throughout the region, and (of great concern from an American perspective) even to American sovereign territory. Much of the ambiguity is gone now. But many questions remain. There is still debate regarding how extensive the damage would be from a North Korean weapon (depending on where it was detonated). There is also some debate about the number of weapons and how they would be used (though much of the argument about the numbers has largely abated). Finally, there is the question of whether or not this program is simply a paper tiger – a program (or set of programs) that the North Koreans choose to display for the world simply as a “Potemkin Village,” yet have no intentions of ever using.⁵ To truly understand the North Korean program and how serious Pyongyang is about using it, one needs to examine the evolving capabilities and the advancing power of this set of weapons programs. Thus, in this section, I will describe and analyze how this program has evolved and advanced since the first test was conducted.

North Korea conducted its first nuclear test in 2006, in a move that shocked the world and showed the world that it had reached the point in its development where it could now weaponize fissile material. The test was conducted during a time period when North Korea was under heavy sanctions and sanction-like initiatives, such as the Patriot Act Section 311, and it is possible that the test was conducted to force the United States back to the bargaining table. It is still not clear whether that was true or not. Nevertheless, the first test produced a resulting explosion that most analysts assessed to be 0.5 to 1.0 kilotons. The test showed that while the North Koreans had now reached the capability of weaponizing their nuclear program, it appeared to still be very small and primitive in what it could do.⁶

While the test in 2006 was quite small, it was at least a partial success. However, it showed that the North Koreans still had a lot of work to do in improving their nuclear weaponization programs. Certainly, this was not (as we now see) something that could happen overnight. But it was something that the North Koreans were obviously continuing to develop. As President Bush left office in 2009 to be replaced by the newly elected President Obama, there were those who were hopeful that things would progress differently. In fact, the Bush administration’s talks with North Korea ended up in total failure and with North Korea giving up none of its nuclear weapons. Thus, perhaps the North Koreans, rather than showing promise as a new American President took the helm, chose to take an aggressive stance as the world looked on. One of the ways that they did this was to conduct a nuclear test. On May 25, 2009, just a few short months after President Obama was inaugurated, the North Koreans once again tested a nuclear device (likely a weapon). This time the yield from the weapon increased significantly, and the assessment reached by most analysts was 2-4 kilotons. While still a low yield (and probably a primitive weapon), the test showed Pyongyang had made progress from the first test conducted nearly three years earlier.⁷

North Korea’s third underground nuclear test (2013) was believed at the time to be a test with a yield of six to seven kilotons.⁸ The third test was the largest of the tests to

that date and showed that North Korea continued to advance its capabilities. The third test was far more concealed than previous tests – making it more difficult for American and allied intelligence collection to assess whether the detonation was of a Plutonium or (Highly Enriched Uranium) HEU device.⁹ According to press reports, high-ranking Iranian officials were present at the test – perhaps to consider collaboration for their own program.¹⁰ North Korea has been assessed for several years to have the capability to mount a 500 kilogram HEU warhead on a missile. The most likely candidate for this at the time would have been the No Dong. North Korea probably got the designs for the warhead as a result of their nuclear deal with Pakistan. Pakistan acquired the No Dong systems (at least some of which came as a result of a trade deal that involved “nukes for missiles”) from North Korea. Pyongyang supplied No Dong missiles to Pakistan beginning in the late 1990s, and Pakistan probably ended the deal because of United States pressure around 2002.¹¹ With a range of up to 1,500 kilometers, the No Dong can hit important targets all over Japan. Key among these potential targets are several US military bases and Tokyo.¹²

North Korea had typically conducted nuclear tests several years apart. That changed in 2016. By the fall of 2015, imagery had shown the North Koreans were building a tunnel at the test facility near Punggye-ri located in northeastern North Korea. The North Koreans decided to conduct the fourth nuclear test during January of 2016. In an interesting twist, North Korea announced to the world that they had detonated a “hydrogen bomb.” To date, there is no definitive evidence to support this claim (at least not in unclassified channels). The test was similar in size to the third underground test North Korea conducted. It did however show that North Korea was continuing to advance and tweak its nuclear weapons program – and a big part of this would be the capability to put a nuclear warhead on a missile.¹³

North Korea conducted its fifth nuclear test in September of 2016. In keeping with its march toward a larger yield, this was the largest test yet conducted by Pyongyang. Additionally, in a break with precedent, this test was conducted just eight months following North Korea’s fourth nuclear test. Previous tests had been conducted several years apart. The majority of analysts who assessed the yield of the blast estimated that the nuclear device power was 10-12 kilotons. Following the completion of the test, North Korea publicly announced that this test was a “smaller, lighter” device – presumably a device that could be mounted on a ballistic missile. This test left no ambiguity about the fact that North Korea was advancing its nuclear programs at a stepped up pace.¹⁴

A year after North Korea’s fifth nuclear weapons test (September 2017), North Korea conducted its largest nuclear test ever. In fact, this test was probably up to 10 times larger than the fifth nuclear test (which itself was far larger than any previous tests). Many experts assessed the sixth nuclear test to have a yield of 100 kilotons or more. Some analysts judged the yield of the test to be much higher. A research institute in Norway released estimates assessing the yield of the blast for the weapon tested to be around 250 kilotons. Kim Jong-un was photographed in North Korean propaganda photos, showing a briefing being conducted with him about a two-stage thermonuclear device. Based on the photos,

it appears that the missile that would carry such a device would be the “Hwasong-14,” a missile I will address in detail later. In a rather shocking bit of publicity, the North Koreans announced to the world that the sixth nuclear test was of a “thermonuclear device.” Pyongyang further asserted that the test was of a hydrogen bomb – a device with the possibility of being mounted on a ballistic missile. Based on the data from the test and the numerous reports regarding its yield, this test showed that North Korea had (easily) tested the most capable nuclear device seen to date. In 11 short years, North Korea had gone from a yield of about one kiloton to a yield of (even in the most conservative estimates) at least 100 kilotons. This leaves no doubt that the North Korean nuclear threat is one that has advanced quickly and must be taken seriously.¹⁵

Platforms That Can Carry North Korean Nuclear Weapons

North Korea has been considered a potential nuclear threat since before the Agreed Framework was negotiated to fruition in 1994. This is important, and while some have said in the past that North Korea’s nuclear threat was really a “paper tiger,” the compelling developments in the size of the yield of North Korea’s nuclear weapons should prove to the world (as it was intended) that Pyongyang is serious about developing its nuclear weapons capability to the point that it cannot only threaten the region North Korea sits in, but potentially the United States. However, nuclear weapons systems are only as good as the platforms that deliver them. Thus, it will be important to assess details regarding North Korea’s ballistic missiles systems, and another platform that most analysts have not considered. In this section, I will describe the plethora of missile systems that North Korea now possesses or that are in development. An assessment of this section will provide the reader with an explication not only of the capabilities Pyongyang’s missiles have, but the gradual development of these platforms since the early 1990s.

Because North Korea can potentially launch Scud missiles that are nuclear-capable, it is important to understand the range of these missiles. While it is unlikely North Korea will use these missiles, if they chose to attack South Korea, these may be the kinds of platforms that would be used – and all of the systems that North Korea has are road-mobile. North Korea’s Scud missiles range from around 300 kilometers for the Scud-B to nearly 1,000 kilometers for the extended range Scud, also known as the “Scud-ER.” All of these missiles are currently operational and have been tested many times, not just in North Korea but in nations that North Korea has proliferated them to.¹⁶ While these missiles are largely 1960s era technology and largely considered primitive and less than accurate, they are credible weapons for attacking cities and present a legitimate threat to South Korea.

A missile that North Korea could potentially use as an Intercontinental Ballistic Missile (ICBM) (though this is unlikely because it takes days to set up and could be destroyed before launch) is the Taepo Dong series of missiles, the latest version of it being called by some the “Taepo Dong 3,” while the North Koreans call it the “Unha-3.”¹⁷ While this

system could potentially be used for long-range missile launches, the North Koreans call it a space launch vehicle (SLV), and one should keep in mind that this is also a good way to test three stage ballistic missile technology (as the North Koreans have done). On February 7, 2016, North Korea completed a successful launch of the Taepo Dong (for the second time). Pyongyang was able to also successfully put a satellite into space. Following the launch, South Korea was able to retrieve parts of the first stage. Specialists who conducted tests and analysis of the “Unha-3” assessed that if fired as a missile, it potentially had a range of 12,000 kilometers. Additionally, analysis of the launch site following the 2016 rocket launch showed an underground railway. This now allows technicians to ready the missile for launch more covertly than in the past and thus shortens warning time for the United States and its allies (from as long as several weeks to as short as a few days), should the rocket be carrying a military payload. With regards to that payload, some analysts have assessed that this rocket was capable of carrying a larger payload than previous versions.¹⁸

North Korea has tested a mobile missile capable of hitting Japan in recent years. This system, the No Dong, was tested several times during 2014. Simulated launches occurred during 2015, as well. During 2014, the testing of what appeared to be a modified version of the No Dong showed a version that appeared to be capable of carrying a nuclear warhead. In addition, analysis of the firing angle when the systems were launched may indicate a modification of the missile completed in order to evade ballistic missile defense systems, such as the Patriot Advanced Capability-3 (PAC-3).¹⁹

North Korea conducted tests of an intermediate range ballistic missile on a mobile launcher (the Musudan) during June of 2016. They conducted two launches, one of which was successful (though the other launch may have been a decoy). The Musudan tested during June of 2016 attained an altitude of at least 1,400 kilometers. The missile launch (which looked almost as if the missile was launched straight up into the air) showed that if its trajectory was leveled out to a normal flight pattern, the Musudan has the range that may legitimately allow it to target Guam (range of 3,500 to 4,000 kilometers). The successful launch of the Musudan showed some new capabilities not previously assessed by analysts. The missile appeared to have newly designed grid fins, and perhaps even new engines. The Musudan also (perhaps most importantly) showed that it could fly at a speed and altitude that might allow it to evade South Korea’s Patriot ballistic missile defense systems (the PAC-2 or maybe even PAC-3 systems).²⁰ After several failures in early launches, the North Koreans showed that the Musudan missile could in fact be launched successfully – at least some of the time.

The North Koreans tested another new (nuclear capable) ballistic missile system during May of 2017. Pyongyang identified this system as the “Hwasong 12,” and the United States Department of Defense (US DOD) called it the KN-17. While the missile looks a lot like the Musudan, it appears to have a longer range. The engines may be different from the Musudan as well, and the newer missile is now equipped with Vernier engines – which may be what gave it the longer range. Analysts who studied the launch of the new missile

have assessed that, if instead of being launched at the high trajectory the missile was tested with, it was tested at a more typical ballistic missile launch pattern (a leveled out pattern that would give it maximum range), the “Hwasong 12” is likely to have a range of 4,500 kilometers. North Korea thus now has two ballistic missile systems with the potential to target Guam. Guam’s American population is nearly 170,000 people, and it is home to several military bases (as sovereign territory of the United States, Guam presents a lucrative North Korean target for a variety of reasons).²¹ Since its initial test-launch in May of 2017, the “Hwasong-12” has been tested again several times.²²

North Korea successfully tested their first mobile ICBM on July 4, 2017. The missile appeared to have both ICBM range and atmospheric re-entry capability. The North Koreans have designated this missile “Hwasong-14.” The “Hwasong-14 is a two-stage missile. Based on the steep angle that the missile was launched on, if the launch pattern was leveled out to maximum range, it appears that the range of the “Hwasong-14” is around 6,700 kilometers, which would put Anchorage Alaska within range of a North Korean ICBM (almost 300,000 people live in the Anchorage area – roughly 40 percent of Alaska’s population). With no ambiguity, the Hwasong-14 is a mobile missile that can threaten population centers in United States sovereign territory. Thus, this means that on the day this missile was first successfully tested, United States defenses experienced a paradigm shift. North Korea proved on that day – a day celebrating American independence – that they had a road-mobile, nuclear weapons capable missile, and could threaten the United States with it.²³ The North Koreans tested an even more advanced version (apparently) of the “Hwasong-14” on July 28, 2017 (US DOD calls this missile the KN-20). This test was also successful to an even longer range.²⁴

The North Koreans chose to stretch the edge of the envelope one step further on November 29, 2017. It was on that day that Pyongyang chose to launch a missile that appears to be even more capable and with a longer range than the “Hwasong-14.” The North Koreans named this missile the “Hwasong-15,” and US DOD has named it the KN-22. On that day in November, it flew for longer and at a higher altitude than either one of the test flights of the “Hwasong-14.” The newer, more advanced ICBM can carry more fuel than the “Hwasong-14” and appears to operate with 80 tons of thrust. It can also target nodes farther inside of the United States and thus, when operational will be even more of a threat.²⁵ Thus, the North Koreans have not one, but two ICBM platforms that can potentially carry a nuclear warhead and target the United States. Both platforms are mobile and thus harder to detect during wartime. According to General Paul Selva, Vice-Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, North Korea is missing only two pieces of technology to perfect its ICBMs. Quoted in the press, the General stated that these two pieces were, “a reliable reentry vehicle and a reliable arming, firing and fusing system.”²⁶ It is unknown what the general meant by “perfect,” as these two aspects of technology seemed to work in the test-launches we have seen. But, logically, more testing would make these two technological aspects of their ICBMs more efficient and capable.

Another ballistic missile that may be considered a legitimate nuclear threat platform (to the US) is considered exactly that – not so much because of its range but because of the vehicle that carries it (a submarine). The missile is called the “Pukguksong-1” by the North Koreans and is a submarine launched ballistic missile (SLBM). The submarine (for now) that has successfully conducted test launches of the missile is often called the “Sinpo-class” sub. The missile has a range of up to 2,000 kilometers and uses solid fuel. Thus, if the submarine (a vessel that may have the capability to conduct long-range blue water operations) can get within 2,000 kilometers of American territory like Hawaii or Guam, this could potentially be an ominous threat to the United States.²⁷

There is one more platform that I consider a credible nuclear threat to the security of the region and to the United States: The North Koreans could put even a primitive nuclear device on a non-descript merchant ship, sail it into any port in South Korea, Japan, or the United States (or elsewhere), detonate it, and kill tens of thousands of people. This is almost never discussed when analysts address the North Korean nuclear threat, but it is not as far-fetched as it sounds. The North Koreans are well known for being able to reflag their ships when they are carrying illicit cargo and proliferating weapons.²⁸ The examples are quite compelling. In 2015 it was confirmed that North Korean crews had used ships flagged under Mongolia, Kiribati, Tuvalu, and Niue to avoid sanctions. In 2016, several North Korean ships and crews were confirmed to be operating under the flag of Sierra Leone. Also in 2016, up to 50 North Korean ships were reportedly flying under the Tanzanian flag.²⁹ In 2017, a North Korean ship was caught operating under the Cambodian flag.³⁰ Ships carrying North Korean illicit cargo also often turn off their transponders – making it even more difficult to track them.³¹ They are very skillful at using this methodology for proliferation, so why would they not be able to do it if they wanted to conduct an attack against the United States or one of our allies?

The Threat of Nuclear and Missile Proliferation: How Real Is It?

North Korea is now becoming known as a nation-state that proliferates weapons to not only other rogue states (and many states that some find surprising), but to non-state actors such as Hezbollah and the Houthis.³² Because this article is about North Korea’s nuclear and missile threat to the United States and its key allies, though, I will address only the nuclear weapons and ballistic missile proliferation highlights that North Korea has engaged in over the time span of Kim Jong-un’s rule. While there has been much debate about North Korea’s nuclear proliferation (particularly when it comes to Iran), the evidence will speak for itself. In addition, North Korea is proliferating missiles and missile technology to some surprising customers.

North Korea began cooperation with Syria to develop a nuclear reactor beginning in the 1990s. Former Director of the CIA, Michael Hayden, discussed North Korea’s support to Syria’s nuclear program with the World Affairs Council of Los Angeles in 2008. He

addressed that the North Koreans assisted in building a plutonium reactor for the Syrians (later bombed and decimated by the Israeli Air Force in 2007), when he stated, “The depth of that relationship was revealed in the spring of last year...” He further commented, “similar to Yongbyon in North Korea, but with its outer structure heavily disguised.” Finally, he left no doubt that it was North Korea that was assisting Syria with its plutonium program (and no doubt about the diverse amount of intelligence sources they used to uncover this) when he said, “Virtually every form of intelligence – imagery, signals, human source, you name it – informed their assessments, so that they were never completely dependent on any single channel.”³³

There is a plethora of evidence confirming North Korea’s proliferation of a plutonium nuclear weaponization program to Syria. The Office of the Director of National Intelligence (ODNI) provided a briefing for public consumption. In it, they uncovered a nuclear weaponization deal that North Korea brokered with Syria dating back to 1997. Intelligence identified a facility in Syria in 2006, and intelligence collected during 2007 showed elements both inside and outside of the facility, leaving no ambiguity that it was a plutonium nuclear reactor – one that closely and remarkably resembled the North Korean plutonium reactor at Yongbyon.³⁴

Other evidence regarding the plutonium reactor that was revealed at the press briefing included proof that a tin roof and thin curtain walls were added to the facility following the completion of its construction. This activity was probably undertaken so that the building’s outline would no longer closely resemble the outline of its brother facility in North Korea at Yongbyon. It is likely that the North Koreans built the changes to the outline of the facility to prevent outsiders from realizing they were the ones who built it – in addition to the fact that it needed to be altered to prevent destruction by forces (such as Israel) who would recognize the threat that it posed (which is actually what happened). According to the ODNI report, several high ranking North Korean officials had conducted visits to the facility since at least 2001. One key official who visited the facility was Chon Chi-bu. Chon is known as one of the top nuclear scientists in North Korea who deals with nuclear weapons. One of the senior intelligence officials at the press briefing remarked in part, “... our information shows that Syria was building a gas-cooled, graphite-moderated reactor that was nearing operational capability in August 2007. The reactor would have been capable of producing plutonium for nuclear weapons. It was not configured to produce electricity and was ill-suited for research.” He left no doubt about the assessment we should all draw from this when he further stated, “Only North Korea has built this type of reactor in the past 35 years.”³⁵

What may have triggered the Israeli attack were reports of a cargo ship arriving at port in Syria carrying 45 tons of yellowcake. The ship had originated in North Korea. Following the destruction of the nuclear reactor, the evidence suggests the yellow cake instead was sent to Iran (if the evidence is correct, because the yellowcake was no longer of use to Syria because their nuclear facility had been destroyed).³⁶

According to Ali Reza Asghari, a high-ranking Iranian defector, the Iranians financed most of the cost for the North Koreans to build a nuclear reactor for the Syrians. Asghari was formerly a general in the Iranian Republican Guard Corps and also former deputy defense minister. According to Asghari, the Iranians spent up to two billion dollars to help pay for Syria's plutonium nuclear reactor. While there is no proof of Iran's motives, it is possible they were looking to go "offshore" with another nuclear program as an alternative to their HEU program.³⁷

North Korea has also helped Syria develop its ballistic missile programs. North Korea had proliferated Scud B's to Syria beginning in the 1990s. Since then they have also proliferated Scud C's, and built fabrication facilities for the Syrians so that they could ship parts and technicians there to assist in the assembling of the missile. In addition, North Korea has shipped Scud D's to Syria and has now built facilities there for fabrication of these missiles with North Korean parts and assistance. North Koreans have also assisted the Syrians with the testing and development of upgrades to these missiles.³⁸

Less linear than Syria's nuclear relationship – though still compelling – is the North Korea-Iran nuclear weaponization relationship. In 2003, the *Los Angeles Times* reported (in a piece by Douglas Frantz) that Iran had received assistance from China, Pakistan, Russia, and North Korea while they were in the process of building their nuclear weaponization program. Frantz stated, "So many North Koreans are working on nuclear and missile projects in Iran that a resort on the Caspian coast is set aside for their exclusive use."³⁹ In 2006, Robin Hughes of *Jane's Defense Weekly* reported that more than 10,000 meters of underground nuclear facilities had been constructed for Iran by North Korea.⁴⁰ According to reports in the European press during 2011, Pyongyang proliferated a computer program to Iran that simulated neutron flows. The North Koreans also reportedly conducted training on how to use the program.⁴¹ Later in 2011, Joby Warrick of the *Washington Post*, wrote that he was using UN officials as a source (the officials reportedly cited secret intelligence provided to the International Atomic Energy Agency [IAEA]), to report, "Iran also relied on foreign experts to supply mathematical formulas and codes for theoretical design work – some of which appear to have originated in North Korea."⁴²

While the evidence to date regarding North Korea's support to Iran's nuclear program is largely anecdotal, there is a great deal of diverse reporting by respected sources in the press and academic world that simply cannot be ignored. Dissidents and defectors have also stated that this activity occurred.⁴³ Thus, one must dwell on all of this evidence, because as often as not, "where there is smoke, there is fire." The North Korea-Iran nuclear proliferation relationship is one that rates continued investigation and analysis.

When it comes to ballistic missiles, Iran is easily North Korea's biggest and most longstanding customer. North Korea started off by selling Iran the Scud B in the mid-1980s.⁴⁴ The North Koreans next proliferated the Scud C to Iran and set up fabrication facilities there where North Koreans could assist in assembling these missiles for Tehran.⁴⁵

North Korea has developed and honed the capabilities of the Scud D for a fabrication facility that exists in Syria (which still uses North Korean parts and technical assistance). Reportedly, Iran also uses this missile. It is unclear if they take deliveries of this missile from North Korea or directly from Syria.⁴⁶ In the mid-1990s, Iran took delivery of the No Dong, a missile with a range of up to 1,500 kilometers.⁴⁷ During 2015, Iran test-launched what was called a “new” missile. But the missile, in fact, appeared to be simply an upgraded variant of the No Dong – likely built with assistance from the North Koreans. The Iranians called this “new” missile the “Emad,” and it has an increased range over previous versions of the No Dong (by about 200 kilometers), in addition to what appears to be an improved guidance system.⁴⁸

In 2005, North Korea proliferated the Musudan missile to Iran (18 systems). This gave the Iranians (at the time) a drastically improved range capability as the Musudan is an Intermediate-range Ballistic Missile (IRBM) and has a range of 3,500 to 4,000 kilometers.⁴⁹ The Iranians apparently tested what may have been an improved variant of the Musudan missile during the month of January 2017.⁵⁰ Iranians have been present at several North Korean missile tests. These tests include tests of what the North Koreans call the “Unha,” and what is commonly known in the west as the Taepo Dong. The Taepo Dong has evolved a great deal over the years, but the most recently tested version has a cluster of four No Dong engines in its first stage.⁵¹ Additionally, in July of 2017, the Iranians tested a missile (they called it a “space launched vehicle”). The Iranians called this SLV (which no doubt had technology that could later be used for ballistic missiles) the Simorgh. The two-stage rocket had a stage that was a cluster of four No Dong engines – clearly technology they got from the North Koreans and likely based on assistance they received after having observed launches of the DPRK “Unha” system.⁵² Yet another example of North Korean assistance to Iranian missile programs can be seen in the “Safir” SLV. This is a system that the Iranians have tested several times. Leaked State Department cables found on “WikiLeaks” reveal that one stage of Iran’s Safir system (the Safir is a two-stage system) is a No Dong.⁵³

There is no doubt that as Iran seeks to advance its missile and “SLV” programs, North Korea has been there to assist them since the 1980s. Many of these systems are nuclear weapons capable – so it is important to monitor their development, as we continue to monitor Iran’s on-again-off-again nuclear weaponization program. However, while Iran and Syria are important customers of North Korea’s ballistic missiles, there are two other customers in the Middle East I would also like to highlight. Egypt has been a customer for Pyongyang since the 1980s, and evidence shows that they likely continue to seek Scuds and perhaps other systems from North Korea.⁵⁴ This is particularly disturbing given the fact that Egypt is a recipient of American foreign aid – including military aid. Another entity I will address is the Houthis. They captured Scuds from the previous (US friendly) government, but now appear to be using even longer range ballistic missiles – missiles that reportedly may have been acquired based on deals that were brokered between the Houthis and the North Koreans by a Syrian intermediary. These newer versions appear to now give the Houthis the ability to target the Saudi capital.⁵⁵

The proliferation activities I have described thus far are only the threats from missiles and nuclear programs. In the Middle East in particular (but in other regions to a lesser extent), North Korea also proliferates conventional weapons, chemical weapons, and the training that is necessary for states to continue to operate their military infrastructure. Thus, as we examine the North Korean threat or as we watch new and more threatening weapons being deployed or tested, we must keep in mind that North Korea is truly a two-track military threat. They are a threat to their own region and to the United States through the direct use of their advancing military systems (nukes and missiles), but they are also a two-headed threat because of the fact that they proliferate their WMD and the platforms that carry it to the Middle East.

Policy Implications

North Korea's military capabilities have grown quite effectively, and indeed quite quickly, during the final years of Kim Jong-il, and especially during the years since Kim Jong-un has come to power in the DPRK. However, while these capabilities have grown, the capabilities that have gained the most attention have been those that could specifically threaten the United States. Thus, the fact that North Korea has now developed a nuclear device that can – even by the most conservative estimates – detonate at 100 kilotons or above is of great concern. What exacerbates this concern is the successful testing of missiles that can hit Guam (Hwasong-12) and if launched from a submarine, Hawaii (Pukguksong-1), as well as mobile missiles successfully tested that can hit at least Alaska (Hwasong-14), or even the west coast of the United States and beyond (Hwasong-15). When one combines the proven capability of a large (by North Korean standards) nuclear warhead with the also proven capabilities of the several platforms that could launch a nuclear warhead, not only in the region, but against much of the sovereign territory of the United States, it is these capabilities that have proven the naysayers of the North Korean military threat to be wrong (again). It is also these capabilities that have changed the policy implications for the United States. Now, it is no longer about what North Korea may be able to do in the predictable future. It is about what the DPRK can do now.

The nuclear and missile tests of 2017 proved that North Korea was no longer a nation on its way to being more than a just a direct regional threat, but now a state that could directly threaten the sovereign territory of the United States. This did not change the paradigm that had existed before. South Korea, for example, is the sixth largest trading partner of the United States. Japan is the fourth largest trading partner of the United States.⁵⁶ It would thus be in the national interest (and always has been) of the United States to deter any North Korean attack against these two nations. The United States has always been a staunch ally of both Japan and South Korea – a signatory to treaties that protect both of these nations from attack.⁵⁷ So, tensions in the region have always had a major impact on the United States and its foreign policy. What the new, proven capabilities of 2017 did was to add a

sense of urgency to American policy. Now, North Korea was no longer that far away threat to US key allies; they could attack the sovereign territory of the United States with WMD that would kill tens of thousands of people in mere minutes. Thus, dismantlement of North Korea's nuclear capabilities as of 2017 was now no longer just something the American government wanted in order to protect its interests overseas; it was something it needed in order to protect its people in the homeland.⁵⁸

After nearly a year and a half of rhetoric between the United States and North Korea, the leaders of the two nations agreed to meet in Singapore in June 2018. For the first time, the leaders of North Korea and the United States would meet. While it was important that the two leaders met in 2018, the results of the meeting were ambiguous and lacking in detail.⁵⁹ The good thing however, about what came afterward was that the Trump administration did not give up its policy of "maximum pressure." This is a policy that remained in effect after the meeting in Singapore, largely because North Korea did not agree to anything. The policy consisted of a number of things, but key among them were sanctions (both unilateral and UN) and financial policies that would hamper North Korea's ability to conduct illicit activities – including the large-scale proliferation referenced earlier in this article. After the summit in Singapore, the "maximum pressure" policy remains in effect.⁶⁰ With another meeting between Kim and Trump likely as of the writing of this article, it is very likely that the President will offer incentives to Kim in order to get North Korea on the path of denuclearization. Nevertheless, sanctions, and other aspects of the "maximum pressure" campaign are likely to continue as long as North Korea continues to maintain its nuclear weaponization program.

Conclusion

North Korea has steadily marched forward with a robust nuclear weapons program and a matching ballistic missile program that can potentially carry these weapons as far away as the United States. The program to be a nuclear-armed and threatening state continues unabated as of the writing of this article.

Throughout the time of the four American Presidents who have dealt with North Korea's nukes thus far, Pyongyang has been able to draw the United States to the bargaining table and then gain concessions before making any actual moves to dismantle its program. The key here is that North Korea has demanded American concessions before it made any real initiatives. The Bush administration actually had North Korea on the ropes in 2006, before caving to North Korean demands about coming to talks – talks that led to an agreement that North Korea violated the next year and that ended up in complete failure.⁶¹ In my view, this is the important lesson that President Trump can take from past failures. It is important to conduct talks. It is important to go the extra mile to deal with North Korea. However, no concessions should be made – none – until North Korea, transparently – to be inspected at sites and time of American choosing – dismantles its nuclear weaponization

program. Unless or until that happens, the economic pressure (sanctions and “sanction-like” initiatives) can and should continue. As North Korea engages in hyperbole and obnoxious rhetoric, the United States should remain focused on a pressure campaign that stops only when North Korea takes action to fulfill its obligations and to join responsible nations in dismantling its rogue nuclear program – and that is only the first step for normalization and peace on the Korean Peninsula.

The Trump administration appears to be following this *modus operandi*, as new sanctions on a Russian bank (as well as other important sanctions) have occurred since the talks, and other initiatives appear to be on the way to keeping the pressure on.⁶² Once North Korea chooses to join the world’s responsible nations and begins to cease its rogue state behavior (if that happens), the pressure can begin to be eased. But unless or until it happens, economic pressure must remain as a tool that will coerce the DPRK into nation-state behavior that eases tension in the region and stops the threats posed to the United States and its allies.

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Notes

* Some of the information contained in this article was previously published in Bruce E. Bechtol Jr., *North Korean Military Proliferation in the Middle East and Africa: Enabling Violence and Instability* (Lexington, Kentucky: University Press of Kentucky, 2018). The author would like to thank the editors and staff for their assistance in this project.

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A Treasured Sword of Justice?¹

Explaining the Key Reasons behind North Korea's Nuclear Development and US Policy Implications

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Abstract: Since the end of the Korean War (1950-1953), North Korea has tenaciously sought to develop nuclear capabilities despite harsh external pressure and sanctions, and thus it poses a serious threat to the international community. What has motivated North Korea to persistently develop nuclear weapons? Under what conditions has North Korea been able to obtain them? How should the US resolve the North Korean nuclear problem? In responding to these questions, this article first articulates the key external and internal reasons behind North Korea's nuclear development, including US military threats, distrust toward the Soviet Union (later Russia) and China, lessons on regime survival deriving from the cases of Iraq, Libya, and Ukraine, weak conventional forces, and unstable domestic conditions. The article then looks into how systemic elements, such as a weak Nuclear Nonproliferation Treaty (NPT) system and the US-China rivalry have indirectly helped the economically fragile nation to manufacture nuclear weapons. The article concludes by delineating several policy implications for North Korea's denuclearization.

Keywords: *North Korea, Nuclear Development, Denuclearization, Regime Survival, NPT, Diplomatic Negotiations*

Introduction

Since the end of the Korean War (1950-1953), the Democratic People's Republic of Korea (hereafter DPRK or North Korea) has tenaciously sought to develop nuclear capabilities despite harsh external pressure and sanctions, and thus it poses a serious threat to the international community. What has motivated North Korea, one of the poorest countries in the world, to persistently develop nuclear weapons? Under what conditions has North Korea been able to achieve nuclear development? What policy implications does such analysis of the nation's nuclear development provide for a currently controversial issue – the denuclearization of North Korea?

In answering these questions, this article creates a new analytical framework that integrates individual, domestic, and systemic-level factors in explaining key reasons behind North Korea's nuclear development. A main argument is that both external and internal elements – the US military threat, North Korea's distrust toward the Soviet Union (later Russia) and China, lessons on regime survival stemming from the cases of Iraq, Libya, and Ukraine, weak conventional forces, and unstable domestic conditions – have increased top North Korean leaders' aspirations to develop nuclear weapons for the purpose of regime security and survival. In addition, systemic components, such as a weak Nuclear Nonproliferation Treaty (NPT) system and the US-China rivalry have indirectly helped the economically fragile nation to accomplish nuclear development.

Moreover, this article makes a key assertion that the Kim Jong-un regime will not completely give up its nuclear capabilities unless it feels fully secure. Hence, in the current US-DPRK diplomatic negotiations, it is necessary for the US to offer some security guarantee measures to the Kim regime in order to make progress toward the nation's denuclearization.

The US also should make every effort to denuclearize North Korea as much as possible through effective diplomatic negotiations. However, it would be unfeasible to achieve final, fully verified denuclearization (FFVD) or complete, verifiable, and irreversible denuclearization (CVID) due to the high possibility of North Korea's deceptive declarations of nuclear programs and the extreme difficulty in finding agreement on a full verification process. Thus, the goal of US foreign policy toward North Korea should be to make it unnecessary for the nation to retain nuclear capabilities through diplomatic measures.

Analytical Framework

In the existing literature, many scholars and pundits largely share a consensus that regime security and survival have been a most significant motive for North Korea's nuclear development.² On top of their insights, this article seeks to provide a comprehensive explanation of the key reasons behind the nation's persistent pursuit of a nuclear arsenal. In other words, this article presents a new analytical framework that integrates individual, domestic, and systemic factors to promote an understanding of the origins of the North Korean nuclear problem and its possible resolution.

A primary element that has enabled DPRK's nuclear development is its top leaders' incessant aspirations for nuclear weapons as an instrument for regime survival, as illustrated in Figure 1. Because North Korea is a totalitarian dictatorial state in which top leaders have almost absolute power, their strong will has been indispensable to the achievement of DPRK's nuclear ambitions. As detailed in subsequent sections, North

Korea's founding leader Kim Il-sung (1948-1994), his son Kim Jong-il (1994-2011), and his grandson Kim Jong-un (2011-present) have all aspired to acquire nuclear weapons in order to consolidate their regimes' security and survival.

Figure 1. An analytical framework that explains North Korea's nuclear development



The North Korean leaders' motives for nuclear development have been sparked and strengthened by both external and internal factors. The former is US military threats since the Korean War, DPRK leaders' long-standing distrust toward its patrons – the Soviet Union (later Russia) and China, and learning from the cases of Iraq, Libya, and the Ukraine that discarding nuclear cards would easily lead to external military intervention and regime collapse or insecurity. The latter is the weakening of DPRK's conventional military forces caused by economic stagnation and unstable domestic conditions sparked by economic crises and leadership transitions. Moreover, the two systemic components – the weak NPT system and the intensifying US-China rivalry since 2008 – have indirectly helped North Korea attain its nuclear capabilities. The following sections address all of these elements in detail.

Key External Contributors to Top Leaders' Nuclear Ambitions

There are three direct external factors that have prompted the three North Korean supreme leaders to pursue nuclear development. Arguably, most significant is the consistent military threat from the DPRK's archenemy, the United States. During the Korean War (1950-1953), the Kim Il-sung regime faced a serious threat when US General Douglas MacArthur considered using nuclear weapons to end the war early. MacArthur's plan, however, did not materialize due to the objection of US President Harry Truman, who was deeply concerned about the unnecessary extension of the war.³

On top of this threat, US President Dwight Eisenhower began to deploy numerous tactical nuclear weapons to South Korea in the 1950s. Their number peaked in 1967 at approximately 950 warheads.⁴ In response, North Korea repeatedly asked its patron, the Soviet Union, to provide a nuclear reactor. In January 1956, Kim Il-sung expressed an interest in having North Korean scientists work in nuclear research. Soviet Minister of Foreign Affairs Andrei Gromyko recorded in April 1958 that “North Korea was eager to start a nuclear program, though they insisted it was for peaceful purposes.”⁶ As a result, in 1965, the Soviet Union helped to establish an experimental nuclear reactor at Yongbyon, and the DPRK regime sought to produce plutonium to develop nuclear weapons. Nevertheless, the Soviet Union never wanted its client nation DPRK to contain the technology to produce nuclear weapons because Moscow distrusted the DPRK’s leaders. Soviet leaders perceived that North Korea would threaten its communist allies with nuclear weapons and even use the weaponry against South Korea and its allies. These acts could be extremely detrimental to Soviet interests, so the Soviet Union continually ignored or refused North Korean requests, thereby postponing its provision of a nuclear power plant to North Korea. Until all American nuclear weapons were withdrawn from the Republic of Korea (hereafter ROK or South Korea) in 1991, the South Korean-based nuclear arsenal was an enduring and existential threat to the North Korean regime.

Even after the 1991 complete withdrawal of American nuclear weapons from South Korea, the US provided the ROK with extended nuclear deterrence or a nuclear umbrella, which means that the US could retaliate against North Korea with nuclear weapons if the North invades the South. Responding to the 9/11 terrorist attacks, the George W. Bush administration even endorsed a strategy of “preemptive strikes” against immediate and future threats to American security. The 2002 US Nuclear Posture Review included North Korea in the list of six states as potential targets for US nuclear weapons.⁷

US-ROK joint military drills were also a serious threat to North Korea. Based on the 1953 ROK-US Mutual Defense Treaty, the two nations began to conduct a series of joint military exercises on a regular basis. Particularly, the so-called “Team Spirit,” which started in 1976 with an emphasis on force flow and force-on-force operations, became a big concern for DPRK leaders on account of its massive scale.⁸ Uniting several smaller exercises into one large one, Team Spirit grew over time from an initial participation of 107,000 US and South Korean soldiers to over 200,000 in the late 1980s.⁹ Moreover, once military tensions had escalated on the Korean Peninsula, the US government often sent strategic military assets to South Korea, including “B-52 bombers, stealth warplanes, nuclear-powered submarines, and aircraft carriers.”¹⁰ In response to these US military threats, the North Korean government has persistently requested the conclusion of a nonaggression pact, a peace treaty, and even diplomatic normalization with the US as a guaranteeing measure for its regime security. Therefore, the American military threat is

an important factor that has continually stimulated North Korean leaders to pursue the development of nuclear weapons for their regime's survival and security.

The second external component is the mistrust between the DPRK and its patrons, the Soviet Union (later Russia) and China. The lack of mutual trust between the communist comrades was another catalyst that directed North Korea toward nuclear development. Top North Korean leaders attempted to gain maximum benefits from the Soviet Union and China while playing both nations against each other.¹¹ However, their trust level toward their two patrons was not very high, and such distrust dates back to the 1950s. The DPRK's founding leader, Kim Il-sung, was extremely sensitive to the intervention of the Soviet Union and China into his nation's internal matters in the 1950s. The Soviet Union had provided North Korea with strong political, economic, and military support, but Kim Il-sung strove to break away from this dominant Soviet influence throughout the 1950s. In addition, Chinese military forces, which had intervened in the Korean War, did not return to their nation until 1956, thus posing a direct threat to Kim's power consolidation and North Korea's independence. In this context, Kim sought to create the *juche* ideology (self-reliance) to promote his nation's autonomy, though the ideology was also aimed at justifying his totalitarian rule. Kim's wariness toward the Soviet Union and China peaked at the so-called "August Incident of 1956." With the support from Moscow and Beijing, the Soviet-Korean faction (a group of high-level North Korean officials who stayed in the Soviet Union during the World War II period) and the Yan'an-Korean faction (those who had strong ties with the Chinese communist leaders during the period) conducted a military coup against Kim Il-sung in June and July 1956, while he was on a trip to the Soviet Union and other communist nations in East Europe. This coup, however, failed, and Kim thoroughly purged all Soviet and Yan'an faction leaders, thus consolidating his totalitarian dictatorship.

Moreover, Kim Il-sung, who had been closely following Joseph Stalin's policy directions, disliked new Soviet leader Nikita Khrushchev's destalinization and conciliatory policies toward the West. In the wake of Stalin's death in 1953, Khrushchev came to power in 1956 and harshly criticized Stalin for his intolerance, brutality, and abuse of power at a closed session of the Soviet Communist Party convention. This act was a serious threat to Kim, as he was pursuing the "Stalinization of North Korea" and its cult of personality.¹² Kim was also deeply disappointed with the Soviet Union after Moscow backed down during the Cuban Missile Crisis of 1962. Another event that reduced the trust level was China's Cultural Revolution that started in 1966. A huge number of violent Red Guards, mobilized by Chinese leader Mao Zedong, denounced Kim as a revisionist. In response, the North Korean media accused China of representing leftist opportunism, dogmatism, and great-nation chauvinism. Between 1966 and 1969, North Korea and China stopped all economic and cultural agreements and top-level

visits, and China even closed its border with North Korea in 1968.¹³ In addition, the sharp confrontation between the Soviet Union and China, which had started in the late 1950s and continued up to the late 1980s, was another source of North Korea's suspicion of its patrons. The level of distrust between North Korea and its patrons reached its apex after South Korea normalized diplomatic relations with the Soviet Union in 1990 and China in 1992 because North Korea regarded the two patrons' new-found ties with South Korea as acts of betrayal. Since DPRK leaders had felt insecure in their patrons' support, this revitalized lack of confidence was another reason behind the nation's nuclear development. The DPRK tried to make up for its weak allied relationships with Moscow and Beijing by developing nuclear weapons secretly and aggressively.

Third, a series of international events – the 2003 Iraqi war, the 2011 Libyan civil war, and the 2014 Russian annexation of the Crimean Peninsula – provided DPRK leaders with an important lesson for regime survival: destroying a nation's nuclear potential could easily lead to external military interventions, thereby posing a serious threat to regime security.¹⁴ Starting in the mid-1970s, Iraqi dictator Saddam Hussein had actively pursued nuclear development, but he failed to produce nuclear weapons due to Israel's bombing of its nuclear facilities in 1981, the US-led coalition bombing during the first Gulf War (1990-1991), and consequential thorough international monitoring and inspections. Hussein thus sought to deter adversaries by falsely aggrandizing Iraq's overall weapons of mass destruction (WMD) capabilities, since Iraq was unable to maintain the nuclear program at its full potential.¹⁵ This situation ended with Hussein's death when the US waged war against Iraq in 2003.

Another dictator in Libya, Muammar Quaddafi, met a similar fate. In the early 2000s, the Quaddafi regime suffered from serious domestic troubles, including economic distress, urban riots, two military coup attempts, and an Islamic insurgency. He had also lost the ability to develop an operational nuclear capability because of the lack of technology and required parts for a uranium enrichment plant. Under these circumstances, Quaddafi desperately needed economic quid pro quos offered by the United States in order to stay in power. He voluntarily stopped his nation's nuclear programs in 2003 in response to US persuasion and pressure. As a result, when the Arab Spring triggered the Libyan civil war in 2011, the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) was able to easily intervene, and Quaddafi was killed by Libyan rebel forces.¹⁶ When witnessing the airstrikes of the US and its allies in Libya in 2011, North Korea's foreign minister actually stated that the denuclearization of the North African nation had been “an invasion tactic to disarm the country.”¹⁷

Ukraine, which became an independent nation in 1991, had approximately 1,900 Soviet strategic nuclear warheads, 2,650-4,200 tactical nuclear weapons, and 176 Inter-

Continental Ballistic Missiles (ICBMs) stationed on its former Soviet territory.¹⁸ By 1996, the nation had transferred all Soviet-era strategic warheads to Russia. In the early 2000s, Ukraine had also dismantled the ICBMs and strategic bombers with the support from the US-funded Cooperative Threat Reduction Program and had even transferred its highly enriched uranium to Russia by 2012. It is needless to say that all these acts made it easier for Russia to annex Crimea from the Ukraine in 2014. Hence, after witnessing all these cases, North Korean leaders may have confirmed the importance of maintaining nuclear capabilities for its regime's survival and security.

Key Internal Contributors to Top Leaders' Nuclear Ambitions

In addition to the above-mentioned external factors, it is necessary to figure out primary internal factors that steered North Korean leaders to develop nuclear weapons. The first was the significant weakening of the nation's conventional military forces, which happened due mainly to persistent economic downturns, particularly an economic crisis after the demise of the Cold War. In the 1950s, the Kim Il-sung regime was able to quickly reconstruct its Korean War-devastated economy through massive mobilization of labor forces and foreign aid from the Soviet bloc. This swift post-war recovery, however, did not culminate in long-term economic development. Rather, the North Korean economy started deteriorating in the mid-1960s and plunged into a long period of economic stagnation. Among the central causes were major defects of the Soviet-style command economy – the lack of incentives for workers to toil productively, economic autarky based on the *juche* ideology, too much allocation of limited resources to the heavy industrial and military sectors, and wasteful spending on large-scale, expensive construction projects. On the other hand, South Korea achieved miraculous economic growth because of its state-directed development strategy, export-driven economy, focus on creating educated workforce, and monetary support from the US and Japan¹⁹. As a result, the DPRK's GDP per capita only increased from \$384 in 1970 to \$811 in 1989, while the ROK's grew from \$286 to \$5,724 during the same period of time.²⁰

Furthermore, the collapse of the Soviet Union and the East European communist nations in the early 1990s posed a fatal blow to the already declining North Korean economy. During the Cold War period, Pyongyang had received approximately \$2.2 billion in aid and credits from Moscow. As the DPRK's largest trade partner, Moscow accounted for more than a half of Pyongyang's trade. Moscow also provided Pyongyang with cheap, below-market-priced oil and weaponry. As a consequence of the collapse of the Soviet bloc, North Korea could no longer depend on the Soviet Union and other key trading partners in East Europe, including Hungary and Poland. Natural disasters, such as severe droughts and floods, further worsened the DPRK's economy. Therefore, North

Korea's average economic growth rate was a negative 4.2 percent during the 1990-1998 period. The nation's GDP per capita considerably dropped, from \$811 in 1989 to \$456 in 1998. Under these circumstances, North Korea became unable to compete with South Korea in terms of conventional military capabilities. Due to its continually stagnant economy, the North has not been able to invest much in innovating its conventional forces, including artillery, tanks, jet fighters, warships, and submarines. Hence, it was strategically rational for DPRK military leaders to offset the asymmetric conventional military advantage of the South by developing nuclear weapons.

Related to the above argument, unstable conditions within North Korea, primarily caused by economic crises and/or leadership transitions, have also been an important catalyst for the nation's nuclear development. North Korea was arguably in a most unstable political condition during the periods of 1989-1994 and 2008-2013. The former period witnessed the end of the Cold War and the death of the DPRK's founding leader, Kim Il-sung. As noted already, the collapse of the Soviet Union and other East European communist countries provided a huge economic and diplomatic challenge to the survival of the North Korean regime. This period ended with a harsh economic crisis in the mid-1990s. Due to this economic crisis, approximately 600,000-1,000,000 North Koreans (3 to 5 percent of the nation's population) starved to death between 1995 and 1998. This was an unprecedented famine in world history for a previously industrialized nation like North Korea.²¹ The North Korean regime's grip over the general public significantly weakened as the nation's ration system almost collapsed. In addition, Pyongyang was deeply isolated from the international community, especially after Moscow and Beijing normalized diplomatic relationships with Seoul despite Pyongyang's strong opposition. The death in July 1994 of Kim Il-sung, whose strong charisma attracted wide-ranging public support, created additional instability for the North Korean regime. Thus, it was not a coincidence that the DPRK made great efforts to develop nuclear weapons in the late 1980s and the early 1990s when its regime survival was in question.²²

The DPRK regime faced more uncertainty in the wake of Kim Jong-il's stroke in August 2008 and subsequent death in December 2011. It appears that this domestic instability strengthened North Korean leaders' aspirations for accelerating nuclear development because its nuclear capability was regarded as a guarantor of regime survival.²³ The new young leader, Kim Jong-un, born in 1984, needed to consolidate his weak power base and sustain the economically moribund nation. Unlike his father, Kim Jong-un had little prior work experience in the nation's party, military, and government before taking power. It was urgently necessary for Kim Jong-un to demonstrate military and economic achievements in order to promote himself and establish political legitimacy. A former South Korean Vice Unification Minister argued, "Kim Jong-un focused on investing a huge portion of North Korea's limited resources in nuclear/missile development as an

instrument for consolidating his authority. This nuclear-focused policy was also aimed at weakening the power of high-ranking military officers who had had substantial influence under the Kim Jong-il.²⁴ After Kim Jong-un took power in April 2012, the DPRK declared North Korea to be a nuclear state in its constitution. In March 2013, the new regime declared the so-called *byungjin* Line, which meant a simultaneous pursuit of nuclear program and economic development.²⁵ Consequently, Kim Jong-un conducted four nuclear tests and 89 test firings of various kinds of ballistic missiles between 2012 and 2017, while his father had accomplished only two nuclear tests and 16 ballistic missile tests during his entire rule from 1994-2011.²⁶

Indirect External Contributors to DPRK's Nuclear Development

As analyzed above, both external and internal factors – US military threats, distrustful Moscow and Beijing, learning effect, weak conventional military forces, and unstable internal conditions – have jointly led top DPRK leaders to develop nuclear weapons for their regime's survival and security. In addition to these direct catalysts, it is necessary to examine systemic elements that have indirectly helped North Korea's nuclear development. To promote a comprehensive understanding, this section addresses two complementary systemic factors – the weak NPT system and the intensifying US-China rivalry.

In March 1970, the NPT came into effect after a grand bargain between non-nuclear-weapon states and the five nations possessing nuclear weapons. The former promised not to acquire nuclear weapons, while the latter promised to disarm gradually their nuclear arsenals and to share nuclear technology for peaceful uses. The International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) has become the enforcer of the treaty's terms. The NPT has played a crucial role in preventing many countries from turning into nuclear powers, as demonstrated in the cases of South Africa and former Soviet republics such as Kazakhstan, the Ukraine, and Belarus.²⁷

Despite its positive role, however, the NPT system contains several fundamental weaknesses that North Korea has been able to exploit. Above all, although it signed the NPT in December 1985, due mainly to Soviet persuasion, North Korea continued to produce plutonium from a nuclear reactor at Yongbyon. According to the NPT, all signatory nations must conclude a comprehensive safeguard agreement (CSA) with the IAEA within eighteen months of signature. The DPRK, however, delayed its signing of the CSA until April 1992 without penalty, as the IAEA had little capacity to enforce the nation to sign the CSA earlier. During this delay, North Korea evaded the IAEA's close inspection of nuclear facilities and obtained adequate plutonium to develop several nuclear weapons.

North Korea also exploited another weakness of the NPT, whose Article 10 allows each member state to withdraw from the treaty on three months' notice if the nation declares that extraordinary events related to the NPT jeopardize its supreme interests. Taking advantage of this clause, the DPRK threatened to quit the treaty several times in 1992-1993 in response to international pressure to give up its nuclear ambitions. This threat worked effectively because the US was seriously concerned about the weakening of the overall NPT system that could result from a North Korean withdrawal. Thus, North Korean threats to quit the NPT helped the nation delay the IAEA's required inspection of suspicious nuclear facilities. After its secret uranium-enrichment program was revealed by US Assistant Secretary of State, James Kelly, who had visited Pyongyang in October 2002, North Korea actually withdrew from the NPT in January 2003. The nation subsequently evicted IAEA inspectors and restarted a nuclear reactor that had been frozen under the 1994 Agreed Framework with the United States.²⁸ In response to these provocative acts, the IAEA declared that the DPRK had violated obligations under its CSA, requesting the UN Security Council's involvement. However, it was not possible for the UN Security Council to take any immediate action toward North Korea, because China and Russia opposed the council's intervention.²⁹ Now outside of the NPT, North Korea conducted six nuclear tests after October 2006. The UN Security Council adopted a number of economic sanctions on North Korea, but these measures were not effective, due to only lukewarm support by key trading partners, China and Russia.

On top of this weak NPT system, the growing US-Chinese rivalry since 2008 has provided the North Korean regime with ample room to maneuver for nuclear development. The two superpowers basically agree with the denuclearization of North Korea. Supporting the NPT system, the US and China have the same interests in the nonproliferation of nuclear weapons. Furthermore, Washington is concerned about North Korea's nuclear adventurism in terms of national security for itself and its key Asian allies, South Korea and Japan. Beijing also worries about a negative impact of the DPRK's nuclear ambitions on regional instability, which could damage the continual economic growth essential to internal stability and the ruling legitimacy of the Chinese Communist Party. Despite these converging interests, however, their strategic priorities in dealing with the North Korean nuclear issue diverge notably. Washington sets a priority on the denuclearization of North Korea, while Beijing places greater emphasis on preventing the North Korean regime's collapse. Thus, Washington has sought to maximize international pressure to stop DPRK's nuclear ambitions. On the other hand, China has been reluctant to push the North Korean regime to discontinue its nuclear program because pressure could cause sudden regime collapse. This scenario is a nightmare to China, which shares a long and porous border (about 887 miles) with the DPRK. Governmental collapse could trigger a massive refugee crisis, disastrous pandemics, and subsequent political and economic instability within the border area.

Given this policy priority gap, the two giants' rivalry notably increased during the post-2008 period due mainly to China's more assertive actions.³⁰ Among them are diplomatic bullying, expansive territorial claims in the South and East China Seas, increased patrolling in disputed waters, and the arrests of fishermen from Japan, the Philippines, and Vietnam. This assertiveness arose after the 2008 financial crisis, during which the American economy was seriously damaged compared to the Chinese economy. At the time, Chinese leaders were filled with pride and nationalism as a consequence of the successful hosting of the 2008 Beijing Olympics.³¹ To check and balance the rise of China, US President Barack Obama declared the so-called "US pivot to Asia" (later scaled down to "US rebalance to Asia") in December 2011 and strengthened its diplomatic and military ties with Asian allies, such as Japan, South Korea, the Philippines, and Australia. The US also promoted partnerships with China's neighbors, such as India, Myanmar, Vietnam, and Singapore. China opposed this American approach, criticizing it as an encirclement or containment strategy.

In this context, it was difficult for Washington and Beijing to closely cooperate with each other to resolve the North Korean nuclear issue. North Korea took advantage to advance its nuclear capability, as it would have been difficult for North Korea to accelerate nuclear development if the two giants had closely cooperated over their shared interest to denuclearize North Korea. In other words, Pyongyang, which has been heavily dependent on Beijing in terms of commercial trade and the provision of energy resources, could not have persistently pursued its nuclear capability if Beijing had fully adopted and implemented intense UN Security Council's sanctions. The intensification of the two giants' rivalry made it harder to resolve the North Korean nuclear issue. The UN Security Council adopted a series of sanctions on North Korea as a result of its nuclear tests and long-range missile launches, but such measures were ineffective, because China often tried to tone down the intensity of the sanctions and showed lax commitment to implementing them.

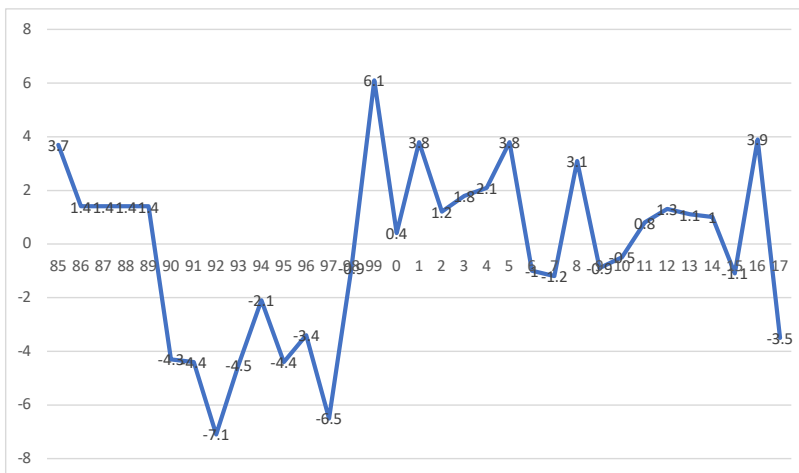
Costs/Benefits of Nuclear Development and Implications for Denuclearization

While exploring the key reasons behind North Korea's nuclear development, this article has thus far shown how external and internal factors have jointly fueled top DPRK leaders' aspirations for nuclear weapons as a primary instrument for regime survival. The article also addressed some indirect contributions to DPRK's nuclear adventurism by several systemic elements. Given this analysis, it would be useful to assess the costs and benefits that North Korea has taken on as a result of its persistent pursuit of nuclear weapons and to explore the main implications of North Korea's potential denuclearization.

First of all, North Korea has paid an enormous economic cost for the development of nuclear weapons. The nation has suffered from UN Security Council economic sanctions since October 2006, when the nation conducted its first nuclear test. Since then, five more nuclear tests and three long-range missile launches have elevated the intensity of the sanctions. On top of such UN measures, the US, South Korea, Japan, and the European Union have also imposed their own unilateral sanctions on the North Korean regime. Although sanctions have not been a fatal blow to the North Korean economy because of China's lackluster involvement in the sanction regime, North Korea has been unable to rejuvenate its moribund economy, as demonstrated in Figure 2. Particularly, the DPRK's economic growth rate plummeted from 3.9 percent in 2016 to negative 3.5 percent in 2017, and this shift was arguably caused by sharply strengthened UN sanctions. Foreign investors have had few incentives to send their resources to such an unstable nation. The DPRK has designated a number of special economic, development, and tourist zones, but they have largely failed to attract a huge amount of foreign direct investment due to the political and economic unpredictability and instability deriving from the nuclear problem.

Furthermore, its nuclear adventurism has continued to prevent North Korea from joining international organizations, including the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund, because the US, the most influential country in these organizations, has blocked the DPRK's entry. Thus, the DPRK has been unable to receive concessional loans, which could have considerably helped its economic recovery and growth, as witnessed in other communist nations like China and Vietnam.

Figure 2: North Korea's Real GDP Growth Rate, 1985-2017 (unit: percent)



Source: The United Nations. Available at: <https://unstats.un.org/unsd/snaama/Index>

Related to these economic costs, diplomatic isolation is another significant cost that North Korea has endured thanks to its nuclear adventurism. Even before starting nuclear standoffs with the international community in the early 1990s, North Korea suffered diplomatic isolation due to the 1983 terrorist act in Burma, the 1987 bombing of a Korean passenger airplane, and the collapse of Soviet bloc countries after the end of the Cold War.³² However, the nation's nuclear ambitions deepened its isolation from the international community. The first (1992-1994) and second nuclear crisis (2002-2003) on the Korean Peninsula largely hindered North Korea's broader diplomatic recognition in the world community during the post-Cold War period. Particularly, the nation's diplomatic isolation increased after December 2008, when the Six-Party Talks, initiated in 2003 among the US, China, Japan, Russia, North and South Korea, ended due to sharp disagreements between North Korea and other parties over how to verify nuclear programs and materials that the DPRK had declared. The world community, led by the UN Security Council, increasingly isolated the Hermit Kingdom through a series of resolutions and sanctions as the nation continued to pursue nuclear and long-range missile capabilities.

On the other hand, a primary benefit provided by North Korea's operational nuclear capability is to deter external military intervention and thus to maintain regime security/survival. The hostage situation created since the populated city Seoul is within range of the DPRK's artilleries/rockets has worked as a useful deterrent for pre-emptive US-ROK military acts. However, Pyongyang's de facto nuclear power status has notably increased the deterrence power, as external intervention could culminate into far more catastrophic outcomes involving nuclear war. For instance, in 2017, US President Trump adopted a strategy of "maximum pressure" and warned Pyongyang of the possibility of US preemptive strikes. But Trump later acknowledged that such military acts could bring about millions of human casualties and massive destruction of industrial facilities, so that it would be implausible for the US to take up the option.

On top of such deterrence, the nuclear achievements have played a pivotal role in promoting national pride among the public. This has contributed to the increase of both internal unity and top leader Kim Jong-un's ruling legitimacy. It is also clear that such nuclear and long-range missile capabilities have provided Pyongyang with an effective bargaining chip with which to engage powers such as the US and China. Without such capabilities, it would have been difficult for Kim Jong-un to have the historic 2018 summits with Trump and Chinese leader Xi Jinping. Therefore, despite considerable economic and diplomatic costs, North Korea's nuclear capabilities have significantly helped to secure Kim's regime and allow it to deal on an equal footing with great powers such as the US.

These considerations offer several important implications for North Korea's

denuclearization. First, unless its regime security is fully guaranteed, the Kim Jong-un regime is unlikely to accept the final, fully verified denuclearization (FFVD) of North Korea that the US government has demanded. In other words, the Kim regime might slowly follow the denuclearization process if the US proportionally provided security guarantees, including sanctions relief, a declaration to end the Korean War, the conclusion of a peace treaty, and US-DPRK diplomatic normalization.

A noteworthy point is, however, that no country can fully guarantee the Kim regime's security/survival, although the above-mentioned measures could assist in that goal. For instance, the US government would probably make little effort to protect the Kim regime, which has been accused of being a longstanding dictatorship that has committed grim human rights violations and provocative military adventurism, if the regime's survival was endangered by a public revolt or a military coup. It might be thus implausible that the Kim regime could feel completely secure regardless of American reassurance measures. For this reason, the regime may desire to maintain its nuclear capabilities. Therefore, in a phased denuclearization process, North Korea would not declare all of its nuclear weapons, materials, and facilities, despite America's security guarantee measures. It would not be very difficult for North Korea to hide them in a number of underground tunnels in mountainous terrains. Furthermore, the DPRK would refuse to accept complete verification measures, including the IAEA inspectors' request to visit all suspicious, undeclared nuclear sites.

In relation to this implication, second, the ongoing US-DPRK diplomatic negotiations could become stalemated if the US continued to cling to its demand for FFVD, or CVID. There are many obstacles in moving forward in terms of a phased denuclearization process, such as the declaration, verification, and dismantlement stages, in exchange for proportional compensation measures. Two primary impediments to the denuclearization process are the difficulty of reaching an optimal compromise in negotiations over how to verify the declared nuclear substances and the alteration of ruling governments in the US and South Korea. The Six-Party Talks (2003-2008) produced a series of detailed agreements on the denuclearization of North Korea, but the diplomatic initiative ended as the US and North Korea failed to find compromise over the verification process. The former pushed for the sampling test that would show how much nuclear material North Korea had produced and inspectors' unlimited access to suspicious nuclear sites. The latter preferred documental reviews, interviews with nuclear workers, and access only to declared nuclear facilities. Also uncertain are whether or not President Trump is reelected in 2020 and the progressive, pro-diplomacy party continues to hold power in South Korea. As witnessed before, the inauguration of US President George W. Bush in January 2001 dramatically shifted the US-DPRK relations from an atmosphere of reconciliation and rapprochement to an adversarial relationship, because Bush disliked

his predecessor Bill Clinton's engagement policy toward North Korea. The transition from a progressive to conservative government in South Korea in 2008 also made it difficult for the Barack Obama administration to engage North Korea.³³

Despite all of these potential challenges, the diplomatic approach is better than other alternatives, particularly military options. Either US preemptive strikes or bloody nose strikes would lead to North Korean military retaliation, thereby sparking an all-out war potentially involving nuclear and biochemical weapons. As a consequence, millions of human casualties and the massive destruction of industrial facilities could ensue. As seen over the last two decades, economic sanctions have not been effective either in denuclearizing North Korea as long as China's priority lies in DPRK's regime survival. Rather, North Korea has continued to enhance its nuclear capabilities amid the sanction regime.

In this regard, the diplomatic approach is an only viable option. But it will take a long time to achieve the denuclearization, even partial and incomplete, of North Korea through US-DPRK diplomatic negotiations.³⁴ The US should make great efforts to denuclearize North Korea as much as possible through effective diplomatic negotiations. However, it would be unfeasible to achieve FFVD or CVID due to the high possibility of North Korea's deceptive declarations and the extreme difficulty to find agreement on a full verification process. America's strict stand for thorough verification, such as IAEA inspectors' access to all suspicious nuclear sites, could end the whole diplomatic approach, as shown in the case of the Six-Party Talks from 2003 to 2008. Hence, despite the achievement of incomplete or partial denuclearization in practice, the US should continually pursue a diplomatic solution, reach an official denuclearization agreement with North Korea, and implement the official agreement without disruption. All these processes could lead the DPRK to an officially denuclearized state, although the nation might actually hide some nuclear programs in secret places.

This diplomatic approach at least has two advantages, though it is an extremely challenging task. The first is to halt the advance of North Korea's nuclear/missile capabilities. The second advantage is to possibly lead the nation to complete denuclearization in the long run. As the North Korean government has emphasized, its next goal is economic development. The above-mentioned security guarantees, and especially US-DPRK diplomatic normalization, would significantly help North Korea grow its moribund economy. Such measures would enable the DPRK to have normal trade relationships with many affluent nations, including the US, Japan, South Korea, and the European Union. In addition to the inflow of foreign direct investment, North Korea could receive large concessional loans for economic development from the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund. As this development progresses, keeping nuclear weapons, materials, and facilities would be a big liability, because the revelation of its secret nuclear activities could

seriously damage its credibility and end most economic assistance. This situation would be extremely detrimental to the North Korean regime stability. Therefore, the goal of US foreign policy toward the DPRK should be to make it unnecessary for the nation to retain nuclear capabilities through effective diplomatic measures.

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Aligning Autonomy and Alliance: Variation in South Korea's Policy Towards North Korea and the Moon Jae-in Presidency

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Abstract: Since its inception, the Moon Jae-in government has pursued a dual strategy of pressure and dialogue. This strategy reflects the contested nature of the North Korean threat in South Korea. While South Korea's conservatives consider the North to be a common enemy of the South Korea-US alliance, the progressive Moon government regards Pyongyang as an irksome but inevitable counterpart in its broader regional vision aimed at enhancing Seoul's foreign policy autonomy. This article seeks to go beyond existing studies that have been either fixated on the nuclear question or have framed South Korea's policy toward North Korea as a dichotomy between the conservative and progressive governments. By comparing various North Korea policies in the post-Cold War era, this article aims to explore the ideational and regional underpinnings of the Moon government's North Korean policy, examining its impact on the South Korea-US alliance and South Korea's relations with China, Russia, and Japan.

Keywords: *South Korea, North Korea, the United States, alliance, autonomy, threat perception, nationalism, regional order, East Asia*

Introduction

The Moon Jae-in government came to power in May 2017, replacing the impeached President Park Geun-hye and ending the rule of the two consecutive conservative governments in Seoul. The arrival of the progressive government coincided with the tumultuous year of escalating tensions between North Korea and the United States. By the second half of 2017, the tension reached a new height as North Korea's nuclear and missile tests sparked a fiery war of words between the Kim Jong-un regime and the Donald Trump administration. Sandwiched between the two, the Moon government responded to the unfolding crisis with a dual strategy of pressure and dialogue, with a strong emphasis on comprehensive engagement towards Pyongyang.

What are the main drivers of the Moon government's North Korea policy? What are its likely regional consequences? This article explores the ideational and regional underpinnings of the Moon government's engagement policy and examine its impact on the South Korea-

US alliance and South Korea's relations with China, Russia, and Japan. Existing studies have highlighted balancing, threat perception, or pan-Korean nationalism as factors shaping South Korea's policy towards North Korea.¹ While they may be useful in accounting for the approaches taken by some of the South Korean governments, they are insufficient to explain variation in North Korean policy throughout the post-Cold War era. For instance, in the face of North Korea's sinking of the South Korean naval ship *Cheonan* and attack on Yeonpyong Island, the conservative Lee Myung-bak government suspended various inter-Korean exchanges and strengthened the South Korea-US alliance. However, despite continuing provocations by North Korea and the intensifying tensions between the Kim regime and the Trump administration, the Moon government renewed exchanges with Pyongyang, which resulted in the three inter-Korean summits and two joint declarations aimed at promoting inter-Korean relations in 2018.²

Varied North Korean policies reflect the contested nature of the North Korean threat in South Korea. While South Korea's conservative politicians consider the North to be a common enemy and the *raison d'état* of the South Korea-US alliance, the progressive Moon government regards Pyongyang as an irksome but inevitable counterpart in its broader regional vision aimed at enhancing Seoul's foreign policy autonomy. With its focus on regional economic and energy cooperation centered on the Korean Peninsula, the Moon government has sought to balance its cooperation with the United States on the nuclear front and its efforts to improve inter-Korean relations. As a result, from a South Korean standpoint, coercive means such as maximum pressure or "bloody nose" strikes have the potential to undermine Seoul's larger regional roadmap. Instead, the Moon administration promotes both US-North Korean talks and inter-Korean relations in order to maintain South Korea's alliance ties with America and to expand its foreign policy autonomy.

This article first examines various theoretical perspectives with respect to South Korea's policy towards North Korea. In the subsequent sections, I compare different North Korea policies by various South Korean governments in the post-Cold War context and delve into President Moon's approach and specific policy measures. Finally, the article examines the broader regional implications of the Moon government's policy with respect to alliance ties and regional relationships.

Explaining Variation in South Korea's Policy Towards North Korea

A number of theoretical approaches are helpful in accounting for a range of policy choices made by different South Korean governments in the post-Cold War context. From a realist standpoint, when a nation threatens neighboring countries with military provocations, the expected policy response would be either internal balancing by increasing their military power or external balancing by seeking alliance partners to cope with the common threat.³ In response to North Korea's persistent threat in the form of nuclear weapons programs and numerous missile launches, several South Korean governments emphasized alliance ties with

the United States. However, not all administrations expanded their military capabilities or focused primarily on strengthening the South Korea-US alliance.

While the literature on balancing is useful in explaining various alliance behavior, it is important to note that states respond to a perceived threat, rather than the increased military capacity of other nations.⁴ Hence, we need to empirically examine the subjectivity of fear in balancing behavior.⁵ Not all countries respond uniformly to the same source of threat. This is because in the face of similar security challenges, the perceived levels of threat in a nation can vary substantially across different political actors as they have at times political motivations to heighten or downplay the threat from their neighbors. The question, then, is under what circumstances?

In accounting for different levels of threat perception, scholars have highlighted the importance of ideational factors.⁶ As for South Korea's threat perception vis-à-vis North Korea, the types of nationalism promoted by different South Korean governments are crucial. Specifically, the conservative governments led by Presidents Lee Myung-bak and Park Geun-hye fostered "oppositional nationalism"⁷ centered on different political identities between the two Koreas (e.g., South Korea's identity as a democratic ally of the United States vs. a totalitarian rogue state identity of North Korea), which resulted in the depiction of North Korea as the primary enemy (or *joojeok*) of the South Korea-US alliance. Presidents Lee and Park consistently stressed the military threat emanating from Pyongyang, using it as an opportunity to promote oppositional nationalism and strengthen the alliance ties with the United States.

In contrast, the progressive governments led by Presidents Kim Dae-jung, Roh Moo-hyun, and Moon Jae-in promoted "pan-Korean nationalism" that focused less on different political identities between Seoul and Pyongyang than on common Korean national identities.⁸ From the standpoint of the progressive governments, North Korea is not a threat, but a crucial partner for a broader regional vision centered on the Korean Peninsula and Seoul's pursuit of greater autonomy in East Asia. The salience of regional autonomy in South Korea's foreign policymaking, in general, and its policy on North Korea, in particular, has been recognized by recent analyses.⁹ For instance, Scott Snyder shows how Seoul's foreign policy has been torn between its search for regional autonomy and its alliance relations with the United States, arguing that Seoul's best bet remains a credible alliance relationship with Washington.

It is worth noting, however, that one of the key drivers behind the progressive governments' push for foreign policy autonomy is South Korea's alliance ties with the United States. Located in a region surrounded by great powers and strategically reliant on the decades-long asymmetric security alliance with the United States, South Koreans have historically felt an acute sense of strategic dependence. As a result, a fervent desire to be an independent, more autonomous regional actor has persisted in South Korea.¹⁰ The yearning to take the lead in regional affairs is the strongest regarding issues pertaining to the Korean Peninsula. President Roh's idea of South Korea's "balancer role" and President Moon's call for taking "the

driver's seat" in peninsula-related issues are a reflection of Seoul's autonomy-seeking strategy that taps into pan-Korean nationalism and downplays the North Korean threat.¹¹ This is why the Roh government did not suspend its engagement policy even after the revelation in 2002 that North Korea had been secretly pursuing a uranium-based nuclear program. As the Moon government stresses pan-Korean nationalism, it is also reportedly considering deletion of the term, "the main enemy (or *joojeok*)," from its 2018 National Defense White Paper.¹²

Overlooking variation in South Korea's autonomy-enhancing strategy and threat perceptions, existing analyses of the North Korean challenge have focused primarily on the resolution of the nuclear crisis. However, both the hardline approach by the Bush administration and the policy of "strategic patience" by the Obama administration have failed to halt Pyongyang's nuclear ambition. Instead, North Korea has conducted six nuclear tests, while making rapid progress in its missile capabilities. While President Trump held the historic summit with Kim Jong-un and opened a series of negotiations with Pyongyang, his government's main preoccupation has remained the elusive goal of achieving a "complete, verifiable, and irreversible dismantling" (CVID) of nuclear programs in North Korea.

This article goes beyond existing studies that have been either fixated on the nuclear question or have framed South Korea's policy toward North Korea as a dichotomy between the conservative and progressive governments. For instance, while the progressive governments engaged Pyongyang, the conservative administrations have been depicted as "bas[ing] [their] policies on deep animosity toward North Korea and unflinching support for the US military alliance."¹³ This conservative vs. progressive frame is missing the variation within each camp, especially between the Roh Moo-hyun and Moon Jae-in governments, with respect to their North Korean policies and attendant regional strategies.

A key factor to consider is the types of autonomy-enhancing strategies taken by different progressive governments. In implementing their engagement policy toward North Korea, the progressive governments have to deal with another important external player, the United States. Specifically, the Roh government pursued a more exclusive form of autonomy focused on the Korean Peninsula, which was often in conflict with its alliance relations with the United States, as evidenced in Washington's concerns about South Korea's "balancer" role.¹⁴ However, the other progressive regimes sought an expansive form of autonomy (i.e., autonomy plus), closely coordinating their North Korean policies with their alliance relations with Washington. A prime example is the Kim Dae-jung government's policy on North Korea during the Clinton presidency, which culminated in the formation of the Trilateral Coordination and Oversight Group (TCOG) and the 2000 US-Democratic People's Republic of Korea (DPRK) Joint Communiqué.¹⁵ The Moon government has been similarly committed to dovetailing its North Korean policy with its alliance relations with the United States. Overall, as shown in Table 1, varieties of South Korean policies towards North Korea are shaped in large part along the two conceptual domains: 1) the types of nationalism and the resulting threat perceptions of the ruling governments and 2) the types of autonomy-enhancing strategies and alliance relations.

Table 1. Variation in South Korean Policies Towards North Korea

		Types of Autonomy and Alliance Relations	
		Autonomy (often at odds with the United States)	Autonomy plus (autonomy and alliance) or alliance ties
Types of nationalism and threat perceptions	Pan-Korean nationalism (North Korea as a partner)	Roh Moo-hyun	Kim Dae-jung Moon Jae-in
	Oppositional nationalism (North Korea as a threat)	Kim Young-sam (1993-1994)	Lee Myung-bak Park Geun-hye

Variation in South Korea's policy on North Korea has regional implications because it affects alliance ties with the United States and South Korea's relations with its neighbors. When the conservative governments were in power, the alliance relationship remained strong, while South Korea's regional autonomy and independent policies toward other regional powers were somewhat curtailed. However, when the progressive governments ruled, the South Korea-US alliance occasionally faced setbacks, and South Korea's relations with other countries expanded. The strain on the alliance was most pronounced during the Roh presidency, as it pursued a regional autonomy strategy that was often at odds with Washington, a foreign policy mishap that President Moon has been striving to avoid by aligning South Korea's autonomy pursuit with its alliance ties with the United States. In the following sections, I first compare different priorities and policy approaches taken by various South Korean governments and then explore the current Moon Jae-in government's policy towards North Korea.

Varieties of South Korean Policy Towards North Korea

In the post-Cold War era, various governments in Seoul have adopted wide-ranging policies toward Pyongyang. The first democratically elected Kim Young-sam government initially promoted pan-Korean nationalism. Specifically, President Kim sought to improve relations with Pyongyang by declaring that “[n]o alliance can supersede our nation; neither ideology nor ideal can assure happiness as our nation can” and by sending back a North Korean prisoner who had been held in South Korea for several decades.¹⁶ However, the first North Korean nuclear crisis of 1993-94 and Pyongyang's threat of turning South Korea into a sea of fire pushed the Kim Young-sam government into a hardline position and oppositional nationalism against the North. The conservative Kim government was thus largely sidelined

from the US-DPRK Agreed Framework that ended the first North Korean crisis in 1994.¹⁷

In 1998, the progressive Kim Dae-jung government first unveiled South Korea's engagement policy towards Pyongyang. President Kim's so-called "Sunshine Policy" consisted of the promise of not seeking unification through absorption by South Korea and socio-cultural exchanges including family visits and tourism in North Korea, all aimed at promoting pan-Korean nationalism. The policy culminated in the first-ever inter-Korean summit in June 2000. At the same time, however, the Kim administration had to work closely with the United States while handling the Asian Financial Crisis that engulfed the South Korean economy, as well as alliance cooperation during the 1998 North Korean missile crisis that led to the Perry Process of negotiation with Pyongyang.¹⁸ During this period, the South Korean government closely coordinated its policy on North Korea with the United States and Japan through the TCOG.

The TCOG was a novel and interactive pattern of trilateral alliance coordination among the US, Japan, and South Korea, going beyond the traditional mechanism of policy coordination through the United States as the hub of the US-Japan and the US-South Korea alliances.¹⁹ Through numerous meetings at the senior and ministerial levels and a trilateral summit, the Perry Process not only effectively coordinated the three countries' North Korea policies, but also strengthened alliance relationships along the way. While the sunshine policy was criticized by the conservatives in South Korea as "*Bookhan Peojugi*" (or spoiling the North with unconditional economic support), President Kim's engagement policy was a prime example of South Korea's leadership role in peninsula affairs with largely positive regional outcomes, including expanded regional autonomy for Seoul and a stronger alliance relationship with Washington.

Kim's successor and another progressive leader, President Roh Moo-hyun, continued with the engagement policy, but under the context of a rapidly developing nuclear crisis on the Korean Peninsula. By the time the second North Korean nuclear crisis erupted in 2002, the George W. Bush administration had approached the nuclear provocation with a whole new level of urgency and determination in the post-9/11 context.²⁰ The resulting pronouncement of "the axis of evils" and the policy of counterproliferation left little room for South Korea's engagement policy towards Pyongyang. In an effort to garner US support for its North Korean policy, however, the Roh administration agreed to send South Korean troops to Iraq, prompting protests from his own party members.

Building on the engagement policy of the Kim Dae-jung government and furthering pan-Korean nationalism, the Roh government intensified interactions with North Korea. Specifically, the Roh government expanded economic and humanitarian aids to North Korea. For instance, it provided \$111.78 million for humanitarian assistance through international organizations, a substantial increase from the Kim Dae-jung government's offer of \$55.38 million.²¹ In 2004, the Roh government also established the Kaesung Joint Industrial Complex, which involved more than 120 South Korean companies.²² It also pursued South Korea's

greater autonomy by seeking a “balancer role” in the region and raising questions about alliance relations with the United States. The search of more exclusive regional autonomy did not make progress as the hardline policy of the Bush administration and North Korea’s Weapons of Mass Destruction (WMD) provocations increased tension, leading to North Korea’s first nuclear test in 2006. As a sign of his insistence on regional autonomy, however, President Roh made one last push for the engagement policy by holding the second inter-Korean summit in 2007.

In 2008, the conservative Lee Myung-bak administration came to power with a major policy reversal towards Pyongyang. With its critical assessment of the engagement policy of the progressive Kim and Roh governments, President Lee rejected previous declarations from the first and second inter-Korean summits.²³ As a former CEO of a major construction company, President Lee adopted a practical approach centered on reciprocal cooperation with Pyongyang. Its “Denuclearization-Opening-3000” strategy was aimed at helping Pyongyang achieve the per capita GDP of 3,000 dollars within ten years in exchange for its denuclearization and economic opening.²⁴

With these broad goals in mind, President Lee in 2009 proposed a “Grand Bargain,” a compressive package deal in which members of the Six Party talks would simultaneously pursue North Korea’s complete, verifiable and irreversible dismantling (CVID) of North Korea’s nuclear programs and reciprocal measures by the members of the Six Party talks (e.g., security guarantee, diplomatic normalization and economic support). In an effort to promote international, rather than inter-Korean, coordination, the Lee government asserted that specific implementation plans would be determined by the five members of the Six Party talks, namely, South Korea, the US, China, Japan, and Russia.²⁵

Breaking away from the previous governments’ emphasis on pan-Korean nationalism and greater regional autonomy, President Lee stressed cooperation with the international community in economic support for North Korea as well. In particular, the Lee government made a particular emphasis on the improvement of the alliance relationship with Washington. From its standpoint, the enhanced alliance ties would promote North Korea’s relations with the United States, which would in turn benefit inter-Korean relations.²⁶ After the sinking of *Cheonan*, the Lee government announced a series of coercive measures against North Korea, including the May 24 measures banning all inter-Korean exchanges except for the Kaesung industrial complex.²⁷

Echoing the US stance, Lee’s priority throughout his presidency remained the denuclearization of North Korea. For instance, Lee’s Unification Minister Hyun In-taek stressed the importance of achieving denuclearization as a prerequisite for further inter-Korean exchanges:

I will implement President Lee’s philosophy of national governance in our policy on North Korea and unification. And denuclearization of North Korea will continue to serve as a precondition for the comprehensive development of inter-Korean relations.²⁸

However, South Korean analysts criticized Lee's North Korean policy because it left little room for South Korea's autonomy in regional issues. As one South Korean analyst observed, the Lee government internationalized the peninsula question, and as a result, the inter-Korean issue was subordinated to US-South Korean relations.²⁹ The Lee administration's hardline policy and the May 24 measures also enabled North Korea's increasing "dependence on China" as the latter's share of North Korea's trade jumped from 24.8 percent in 2000 to 88.1 percent in 2010.³⁰

Park Geun-hye, Lee's successor as president, followed a similar policy towards Pyongyang, although she used catch phrases such as "Trustpolitik" and "unification as *daebak* (or a bonanza)." Trustpolitik is premised on the assumptions that the root of inter-Korean tensions is a lack of trust between the two nations and that South Korea's unconditional economic support for the North is not beneficial for regaining trust between them. The South Korean public initially expressed their support for this new approach as she sought to gradually improve relations with North Korea through humanitarian aid.³¹

Despite her call for patience and trust building in Seoul's relations with Pyongyang, President Park brought up the question of unification as well. In her first New Year's remark in January 2014, she asserted that unification could serve as a major opportunity for South Korea to stimulate the economy (hence the term, a bonanza).³² In a nod to President Lee's North Korean policy, however, the Park government also sought to resolve the nuclear challenge first, while stressing international cooperation and humanitarian aid to North Korea.³³ Specifically, she argued that South Korea should "mobilize the international community to help it dismantle Pyongyang's nuclear program," especially "strengthening the indispensable alliance between South Korea and the United States."³⁴ Overall, the national identity the Park government promoted was an international one that confronted or excluded North Korea.³⁵ The end result was the continuation of oppositional nationalism and the heightened threat perception vis-à-vis North Korea.

As one South Korean analyst pointed out, however, it was premature to discuss unification when there was no progress in inter-Korean relations, a first step toward the goal of achieving unification.³⁶ Ironically, Park's own minister in charge of unification Ryu Giljae later revealed that he was not even informed of Park's speech on unification.³⁷ The Park government also established a Unification Preparation Committee, but as a South Korean analyst observed, without short and immediate-term plans to improve inter-Korean relations, the talk of unification and trustpolitik went nowhere.³⁸ She also presented the so-called Dresden Declaration, laying out "three proposals to North Korean authorities in the hope of laying the groundwork for peaceful unification."³⁹ But the speech was viewed as potentially provocative to the Kim Jong-un regime because it could mean unification through absorption by the South.⁴⁰

The Moon Jae-in Government's North Korea Policy

Coming on the heels of the first-ever impeachment of a South Korean president, the Moon Jae-in government adopted a radically different approach towards Pyongyang. Having served as the Chief of Staff for President Roh Moo-hyun and having accompanied Roh during his summit with Kim Jong-il in October 2007, President Moon was expected to continue the engagement policy and the autonomy pursuit of the Kim Dae-jung and Roh Moo-hyun governments. Even prior to assuming his presidency, Moon promised to take the lead in addressing the North Korea challenge.⁴¹ In an extensive interview, Moon, then the leader of the opposition Democratic Party of Korea, observed that Korea's national tragedy of losing sovereignty to Japan came about as the Korean Peninsula turned into a battleground for great power competition.⁴² It is thus crucial for South Korea to carve out its own space and autonomous role in the region.

Despite similar focus on pan-Korean nationalism and South Korea's leading role in the peninsula affairs, however, President Moon sought to overcome Roh's shortcomings. For instance, former US Ambassador to South Korea Thomas Hubbard criticized Roh's North Korean policy as fixated on inter-Korean relations to a point where it jeopardized alliance ties with Washington.⁴³ As such, Moon has been careful not to alienate the US in his search for South Korea's regional autonomy and, whenever possible, made sure to coordinate South Korea's policy with that of Washington. For instance, South Korean Ambassador to the United States, Cho Yoon-je, reiterated, in October 2018, the importance of coordinating inter-Korean relations with the alliance ties:

The inter-Korean summit in April served as a springboard for the first North Korea-US summit, and the inter-Korean summit in Pyongyang in September breathed new life into North Korea-US dialogue. The two tracks of inter-Korean relations and denuclearization provide each other with momentum and enable us to keep moving forward.⁴⁴

At the same time, the Moon government engages North Korea as part of a broader regional vision that goes beyond Northeast Asia. In contrast to President Roh's unsuccessful efforts for South Korea's "balancer" role in Northeast Asia, President Moon has been seeking to strengthen alliance ties with the United States, while pursuing more expansive regional autonomy by reaching out to other Asian nations.⁴⁵

Despite his renewed emphasis on the relations with the United States, however, it is important to note that there are fundamental differences between the US administrations and the Moon government in their views of coercion and sanctions. The successive US administrations have tended to utilize a coercive approach to pressure Pyongyang into nuclear dismantlement, whereas the Moon government views sanctions as a means to bring North Korean to the negotiating table. As such, the Trump administration's "maximum pressure" strategy and the "bloody nose" tactic of targeted military strikes on North Korea stood in contrast to the Moon government's dual strategy of pressure and dialogue.

Overall, President Moon opposed the policy of isolating the Kim regime and expressed his willingness to engage North Korea with the larger goals of denuclearizing Pyongyang and establishing a permanent peace system on the Korean Peninsula.⁴⁶ During the tense war of words between Kim Jong-un and Trump in August 2017, President Moon questioned the validity of using only coercive means and stated that “[t]he purpose of strong sanctions and pressure against North Korea is to bring it to the negotiating table, not to raise military tensions.”⁴⁷ Even weeks after Pyongyang’s sixth nuclear test, Moon, in his speech at the UN General Assembly in September 2017, focused more on multilateral negotiation than on sanctions on North Korea.⁴⁸

As for specific policy measures, the Moon government from the first month of its rule took a 180-degree turn by permitting humanitarian missions to North Korea such as medical support and religious exchanges.⁴⁹ In July 2017, President Moon laid out a “New Economic Map for the Korean Peninsula” and called for meetings with North Korea to discuss various inter-Korean issues. In contrast to the conservative Lee and Park administrations’ insistence on the denuclearization as a precondition for dialogue, the Moon government is of the view that to denuclearize, South Korea needs to engage North Korea and improve inter-Korean relations first. This conviction is evidenced in Moon’s memoir, in which he writes that it would be crucial to restore bilateral relations with North Korea and help it get out of isolation, which would also help resolve the nuclear crisis.⁵⁰

The Moon government’s different assumption about North Korea applies to the issues of unification and economic cooperation as well. In September 2017, President Moon assured Pyongyang that his government did not “desire the collapse of North Korea” and “[would] not seek unification by absorption or artificial means.”⁵¹ In fact, Moon believes that peaceful relations with North Korea could be the basis of a new economic opportunity linking the Korean Peninsula to China and Russia, especially for the next generation of Koreans.⁵² Moon also maintains that the Lee and Park governments ended positive economic cooperation between the two Koreas, forcing North Korea to rely on China, and that a China-friendly regime in Pyongyang would make reunification far more difficult.⁵³

As for a broader regional roadmap, the New Economic Map for the Korean Peninsula initiative plans to develop the three belts that connect the two Koreas with the larger aims of securing a new economic engine for the peninsula and linking economies in Northeast Asia: 1) the East Coast belt for energy and natural resources linking the two Koreas to Russia; 2) the West Coast belt for industrial, logistics, and transportation sectors connecting Seoul, the Kaesung industrial complex, and Pyongyang; and 3) the demilitarized zone (DMZ) belt for the environment and tourism linking Mounts Seorak, Keumkang, and Baekdu. This regional master plan aims to create the environment for unification by facilitating inter-Korean cooperation, job creation, and economic growth. Overall, it seeks to build a Northeast Asian economic community and transform the Korean Peninsula into a regional hub of economic cooperation.⁵⁴

Meanwhile, the conservative Liberty Korea Party continues to highlight denuclearization and alliance relations with the United States. Commenting on the overall direction of President Moon's North Korean policy, Hyun In-taek, former Unification Minister during the Lee Myung-bak presidency, called for closer cooperation with the United States, rather than following North Korea's demands.⁵⁵ Hong Joon-pyo, then the leader of the Liberty Korea Party, also criticized President Moon's lack of a blueprint for North Korea's denuclearization and reiterated the Party's demand for reinstating tactical nuclear weapons on the Korean Peninsula.⁵⁶ A spokesperson for the Liberty Korea Party went even further to demand a "free North Korea" policy that could facilitate a collapse of the Kim Jong-un regime.⁵⁷

However, the conservative position has not been popular among the South Korean public. While many South Koreans were frustrated about North Korea's military provocations in 2017, the majority of the South Korean public continue to praise Moon's sustained efforts for dialogue and accuse the conservatives of being fixated on the Cold War-type anti-North Korean sentiment.⁵⁸ Even before President Moon's summit with Kim Jong-un, more than 70 percent of South Koreans expressed their support for the summit.⁵⁹ In the wake of Moon's consistent engagement policy towards Pyongyang and his two successful summits with Kim Jong-un, his approval rating shot to 83 percent, the highest ever for a first-year South Korean president.⁶⁰

Against this domestic political backdrop, Moon's Democratic Party won a landslide victory in local elections in June 2018, winning 14 out of 17 Metropolitan Mayor/Governor positions.⁶¹ Given the overall support for Moon's policy towards North Korea, South Korea's conservatives need to "think of a way to reach out to young voters," which would be much more difficult in light of the revelation that "South Korea's military had drawn up plans for martial law during the mostly youth-led anti-Park protests."⁶²

At the regional level, criticizing the Lee Myung-bak government's failure to improve relations with other countries in the region, President Moon argues for balanced diplomacy in which South Korea maintains its alliance relations with Washington, while maintaining cooperation with China.⁶³ Moon's efforts for greater regional linkages including the alliance is evidenced in the Panmunjeom Declaration signed at the first summit between Moon and Kim. In view of the Trump administration's focus on denuclearization, both sides agreed to work towards "complete denuclearization" of the Korean Peninsula.⁶⁴ But they dedicated most of the document in promoting inter-Korean relations. Moon and Kim also "agreed to actively pursue trilateral meetings involving the two Koreas and the United States, or quadrilateral meetings involving the two Koreas, the United States, and China with a view to declaring an end to the war, turning the armistice into a peace treaty, and establishing a permanent and solid peace regime."⁶⁵

Overall, the Moon government stresses the importance of South Korea's leadership role and pan-Korean nationalism, even in dealing with the nuclear question. This stands in contrast to the conservative governments which prioritized cooperation with the international community, especially the United States, over inter-Korean relations. In a nationally-televised

speech in August 2018, President Moon thus declared, “we are the protagonists in Korean Peninsula-related issues” and “advancement in inter-Korean relations is the driving force behind denuclearization of the Korean Peninsula.”⁶⁶ The following month, in September 2018, Moon held his third summit with Kim Jong-un. At the conclusion of the summit, both sides issued the Pyongyang Declaration, in which they “reaffirmed the principle of independence and self-determination of the Korean nation, and agreed to consistently and continuously develop inter-Korean relations,” while pledging their cooperation on “complete denuclearization of the Korean Peninsula.”⁶⁷

Regional Consequences

The Moon government’s North Korea policy has larger implications for the US alliances in East Asia and South Korea’s relations with China, Russia, Japan, and Southeast Asians. Similar to the Kim and Roh governments, President Moon approaches the North Korean question not just as the nuclear challenge but also part of inter-Korean relations and the regional security order in East Asia. This viewpoint is premised on the assumption that the resolution of the nuclear crisis is inextricably linked to the larger regional order. As such, how the North Korean challenge is addressed has the potential to reshape alliance dynamics and regionalism in East Asia.⁶⁸ However, in contrast to the previous progressive governments that promoted regional cooperation confined to Northeast Asia, the Moon administration calls for much wider regional linkages that include Russia and Southeast Asian nations, while at the same time reaffirming the alliance ties with the United States.

As for the alliance, Moon’s North Korea policy is aimed at enhancing South Korea’s autonomy by taking the lead in peninsula matters, but with the understanding that this should not come at the expense of alliance relations. During the Roh presidency, the proposed balancer role was widely criticized by South Korean conservatives who viewed such a role as “impractical” and blamed Roh for “weakening the country’s traditional alliance with the United States and Japan in favor of a neutral position among regional powers.”⁶⁹ Unlike Roh, President Moon has ensured that his foreign policy team coordinated closely with the Trump administration over the North Korean question, even as his government reached out to Pyongyang for dialogue. His dual strategy of pressure and dialogue towards North Korea itself is a reflection of his efforts to coordinate with the US on the nuclear front, while charting South Korea’s own path to North Korea.

His strategy was tested early on in 2017 as the tension intensified between North Korea and the United States. Despite Moon’s emphasis on the alliance relations with Washington, President Trump’s message of “fire and fury” on North Korea and the Trump administration’s consideration of limited strikes on North Korea worried the Moon government. In fact, a Pentagon official warned that the bloody nose strike could lead to “an unacceptably high number of casualties.”⁷⁰ Therefore, according to an American analyst, a key task for the Trump administration was “to up the ‘maximum pressure’ campaign and keep South Korea

on board.”⁷¹ However, during his meeting with US Vice President Mike Pence, Moon still expressed his desire to seek dialogue with North Korea, although Pence reiterated CVID as the most important priority.⁷²

After the inter-Korean summit in April 2018, South Korea’s efforts to promote dialogue between the US and North Korea facilitated the first-ever summit between a sitting US president and a North Korean leader. Ironically, despite Moon’s efforts to ensure the alliance ties, during the news conference after his summit with Kim, Trump called US-South Korean military drills “provocative” and expressed his willingness to withdraw US forces from South Korea.⁷³ In response, a Defense Ministry spokesperson in South Korea said, “there is a need to discern the exact meaning and intent of President Trump’s comments,” mentioning that “there have been no discussions yet with Washington on modifying drills set for August.”⁷⁴ This confusing alliance dynamic is problematic as Moon has consistently sought to coordinate with Washington and the South Korean public still remains supportive of the alliance with the United States.⁷⁵

As for China, which has been alarmed by North Korea’s provocations and the mounting tension between Pyongyang and Washington, the Moon government’s policy of engagement came as a welcome development on the peninsula. While China remains the only military alliance partner for North Korea and provides most of the latter’s oil and other necessary supplies, China has recently joined the other members of the UN Security Council to place a series of sanctions against North Korea on minerals, jet fuels, and even a complete ban on its coal and iron exports.⁷⁶

Beijing’s hardline approach to Pyongyang stems from its increasing concerns about the negative regional repercussions of North Korea’s WMD provocations. Coupled with its potential to spark a nuclear arms race in an already volatile region filled with political tensions and territorial disputes, Pyongyang’s nuclear brinkmanship has served to bolster America’s military presence in East Asia. As a result, the Chinese government pushed for a “dual-track approach” aimed at seeking the denuclearization of the Korean Peninsula and establishing a permanent peace system in the region.⁷⁷

In this regard, President Moon’s engagement policy towards Pyongyang and the Panmunjeom Declaration calling for a permanent peace treaty were particularly beneficial for China. As a participant in the Korean War, officially ending the Korean War has been a key priority for Beijing. In fact, South Korean progressives, such as former Unification Minister Lee Jongsuk, call for speedy declaration of the end of the Korean War and the start of the permanent peace process.⁷⁸ However, the conservatives oppose such a declaration without North Korea’s complete denuclearization, sticking to the US position.⁷⁹ Interestingly, it was reported in the South Korean media that Yang Jiechi, Director of the Central Foreign Affairs Commission and former Chinese Foreign Minister, had made a secret visit to South Korea around mid-July of 2018 to discuss the ending of the Korean War with South Korean officials.⁸⁰ In a sign of growing cooperation between South Korea and China, the South

Korean ambassador to Beijing also stated that South Korea and China would continue their strategic communication for Beijing's constructive role in the Korean Peninsula.⁸¹

China-North Korea bilateral relations improved significantly after the three summits between Chinese President Xi Jinping and Kim Jong-un. The third meeting came one week after the Kim-Trump summit in Singapore. In a sign of growing ties between the two communist nations, the Chinese government "broke with precedent and announced Kim's two-day visit."⁸² As the positive momentum continued over the summer of 2018, the Chinese government appeared to have relaxed its sanctions against Pyongyang, as North Korean workers were reportedly "returning to jobs inside China, some under the guise of educational exchanges."⁸³ President Xi also sent Li Zhanshu, the Chairman of the National People's Congress and the third highest member of the Chinese Communist Party, as his special envoy to Pyongyang as the Kim regime commemorated the 70th anniversary of the founding of the DPRK.⁸⁴ In his letter delivered to Kim, President Xi declared that the two communist nations "through the three past summits with Kim, opened a new chapter in the development of bilateral relations," expressing his hope to "develop North Korea-China relations more quickly."⁸⁵ The Chinese government also urged the UN Security Council to consider immediate sanction relief on North Korea "in accordance with the compliance of [North Korea] and the development of the situation."⁸⁶

However, the Moon government's push for dialogue was not well received in Tokyo. After numerous North Korean missile launches, some of them flying directly over Japan, Prime Minister Abe Shinzo at the UN General Assembly declared that Japan "will face up to North Korea's nuclear and missile threat through the Japan-US Alliance and through Japan, the US and the Republic of Korea (ROK) acting in unity," while supporting the US position that "all options are on the table" and UN Security Council Resolutions against North Korea.⁸⁷ As long as the Abe government maintains its hardline position on North Korea, Moon's engagement policy towards North Korea may raise questions over effective coordination between South Korea and Japan.

Going beyond President Roh's regional strategy centered on Northeast Asia, President Moon has expanded South Korea's regional role to include Russia and Southeast Asia. The new strategic shift is evidenced in South Korea's Northern and Southern strategies. As for Russia, Moon's speech at the 2017 Eastern Economic Forum in Vladivostok shows that South Korea's new northern policy is aimed at linking East Asia via economic and energy cooperation.⁸⁸ In this broader regional vision, enhanced inter-Korean relations are crucial as one of the key linkages in the plan is gas pipelines through North Korea. To this end, the Moon administration established the Presidential Committee on Northern Economic Cooperation. President Moon also suggested a Northeast Asian supergrid that would connect Russia, Mongolia, and the two Koreas as part of a larger regional vision for economic community and multilateral security regime in East Asia.⁸⁹ During his state visit to Russia in June 2018, Moon reiterated the importance of South Korean-Russian economic cooperation and trilateral cooperation among North and South Korea and Russia.⁹⁰ As a specific mechanism

for regional cooperation, President Moon also proposed an East Asian Railway Community linking six Northeast Asian nations and the United States as a stepping stone for regional energy and economic communities such as the European Union.⁹¹

South Korea's latest efforts to expand its regional autonomy is its "Southern Policy" that "seeks to diversify and enhance Seoul's political and economic relations with ASEAN's 10-member states, as well as India."⁹² During his July 2018 meetings with leaders of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN), Moon depicted "a peaceful Korean Peninsula as a 'new economic growth engine' for ASEAN countries."⁹³ North Korea's participation in the 2018 ASEAN Regional Forum (ARF) further promoted Moon's expanded regional vision linked to North Korea.⁹⁴

Conclusion

The Moon Jae-in government's policy towards North Korea is driven by its efforts to reshape the nature of inter-Korean relations and expand South Korea's regional autonomy. Unlike the previous progressive governments' approaches, Moon's policy has expanded the scope of regional strategy from Northeast Asia to greater Asia, including Russia and Southeast Asia. By comparing the Moon administration's policy with those of previous South Korean governments, this article has argued that President Moon's North Korea policy has thus far aligned South Korea's engagement of Pyongyang with its alliance relationship with Washington in an effective manner.

As the Moon government seeks to promote regional cooperation and denuclearization on the basis of stable inter-Korean relations, the Trump administration should approach the North Korean challenge not merely as a proliferation challenge but also as a novel way to establish a new regional order. In this regard, Mike Mullen and Sam Nunn's proposal of "a comprehensive deal" involving the US, the two Koreas, and China is a viable option. In the proposal, the former chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff and the former senator recommend that all sides work to replace the armistice on the peninsula with "a peace agreement" in return for North Korea's pledge of nuclear disarmament and progress on other issues.⁹⁵

However, the issues of sequencing and verification will remain major hurdles, but a larger implication of the proposal is that resolution of the nuclear crisis has the potential to influence other salient regional issues, ranging from the role of US troops in South Korea to the signing of a permanent peace treaty, and eventually to the unification of the two Koreas. It is not far from what the Moon government has called for. However, South Korea's engagement policy and broader regional strategy need to proceed in close partnership with the United States. In this vein, at the G-20 summit in November 2018, President Moon agreed with President Trump "on the importance of maintaining vigorous enforcement of existing sanctions to ensure the DPRK understands that denuclearization

is the only path to economic prosperity and lasting peace on the Korean Peninsula.”⁹⁶

Moreover, overall regional dynamics surrounding North Korea are often far beyond the control of South Korea. In early November 2018, for instance, North Korea’s foreign ministry threatened to “return to a policy of strengthening its nuclear force if the Trump administration did not lift economic sanctions,” and a scheduled meeting between US Secretary of State Mike Pompeo and his North Korean negotiating partner Kim Young-chol was cancelled at the last minute.⁹⁷ Nevertheless, the Moon government has been relentless in its engagement of North Korea in large part to catalyze the denuclearization of North Korea, which would then allow sanction relief and resumption of inter-Korean economic projects.⁹⁸ Although the end game on the peninsula is far from clear at this writing, the Moon administration will continue to promote both inter-Korean relations and US-North Korean talks as part of its broader foreign policy vision of seeking greater regional autonomy while sustaining Seoul’s alliance ties with Washington.

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Primacy of Diplomacy and Economic Power: How Japan Counters North Korea's Nuclear Weapons and Ballistic Missile Development

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Abstract: Japan's response to North Korea's nuclear weapons and ballistic missile programs is centered on the use of diplomatic and economic pressure to compel North Korea to return Japanese abductees from North Korea and de-nuclearize the country. Prime Minister Shinzo Abe has consistently promoted the use of economic coercion through unilateral and multilateral sanctions, even when the rest of the world thought that a diplomatic breakthrough was forthcoming after the Singapore Summit of 2018. Tokyo also relies on the international community, especially the United Nations, to name and shame North Korea for its erratic behavior regarding its nuclear weapons and missile development projects. Japan's defense strategy remains the combination of conventional defense and nuclear deterrence through the US alliance. Japan has also come forward with plans to deal with contingencies on the Korean Peninsula.

Keywords: *Japan, nuclear weapons, economic sanctions, abduction, contingency planning*

Introduction

The development of North Korea's nuclear and missile programs has proven to be a long-term challenge for Japan. Like other countries, Japan wishes to see stability on the Korean Peninsula and promotes the use of diplomatic and economic instruments with its neighbors to achieve peace and eventual denuclearization. Yet between Japan and the rest of the world are some delicate differences. For instance, the Japanese are not quite on the same page as others about dangers of long-range ballistic missiles and, ultimately, the chance of Korean unification. Japan's concern with North Korea is not just with its nuclear and missile programs but also a variety of economic and diplomatic issues. As it stands, the Shinzo Abe administration's concern rests more with a return of remaining Japanese abductees from North Korea than a short-term "resolution" of nuclear weapons and missile issues. For this reason, Abe and his policy advisers have been reasonably skeptical about the chance of short-term rapprochement with North Korea and remained firm in their belief of the use of diplomatic pressure and economic sanctions, even when the rest of the world thought that a diplomatic breakthrough was

forthcoming after the Singapore Summit of 2018. Japan's role in the current strategic dynamics in East Asia is unquestionably critical, but also unique.

In this article, I address the question of how Japan counters North Korea's nuclear weapons and ballistic missile development programs. Investigation of this inquiry will require a discussion of the following: I start with Japan's perception of North Korean military programs and how it responds to them. Second, I explore some of the most important determinants of North Korea policy, including the abductee issue, North Korea's activities inside Japan, and economic interactions. Finally, I discuss Japan's contingency plans for crisis scenarios on the Korean Peninsula to show what the Japanese are thinking about how conflicts would unfold and how they would respond to future crises. In so doing, I point out Western literature's general dearth of Japanese analysis on North Korea. In part because of language differences, the United States seldom encounters Japanese scholars' views, especially those expressed in Japanese.¹ In analyzing North Korea from a Japanese perspective, I intentionally use a number of Japanese works as a means of exposing readers to what the Japanese experts have to say.

Japan's threat perception of North Korea

To start with, Japanese perception of North Korea is shaped by the absence of formal diplomacy. Like the United States and South Korea, Japan is one of around 50 nations without official representation or embassy in North Korea, which has long fueled the sense of uncertainty and mutual untrustworthiness. Japan considers South Korea the only nation in the Korean Peninsula. While informal relations exist between Japan and North Korea, absence of formal channels means that Japan relies on other countries – those with official ties with Pyongyang, such as China – for communications and information. This arrangement raises the relative importance of private travelers, academics, media personnel, and independent defense analysts – those outside the government – to play a role in these functions. Thus, Japan's perception of North Korea is a creation of multiple narratives and actors.

As North Korea's military capability increased over the years, Japan's defense scholars have called for adopting a serious response. North Korea's power has grown so much that, while China's is greater than North Korea's, some think that the latter's threat is more imminent. A retired lieutenant general of the Japan Ground Self-Defense Force (JGSDF), Noboru Yamaguchi, writes that while China's rise might have both positive and negative impacts on global strategic environments, it is "North Korea (that) constitutes the paramount foreign threat to (Japanese) national security."² For this reason, Ryukoku University professor Soutetsu Ri argues that peace with North Korea cannot be taken for granted. Because he believes (back in 2011) that the United States remains preoccupied with the situation in the Middle East, the key to Korean peace remains with China as the main negotiator for stability.³

More recently, reflecting the 2017 rise in the number of missile and nuclear tests in North Korea, some experts have gone to extremes; for instance, Yoji Koda, a retired rear admiral of the Japan Maritime Self-Defense Force (JMSDF), contends that with the arrival of US President Donald Trump, there is no reason why the United States would *not* go to war with North Korea and that, accordingly, Japan needs to be prepared for it. Granted, Koda's book was published as the nuclear brinkmanship of 2017 was rising.⁴ Yet it is somewhat alarming that this rather sensationalist and ultimately false prediction came from one of the former top naval commanders of the country. Shigeru Handa details a variety of scenarios in which North Korea and Japan would go to war. In what appears to be drawn from war game scenarios, the contingencies he explores include North Korean attacks on places like nuclear reactors and US bases in Japan, facilities that many believe are vulnerable and, once attacked, would likely force the Japanese government to evacuate citizens. He also considers crisis situations in which Japan would have to mobilize the police and private sector because Self-Defense Forces (SDF) would be too preoccupied with war-fighting with North Korea to deal with evacuation duties. Other issues he investigates include inflows of North Korean refugees into Japan once the Peninsula becomes unstable, questions about where on Japan's northwestern coasts the refugees would land and how Japan's Coast Guard (JCG) and police would respond, the likelihood of chaos in refugee camps, and even the possibility of refugee riots. Thoughts are also given to SDF's readiness for using missile defense to intercept Nodong missiles, and North Korea's potential use of guerrilla commandos and special forces inside Japan.⁵ Japanese officials took the threats seriously enough to pass a series of national security laws, such as the National Emergency Legislation in 2003, to allow the government to take necessary actions against foreign threats, and deploy Patriot missile defense systems across Japan and *Aegis* ships on the sea to curb North Korea's aggressiveness.

In the last few years, North Korea's threats have renewed attention in Japan, after Russia and China dominated the security discourse. Russia, North Korea, and China are all nuclear powers with considerable conventional forces, but the perception of threats to Japan varied over time, possibly in the order of Russia (during the Cold War) to North Korea (in the 1990s) to China (in the 21st century).⁶ North Korea's military threats to Japan were perceived to be limited primarily to medium-range ballistic missiles and nuclear weapons, and as a result, the Japanese are aware that North Korea can only do so much to hurt them. Most informed Japanese see North Korea's nuclear and missile programs as little more than a means of deterrence and national survival, certainly not ones to use in preemptive missions to physically attack Japan.⁷ They also believe that North Korea's large army can be used for little other than defense in ground warfare. North Korean soldiers are too poorly fed and the armed forces short of fuel, supplies, and good weapons to wage an offensive war for a sustained period of time. North Korea's power does not match its hostile intent, and Pyongyang would not survive allied retaliation if it carried out mass attacks, even if they may initially cause tremendous damage. As

a whole, North Korea has never posed as grave a threat to the Japanese as the Soviet Union did and China does today. It has never invaded Japan nor launched a ballistic missile aimed at it. Thus, a degree of predictability exists in Japan that spares panic each time Kim Jong-un (and Kim Jong-il, previously) makes a threat of military destruction because his behavior, while certainly erratic, has a distinctive pattern of making threats, demanding more aid and sanctions lifted, and being silent for a few months before he repeats it. The informed Japanese are also aware that North Korea's problems are more internal than external, and more political and historical than military.

A more consequential scenario than a military strike is North Korea's "implosion." It may be precipitated by a growth of social expectations for change among North Koreans. Koichi Yonemura points to a leaked document that North Korea's inspection agency made in recent years to say that a recent rise of economic "entrepreneurs" has begun to threaten North Korea's social integrity. Designed as an educational material for inspectors, the document contained a detailed investigative account of economic "incidents" that occurred across the country between 2006 and 2009. These "incidents" included North Korean citizens stealing cultural artifacts worthy of UNESCO World Heritage status and selling them to China, as well as those who bribed military officers and regional government officials to develop gold mine projects. What they have in common is the demonstration of a high level of individual motivation to ignore law and regulations to become rich. Yonemura may have exaggerated a bit when he says that these bandits (sic) are becoming "mainstream" in North Korea because they present an "exemplary" way of living through black-market operations,⁸ but this revelation is one of the recent reminders of potential instability coming from economic change.

The second course of "implosion" is a rebellion of mid-level military officers seeking to displace the Kim Jong-un regime. A number of Japanese analysts argued in the late 1990s along this line; North Korea's *juche* (self-reliance) economy was failing, a famine was devastating people's lives, and the armed forces were in a shamble,⁹ a situation ripe for some kind of internal revolt. There is some ground to think this may happen even now. This rebellion scenario has been explored in various degrees by foreign observers, including those in Japan. According to a 2016 NHK documentary, a leaked USB created by North Korea's 3rd Army Unit 235 indicated how low the morale was in North Korean forces and how much anger had developed toward Kim Jong-un.¹⁰ Although several coup attempts have been made and suppressed in North Korea, a successful one in the future would unleash a range of humanitarian troubles in and around the Peninsula, including displacement, forced migration, and unintended launch and proliferation of nuclear arsenal. These events would generate or accompany a political vacuum in the country, potentially leading to a short-term foreign occupation by China, Russia, South Korea, or UN forces. With thousands of refugees crossing the sea and land for asylum, Japan would be among the nations forced to take them in for an unforeseen period of time.¹¹ If that happens, many SDF branches would be mobilized to contain

the impact: JMSDF to work with JCG to rescue refugees offshore while watching for clandestine boats and submarines; Air Self-Defense Force (JASDF) to provide supply and reconnaissance flights in addition to carrying out routine defense functions; and JGSDF to work with national and local police to set up refugee camps and protect local residents from them. Humanitarian resources needed for these duties would take away a large amount of resources for Japanese national defense. As Andrei Lankov famously argues, an implosion would come suddenly and violently.¹²

As of February 2019, the likelihood of this scenario is not great because Kim Jong-un has tightened his control of society and military by systemic coercion, execution of his lieutenants, and widespread indoctrination and propaganda. Accordingly, the Japanese are not losing sleep. Waseda University professor Toshimitsu Shigemura argues that North Korea will not “fall” anytime soon because the leadership in Pyongyang, even from the time of Kim Jong-il, has consolidated its grip on society by capitalizing on foreign criticisms and economic sanctions as a justification to tighten control.¹³ The economic situation may not be so bad as often described. Yoji Gomi looks at a rare bright aspect of economy that may become stable in the near future. He argued in 2018 that “market economy is spreading in North Korea. Capitalists have spread into society to drive taxicabs and run real estate. North Korea has made money through selling giant statues of national leaders to African nations. While Kim Jong-il sometimes got the country into famine and financial problems, his son has been doing relatively well. North Korea is far from collapse.”¹⁴ Yet others see things differently. The director of the Tokyo-based Korea International Institute, who graduated from the (North) Korea University in Japan, Toojin Park argues that Kim Jong-un’s policy of combining economic development with nuclear weapons development is inherently incompatible and unsustainable. With a series of expensive nuclear and missile tests conducted over the years, Park asserts that there is no way for North Korea to sustain a high economic growth for long with so much investment in military affairs. While some appreciate Kim’s ability to keep the political status quo, analysts like Park are more pessimistic about the future stability of the regime.¹⁵

The other threat assessment that observers consider relates to the possibility of infiltration by special forces. National police argue that North Korean special forces have more than 100 targets on the list of important defense facilities, including nuclear facilities, oil refineries, national telecommunication routes, electrical substations, bullet trains, subway systems, and major bridges. 34 nuclear facilities are located on the western coast of Japan, such as Niigata prefecture, where North Korean agents have landed and operated before.¹⁶ This sense of vulnerability comes in part from the police knowledge of specific locations where over a dozen Japanese citizens were likely abducted by North Korean agents in the 1970s, which is reinforced by several other cases of attempted infiltrations of the past. Atsushi Miyata, who worked on Chinese and North Korean affairs while in JASDF, points out that in 2013, for instance, a North Korean agent who

had successfully naturalized in Japan had applied for jobs at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Public Safety Intelligence Agency before being turned down.¹⁷

The fear of infiltration has manifested itself in recent events. Katsuhisa Furukawa, who served on the Panel of Experts of the United Nations Security Council on Economic Sanctions on North Korea and authored bestselling books on the topic of North Korea, quotes his colleague at the UN, allegedly a former CIA analyst, as saying that “Japan is full of those associated with North Korea.”¹⁸ Although it is not entirely clear what “associated with North Korea” means, this remark resonates with the fact that Kim Jong-il (not Kim Jong-un) used to tell Kenji Fujimoto, the famous sushi chef who “returned” to North Korea in 2016 to open a Japanese restaurant (called *Takahashi*) in Pyongyang, that “Japan’s naval police is weak. North Korea’s submarines have gone to Japan many times undetected. . . . SDF should do a better job. Japan’s an island nation; it should defend itself better.”¹⁹ The sentiment – that there are so many North Korean agents not just in Japan, but also across Asia, looking to undermine Japan’s security – is shared among observers; soon after Kim Jong-nam’s assassination in Kuala Lumpur in 2017,²⁰ a team of Mainichi Shinbun journalists published a detailed study of how that internationally-executed assassination happened. This is not only because there are over 150 nations with formal diplomatic ties with North Korea, but also because it is widely known that North Korean agents are in Southeast Asia, such as Malaysia and Singapore, where they are suspected to operate relatively freely because those countries did not require visas for North Korean citizens until recently.²¹

Response toward North Korea’s nuclear and missile programs

According to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MOFA), Japan’s policy toward North Korea is as follows: “Japan seeks to normalize its relations with North Korea, in accordance with the Japan-Democratic People’s Republic of Korea (DPRK) Pyongyang Declaration, through comprehensively resolving outstanding issues of concern such as the abductions, nuclear and missile issues as well as settlement of the unfortunate past.”²² In the 2002 Pyongyang Declaration, both sides pledged to abide by international law, cooperate for peace, and not to threaten each other, among other things. While North Korea agreed to extend moratorium on missile tests before it was later breached, Japan apologized for wartime acts and offered economic and humanitarian aid as appropriate after normalization. In sum, the declaration was aimed to improve the bilateral relationship, consider international environment, and use economic incentives to solve military problems. Although the statement does not mention military instruments of policy, Japan’s military response toward North Korea’s nuclear and missile programs is substantial.

As such, Japan’s defense strategy remains the combination of conventional defense and nuclear deterrence through the US alliance. On one hand, Japan has improved its

conventional defense capability through the deployment of Patriot Advanced Capability (PAC) systems and stronger cooperation between JMSDF and JCG. JASDF has deployed PAC-3 batteries at various bases in order to shoot down any incoming medium-range ballistic missiles from North Korea. The Ministry of Defense is looking into deploying *Aegis Ashore* systems in Akita and Yamaguchi Prefectures in the near future. With the existing fleet of JMSDF *Aegis* ships, these systems are primarily designed to defend against and deter attacks coming from countries like North Korea. Despite the growing arsenal of advanced weapons, however, political efforts remain stalled with regard to revising the peace constitution, especially its Article 9, which bans the use of force as a means of settling international disputes. Thus, severe legal constraints remain on the use of material capability, even if the latter has been growing over the years. On the other hand, the US-Japan security alliance remains the center of Japan's overall defense policy, including one toward North Korea. America's extended nuclear deterrence adds much power to Japan's overall intent to deter North Korea from launching first strikes. The bilateral cooperation worked well during President Barack Obama's Asia rebalance strategy, although the strategy had elements that provoked countries like China to aggressively respond to the changing balance of military power between China and the United States.²³

In the meantime, Japan's defense strategy toward North Korea does not officially involve cyber deterrence or preemption; the fact that, despite the imminence of cyber threats, Japan has yet to embrace a tough cyber measure against North Korea may come as a surprise because North Korea is one of the nations allegedly tied to hacking groups, such as the Lazarus Group, also known as Hidden Cobra.²⁴ The reason for this lack of evident intervention is that, like many other countries, Japan has been careful to take enough time to develop a cyber strategy. Accordingly, there is little public information available about Japan's cyber strategy tailored toward North Korea.

Japan's response to North Korea's nuclear weapons and ballistic missile programs has much to do with the use of diplomatic and economic pressure to compel North Korea to return the abductees and de-nuclearize. Prime Minister Abe has consistently promoted the use of economic coercion through unilateral and multilateral sanctions, even during the recent attempt by South Korea and the United States for a rapprochement with North Korea. A number of academics support the use of economic sanctions.²⁵ Tokyo also relies on the international community to name and shame North Korea for its behavior, especially at the United Nations.

All these considerations point to the uniqueness of Japan's response to North Korea's nuclear weapons and ballistic missile programs. It is not just North Korea's nuclear weapons and missiles that shape it, but external elements that could become internal vulnerabilities, such as kidnapping of citizens and Special Forces infiltration. Naturally, Japan's response is closely linked with various constituents of domestic politics whose voices and concerns have affected policy one way or another. As such, a key part of

bilateral contention remains centered on the discussion about those internal factors.

Domestic determinants of Japan's North Korea policy

Because internal determinants of North Korea policy are too many to be fully examined in this limited space, I selectively discuss some of the most important ones – leadership analysis, the abductee issue, operations of ethnic Korean political groups, and economic interactions. First, Japanese officials formulate policy based on what they expect the leadership in Pyongyang will do in light of the history of the two countries, economic interactions, and directions of international politics. The Japanese commonly collect information on various aspects of Korean politics and society and have written many books on leadership analysis of this kind. In particular, personality analysis on Kim Jong-un has much to do with a series of speculations about his past and present.²⁶ Along with Kim Jong-un's closeness to individuals like Fujimoto and the fact that his mother was born in Japan, Japanese observers tend to draw a sense of comfort that he will not order a military strike on Japanese soil under normal circumstances. Generally, the Japanese see Kim to be a cold-blooded but rational actor with a decent degree of strategic restraints and ability to conduct reasonable cost-benefit analysis. Thus, while Japan continues to strengthen its defense, it pays much attention to its bigger strategic rival in China.

Second, Japan's policy towards North Korea is based on a years-long commitment to returning home the abductees, whose resolution is now one of the major conditions for diplomatic normalization with North Korea. The abductee issue has been one of the reasons why Japan has firmly opposed deals with North Korea over missiles and nuclear weapons and continued to push for economic sanctions and diplomatic isolation. The abductee issue is so central to the interests of political heavyweights at home, especially Abe, who became prime minister after championing the issue in front of his predecessor (Koizumi), that some experts propose to make drastic compromises with North Korea as a means of solving it. One such expert, the late diplomat Hisahiko Okazaki, proposed to give North Korea 50 tons of rice in exchange for repatriation, assuming that the kidnapped were still alive then.²⁷ The abductee issue became prominent in 2002 when Kim Jong-il met with Prime Minister Koizumi in Pyongyang. It has since become a "must discuss" issue in negotiations with North Korea, arguably stalling multilateral discussions like the six-party talks, but reflecting a key aspect of Japanese politics. The main lobby group, called the Association of Families of Victims Kidnapped by North Korea (AFVKN, or "Sukuukai" in Japanese), has made the resolution one of Abe's (but not necessarily his successors') conditions for normalization. With the press mostly on their side, the groups' members have repeatedly met not only with prime ministers, but also Presidents Barack Obama and Donald Trump to make a case for the return of abductees. There has been no breakthrough in their effort in recent years, but the lobby

continues to shape a hardline approach in Abe's policy.

The third determinant of North Korea policy is the role of ethnic North Korean residents in Japan and their organizations, such as the Chongryon, or "Chosen Soren" in Japanese. North Koreans with permanent residency in Japan are an important source of intelligence from which to draw a political "temperature" in North Korea. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs reports that as of June 2014, there were as many as 537,000 Koreans, including North Koreans (but excluding those who naturalized), registered as living in Japan,²⁸ especially in major cities with large North Korean populations and Korean towns, like Tokyo, Kawasaki, and Osaka. The history of ethnic repatriation to North Korea is long,²⁹ with a number of ethnic Koreans returning home to North Korea on a weekly basis, but many others remain in Japan. While Korean people in Japan have long been targets of nationalist attacks, most of them remain largely apolitical groups of people and have merged into Japanese society through commerce and marriage.

In contrast, political groups like the Chosen Soren have been clandestinely active and have caused controversy in recent years by, for instance, demanding a government subsidy for operating its schools (such as the aforementioned North Korean University in Japan) where anti-Japan education is allegedly provided. With close ties to Pyongyang, the group organized itself from North Korean residents in search of eliminating discrimination and improving the quality of Korean life in Japan. The Chosen Soren and its associated organizations also promote understanding about and support for North Korea by inviting legislators, regional politicians, and famous people to social events.³⁰ However, this group is hardly immune from critique, not only from Japanese observers for problems ranging from alleged espionage to indoctrination and tax evasion, but also even those from within. Kwang Hee Han, a former Chosen Soren leader who had become vice minister of finance at its headquarters in Tokyo after 40 years of service, criticizes the group for many problems it has caused. Among other things, he revealed how the group's "study group" indoctrinates students to believe in communism, teaches them how to operate as spies against South Korea, and makes money operating gambling industries like pachinko.³¹

The last domestic determinant of North Korea policy, which is tied to a policy outcome of sanctions, is economic interactions. I focus on domestic aspects of economic interactions for two reasons. First, North Korea's economic capacity shapes its behavior toward the Japanese and therefore affects the way the two countries interact economically. Second, Japan uses both economic sanctions and potentiality of financial aid as a means of getting North Korea to change policy for the better. Japan and North Korea used to engage closely on economic terms, even though economic interactions brought little benefit for the Japanese. For Japan, North Korea has never been a large trading partner, and Tokyo severed official trading ties with Pyongyang in 2010.³² For North Korea, Japan is a key economic actor to buy goods and supplies from, and commerce used

to give them some of the best nutrition and most advanced technologies. But for the Japanese side at least, economic instruments are an important part of its policy. This is clear from a historical standpoint; Japan used to export such manufactured goods as transport materials, while importing foodstuffs like mushrooms and seafood. In those days, North Korean commercial ships used to come to Japan on the famous cargo passenger ferry named *Man Gyong Bong 92* that served as a symbol of bilateral trade for decades. The ferry operation was criticized for allegedly being part of shipping illicit materials and eventually shut down in 2006 by the Japanese government due to Kim Jong-il's launching of missiles and nuclear tests. Japan stopped trade in 2010 and has since stuck mostly with multilateral economic sanctions. It remains true, however, that North Korean travel bureaus in Japan continue to give travel visas to ordinary Japanese citizens who are willing to pay for travel and, in so doing, technically contribute to the regime's finance, before they return to Japan to do things like writing travel books.³³

In a book in Japanese, Kyushu University professor Jongseok Park provides an academic insight on North Korea's economic performance in historical manner, showing that the North Korean economy used to be closed, but once it realized that economic development was impossible to achieve as long as North Korea worked only with socialist nations, it began to seek better relations with the capitalist world, especially since the end of the Cold War. In light of the collapse of the socialist order, however, North Korean authorities became careful about moving ahead too quickly with structural reform. Meanwhile, the private sector developed, albeit slowly. Therefore, while the North Korean economy grew with socialist cooperation, it shrank as socialist republics began to recede. In the 1990s, North Korea's economy recovered slightly, but the society soon suffered from famine. Now, in the 21st century, North Korean leaders have put off drastic reform in favor of raising productivity through limited opening of its economy to the outside world.³⁴

Today, Japan has adopted a tough sanctions policy as a means of coercing Pyongyang to change behavior for the better. Yet it has also allowed ethnic North Koreans to return home permanently or visit there for family, which essentially permits a limited export of household goods. Until recently, Japan tacitly allowed North Korean shipping companies to use its ports and operate. In his 2017 book, *Financial Sources of North Korean Nuclear Weapons: Secret Records of United Nations Investigations*, Furukawa makes key revelations. While the Abe administration has been among the most vocal about the need to tighten the sanctions, Furukawa contends that Japan is one of the many countries that practically allow North Korean agents to trade illicitly. Specifically, he argues that the problem is with the lackluster nature of Japan's domestic law. For example, he shows that special measures law on freight inspection (貨物検査特別措置法) only allows the government to inspect freight that directly comes from and goes to North Korea, but does not allow the government to inspect freight that goes elsewhere (like Russia). In 2015, this law prohibited the government

from conducting full inspection of a North Korean ship docked in Sakaiminato, Tottori prefecture, because it belonged to a third country, when the government suspected it of carrying smugglers.³⁵ So legal reform is needed to do Japan's part in the execution of economic sanctions. The scale of insufficient supervision is smaller, however, compared to other countries like China, which has evidently allowed North Korea to violate international sanctions and actually conducted trade and ship-to-ship cargo transfers on the sea, especially at nighttime.

If the North Korea situation improves dramatically in the near future, some observers think that Prime Minister Abe might try to visit North Korea. Japan's *Business Journal* speculates that he would, based on a testimony of Thae Yong-ho, a former North Korean diplomat who defected in 2016 while deputy ambassador to the United Kingdom, who maintains that a diplomatic rapprochement between Japan and North Korea is possible because there are some positive signs for it in North Korea. For instance, he cites a special investigative committee designed to investigate Japanese abductees that remains intact despite North Korea's insistence that the abductee issue has been resolved (from North Korea's perspective). Thae argues that this is because Kim Jong-un wants to get massive aid from Japan in exchange for the resolution of the abductee problem.³⁶

Contingency planning

Japan's policy toward North Korea remains an important part of international diplomacy. Yet Japan's influence would continue to wane if outside dynamics and accidents proved more influential. Recent events, especially the 2018 Trump-Kim Summit in Singapore, demonstrate the limit of Japanese diplomacy; Prime Minister Abe was seen as largely out of the diplomatic loop while his counterparts in South Korea and China were "in." When diplomacy goes well, few are worried, until it does not go well. As such, Japanese leaders have long planned for contingency, which includes a variety of scenarios ranging from North Korea's "collapse" to conventional missile strikes. Accordingly, they have deployed missile defense, strengthened the alliance with the United States, and relaxed legal constraints on the use of force. The so-called J-Alert, a nationwide warning system designed to deal with crisis situations that include missile launches to earthquakes, is a relatively recent invention. The system became a popular target of public complaints when North Korea fired a few missiles to cause noisy alarms in the middle of the night, but people know that the problem rests with North Korea and not the system itself, which is functional.

Security loopholes remain, however. Japan's Coast Guard (JCG) has often failed to detect illegal entries of North Korean fishermen who reached the shores on Japan.³⁷ In fact, as military analyst Kazuhisa Ogawa demonstrates, JCG has long failed to defend the coastline from North Korean and Chinese encroachments.³⁸ This trend has only

intensified in recent years. JCG statistics shows that in 2017 alone, a total of 104 wooden boats have reached Japan from North Korea, in addition to 35 North Korean bodies found with them.³⁹ This is a serious national security matter because, in the case of North Korean implosion, Japan would face a torrent of refugees crossing the ocean to reach Japan, for which it is not ready. Shin'ichi Kiyotani argues that it is possible that some "refugees" may turn out to be intelligence officers trained to harm Japanese nationals once they land. JCG and JMSDF do not each have a staff size large enough to deal with tens of thousands of refugees. Even if they are able to detain some of them, there will not be enough facilities to host the refugees. Police will not have enough officers to man the facilities, so JGSDF would be mobilized to defend vulnerable facilities, which would mean less manpower for national defense. As a result, Japan would have to mobilize the private sector to provide security, facilities,⁴⁰ and order, but those in the private sector are not as trained and resourceful as government agencies. Ultimately, one must assume that all these scenarios could unfold after North Korea launched a mass cyberattack on Japan to significantly downgrade computer systems across the SDF.

Because of severe restrictions on the use of defense force, the Japanese government has relied on US forces as a central part of planning for contingency. Joint actions would be based on a series of existing agreements, but most importantly on the 1960 security treaty. The sections that are most pertinent to joint planning are in the treaty's Articles 4 and 5. On one hand, Article 4 states that US forces would consult with the Japanese government when they intend to make changes on combat operations affecting US bases in Japan.⁴¹ Some observers naturally suspect that US forces would act without consultation in case of contingency.⁴² As of now, there is no unclassified government document that states whether and how much US force in Japan would be used to fight a war in Korea, although a series of verbal commitments made by generations of national leaders on both sides of the Pacific all but guarantee a swift discussion being set up by joint forces at time of crisis. This is a critical alliance matter people must be aware of, but it turns out that not many studies have been done on this topic, even in Japanese. In this respect, Toojin Park's analysis of several US war plans against North Korea is a rare study in Japan, but it is done with the US Forces in Korea (USFK, 35,000 troops) playing a central role without consideration of US Forces in Japan (USFJ, 48,000 troops). To be fair, Park does mention the possible use of amphibious assault ships based at Sasebo and E-4B aircraft allegedly based at the National Airborne Operations Center at Chitose Air Base in Hokkaido, but he does not elaborate exactly how these forces would be used and for what purpose.⁴³ Park argues that in case of a bilateral US-North Korea war, North Korea would lose quickly for five reasons. First, North Korean forces are not unified enough to face stronger adversaries. Second, North Korean soldiers are too malnourished to fight. Third, its ballistic missiles cannot reach the US homeland. Fourth, North Korean conventional weapons are "useless" (sic) and there is little fuel for soldiers to use to fight. Finally, North Korea's economy is too small to fight the prosperous US forces.⁴⁴ The

problem with this view is that a purely bilateral war is unlikely and that a decent analysis must at least take China, South Korea, and probably Russia into consideration. There are already many war scenarios on the Korean Peninsula that scholars outside Japan have explored,⁴⁵ but these analyses exclude those scenarios.

On the other hand, Article 5 of the 1960 security treaty ties US forces with the defense of Japan, although the Article is written in ways that do not necessarily guarantee US forces to defend Japan in *every* conceivable scenario. A highly technical reading of Article 5 shows that in fact, the Article gives Washington a considerable leeway to maneuver; it allows the US side to respond to an armed attack on Japan in the territories “in accordance with their respective constitutional provisions and processes.”⁴⁶ This means that, even if Japan is under attack and asks for US help, US forces will not necessarily be under obligation to intervene at the timing of Japan’s liking unless and until Congressional and legal procedure finds it in America’s interest to do so. Similarly, Article 5 does not automatically force the Japanese to act, either. This strict interpretation of the Article aside, however, Japan and the United States remain close allies, and it is difficult to imagine a scenario in which North Korea would end up splitting the alliance. Therefore, it is fair to expect both countries to operate together, although details of joint operations are likely to depend on how the crisis unfolds into a conflict.

Contingency planning remains an important matter not only because a Korean war would significantly impact Japan’s national security, but also because there are nearly 60,000 Japanese citizens living in South Korea, in addition to those traveling there. Evacuation plans for the nationals are necessary, especially ones involving SDF, not just USFJ or USFK. JASDF could be requested to fly people out of the Peninsula, while JMSDF would be tasked to sail them away to secure location. JGSDF would have to protect the aircraft on deck and ships from possible attacks and riots. It is unknown, however, whether Japan would be able to secure the South Korean government’s approval to deploy SDF to South Korea to evacuate the Japanese citizens there. It would be legal for SDF to operate outside Japan under the 2015 collective self-defense clause as long as USFJ is involved, but the problems are that (1) the evacuation operation would take place on South Korea’s sovereign land and (2) by law, SDF could only be legally mobilized to *already pacified* areas; SDF cannot be deployed to combat areas overseas without special legal measures added. Even if SDF was deployed to South Korea, the size of deployment would be politically determined, likely small, and without anything more than sidearms for SDF personnel, so SDF would not necessarily be able to deal with a large number of people – accounting realistically for not just Japanese citizens but locals, Americans, Chinese, and tourists – asking to be evacuated in the midst of chaos.⁴⁷

These challenges were part of the considerations assessed in some operational plans, one of which was recently published without government sanction. According to the *Yomiuri Shinbun*, a Japanese newspaper, if North Korea’s shelling (or threats of it) close

airports in South Korea, the Japanese government would work with US forces to move affected Japanese and American citizens from Pusan to the Tsushima islands. After spending a night or two there, the evacuees would take turns to board Japanese and US ships to move to Kyushu via Moji port. The obvious problem with this plan is the possible objection from the South Korean government to temporarily host SDF personnel on South Korean grounds. To deal with the problem, JMSDF ships might consider docking next to US ships that get stationed at Pusan port, theoretically *without touching* Korean ground, in order to move the people, although such a move would likely be exposed and become highly controversial in South Korea, even in time of turmoil. Japanese officials have scouted the terrain around and on Tsushima and looked into local infrastructure on the island, such as lodging facilities, water supply, and foodstuffs. The government might soon begin consultation with local governments that could end up hosting the evacuees.⁴⁸

No evacuation plans would be perfect; there are at least three issues with this plan. First, it assumes the availability of US forces and resources Japan needs, but it is possible that both forces would be so pressed that they may not be able to help each other. USFK would be mainly tasked to fight the war and move at least 200,000 American people known to be living in South Korea today, including tourists, to safer locations, a task that would involve the use of various US bases in Japan. Even this operation alone would be complicated; people would be easier to “move,” but we have to beware of an additional challenge – seemingly funny but seriously – how to deal with the need to relocate and feed hundreds of animal pets of those fleeing families, which add logistical constraints on the relocation at time of crisis.⁴⁹

The second challenge is with the multinational nature of a conflict on the Peninsula, especially with regard to UN missions there. While South Korea hosts the UN Command forward presence among others, Japan hosts the United Nations Command-*Rear* at Yokota Air Base. In case of contingency in Korea, the rear forces may be used to conduct a number of functions at the same time, including providing support to the front line and bringing UN forces in Korea to Japan, which would be an additional logistical challenge for the Japanese. Japan could be asked to open extra SDF bases to these troops and provide medical care and other resources when government functions are overstretched. Furthermore, the UN Command and communication routes could become targets of North Korean missiles, a possibility that the Japanese government must know would cause heavy casualties.

The final concern one may have with the plan is the assumption of a fully supportive political environment in Japan for the operation. Even though North Korea's threats have been there for a long time, the reality is that most Japanese are not quite ready for war with North Korea, and the particular nature of local opposition to US and Japanese bases, including those in Okinawa, must be considered an obstacle, especially if the war expands and becomes protracted with Chinese or Russian interventions. Postwar

US presence on Okinawa has long caused many types of troubles with local hosts. US contingency preparations have made people in Okinawa, some of whom are staunch anti-base activists, aware of US plans to evacuate US troops and their families currently in South Korea to Okinawa.⁴³ Contingency planning reflects the presence of many moving parts, which makes it difficult for interested parties to conduct realistic scenario planning. As such, the planning process requires the Japanese government to reshape the domestic political environment, where USFJ would swiftly and effectively be used.

Conclusion

The main findings of this article are as follows: First, Japan's response to North Korea's nuclear weapons and ballistic missile programs is a function of multiple factors and actors in Japan, not just of government officials but also of private citizens, academics, and the media. This is largely because of the lack of formal ties between Pyongyang and Tokyo, but also because these non-governmental actors have traditionally been an important part of foreign analysis. Second, Japan's concerns with North Korea are not only with the latter's missiles and nuclear weapons, but also other problems, such as the abductee issues and infiltration risks, which make it a quite complex foundation of policy formulation. The complexity also reinforces the fact that Japan's national interests are not always directly correlated with its neighbors in East Asia and the United States, largely because those countries are not necessarily apprised of all of those issues in Japan. Additional challenges come from the fact that North Korea's military threats pose problems to some different constituents, such as those in Okinawa, who do not necessarily have the same level of enthusiasm for US presence as those officials in Tokyo. All these challenges provide a set of complicated problems that Japan needs to take into consideration as it formulates and implements North Korea policy.

There are two policy implications: Japan's limited facilitation of denuclearization and the complexity of Japan's democratic system. First, while Japan remains committed to dealing with challenges related to North Korea's WMD and missile programs as a member of the international community, its ability to facilitate denuclearization on the Korean Peninsula remains limited. Japan is unlikely to go nuclear anytime soon in order to deter North Korea on the nuclear level. Nor does it generate an offensive conventional military strategy to strike North Korea's missile launchers; instead, Tokyo has made its missile defense system more robust. These limited actions have come in large part due to its heavy reliance on economic and diplomatic instruments and internal constraints on the use of force. This means, however, that as long as the international community continues to use such means in a major multilateral framework, Japan will be able to do much to contribute to the effort as a middle power.

Second, Japan's response to North Korea's nuclear and missile development programs

will always reflect multiple dimensions of a complex democratic society. As such, this article has laid out a set of key political and social organizations that have much to do with the way policymakers function. Among the most important factors is the role of the abductee issue, which has prevented the Abe administration from walking away from a hardline, maximum pressure campaign. While the abductee issue appears to be detached from North Korea's weapons programs, it continues to have a powerful impact on the way the Japanese consider North Korea and how Prime Minister Abe shapes Japan's North Korea policy. The international community must take into account the multifaceted nature of Japanese domestic politics that influence the way policy is made toward North Korea.

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Acknowledgment: For comments on earlier drafts, I thank Yangmo Ku, participants in the Peace and War Summit at Norwich University and the St. Louis East Asian Modern (STEAM) reading group, and the anonymous reviewer of this article. I also thank members of Japan's Air Self-Defense Force for hosting me as its inaugural visiting research fellow at Air Staff College, as well as the Maureen and Mike Mansfield Foundation where I was a cohort 4 member of the U.S.-Japan Network for the Future program between 2016 and 2018. For financial support, I thank Saint Louis University. Views expressed in this article belong solely to the author and do not necessarily represent the official policy of the institutions mentioned here.

Notes

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Primacy and the United States: the Role of the US in the Modern Era

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Abstract: On the international stage today, there is no shortage of adversaries. Whether it be Putin's Russia or Xi's China, the United States has the responsibility to confront the nefarious actions of these revisionist states. However, academia has somehow become filled with deep forebodings of eventual American decline, as both the public and the political elite cast doubt on continued US primacy abroad in favor of advancing US interests at home. This article argues that the US still retains both the soft and hard power necessary in order to continue our role in the rules-based order which has been, and continues to be, the basis for peace and stability. Because of our adversaries' invidious attempts to undermine American democracy at home, the strength and trust of our political institutions rests upon a strong and determined stance abroad.

Keywords: primacy, United States, China, Russia, North Korea

Introduction

The global dominance of the United States has been threatened by a variety of actors on the world stage. The rise of revisionist powers such as China or Russia has caused many to doubt whether US power has weakened. These powers have sought to upend the American-led world order through military, economic, and political initiatives that have attacked the legitimacy and credibility of the United States. This paper will explore the underlying motivations for their actions and their likelihood of success. Most importantly, it will analyze how US foreign policy can be amended in order to counter these attacks in a way that protects the rules-based order that has been the linchpin for foreign relations since the Cold War. Although there seems to be deep skepticism toward the US responsibility to continue its global leadership, these fears are unfounded and primacy remains the best option to protect US interests. US hegemony has allowed the diffusion of American ideals abroad, creating a more peaceful and democratic world. To willingly forfeit this mission out of obduracy or entrust this supreme responsibility to other states would have immense repercussions at home and abroad.

Description of Primacy

The main objective of primacy is to use US hegemony to shape an international order congenial to US interests and values.¹ Primacy is built on the supposition that a hegemonic power which surpasses other countries in economic, military, and political affairs can alter the international structure in a way that suffuses the hegemon's influence and values abroad.² It is important to delineate, however, that primacy should not be confused with imperialism, a manner of rule which is dependent on force. Rather, according to liberal primacy, the hegemon uses mutually agreed upon rules and institutions to alleviate the nature of the anarchy by lessening ambiguity and forming interconnected relationships.³ Institutional agreements, in the form of multilateral and bilateral agreements, increase the flow of information between participant nations and act as mechanisms for the provision of public goods, all of which facilitates cooperation and makes the behavior of states more predictable.⁴ These arrangements do constrain the autonomy of the unipolar state with its attendant responsibilities, such as providing security or managing the global economy, but the benefits these agreements confer to the hegemon – in the form of economic progress, military security, or diplomacy – outweigh the costs. Furthermore, the services it offers act as an incentive for member nations to lose a part of their sovereignty as well; it is more economical to accept the public goods the hegemon has to offer, goods that its recipients have greater difficulty in providing. Therefore, the liberal hegemon can be understood as not only possessing material capabilities but also acting as a “hub” around which other states connect and operate.⁵ The United States assumed this role at the end of the Second World War.

Following the Second World War, the United States acted as the “hub” which knitted together every major democratic power. Possessing extraordinary economic, military, and material reserves, the US effectively built a new international order reliant on multilateral alliances, strategic restraint, cooperative security, and open and institutionalized rule-based relations as a response to what it deemed national security concerns.⁶ Through its support of organizations such as NATO, the United Nations, the European Union, the World Bank, and the International Monetary Fund, the US has fundamentally altered the makeup of international relations. In fact, these institutions not only cultivated a sense of reciprocal altruism, but also an appreciation for democratic norms, values which have continued to spread under US auspices. However, with the Soviet Union gone and US power beginning to attenuate (as some would claim), many have doubted the practicality of this foreign policy. With the costs of international hegemony beginning to rise, it is unjustified for the United States to continue shouldering the burden for the world's welfare; such a course of action, if continued, may even be dangerous. Still, the United States is the only country today which has the “ability to deploy and support the largest and best-equipped forces but also the capacity to preserve the social cohesion.”⁷ The world needs the US, especially at this point in time, both for its power and its ideals, to ensure that challengers who pose a threat to the rules-based order will be defeated or divested of their purpose. The United States should be fully committed to this policy, especially when

confronting adversaries such as China or Russia, and still retains the necessary resources to pursue this aim.

The Rise of China

Despite China's tumultuous journey from communism to market capitalism, the country has proven to be an implacable enemy of the rules-based system which has so painstakingly been created since the end of World War II. With an historically tempestuous relationship with the US, China has evolved into an economic giant, successfully rising from an extreme level of poverty to become one of the world's most productive economies, supplying goods to markets worldwide. Indeed, China's GDP has grown by a whopping 7.75 percent, compared to only 2.5 percent for the United States in the year 2015.⁸ This growth is predicted to eventually surpass the United States in economic output, though not in per capita income, in the year 2020.⁹ Though the world has acclimated itself to this new economic giant, this monumental success masks the growing acrimony which characterizes its behavior toward the United States.

China's economic expansion has been a topic of considerable discussion, and has had a generally salutary effect on the world economy; however, this is juxtaposed by China's growing military ambitions. Chinese technological innovation has allowed its military forces to achieve approximate parity to their US counterparts in a number of important military scenarios, including air superiority, anti-surface warfare, and airspace penetration.¹⁰ Furthermore, though China's nuclear arsenal is still numerically inferior to that of the US, the survivability of these weapon systems have increased throughout the last decade.¹¹ Perhaps the most disconcerting of China's military developments has been the creation of sophisticated missile systems designed to take out aircraft carriers, the first rate ship in the US Navy's arsenal.¹² This development is supplemented by a proliferation of Chinese submarines operating in areas such as the South China Sea; reports indicate that "between 1996 and 2015, the number of modern diesel submarines in China's inventory rose from 2 to 41, and all but 4 of these boats are armed with cruise missiles."¹³ Both of these activities will prove to be a substantial obstacle to the US Navy in the area if these assets are deployed. Unfortunately, it seems that the Chinese government has no compunctions toward doing this.

To the consternation of the world community, China has displayed a willingness to flex its military muscles when it deems its interests have not been adequately recognized. Accompanied by specious "peaceful" proclamations, it has arrogated a rather broad claim to the South China Sea, known as the area within the "nine-dash line," which is contested vehemently by Vietnam and the Philippines. This alarming trend has evoked the ire of these nations whose security and economic welfare are inextricably woven into that sea. For example, in 2012, China used patrol ships to prevail over the Philippines in a dispute over the Scarborough Shoal, and in 2016, a serious dispute erupted after a Chinese oil company installed a large oil rig in Vietnamese

waters.¹⁴ Coupled with these invidious actions have been concurrent island-building operations China has pursued. China has effectively “built” and reinforced various islands in the Spratly Archipelago and a section known as the Fiery Cross Reef.¹⁵ On these islands are “airstrips, ports, radar facilities, solar arrays, lighthouses and support buildings.¹⁶ If missile systems are placed on China’s territorial acquisitions near this important maritime route, specifically on the Scarborough Shoal, it will pose a severe threat to the US Navy operating in the area. Only a clear and cogent strategy by the US and its allies such as the Philippines, and Vietnam can nullify this threat. Yet, it is doubtful those allies would have the temerity to confront China without the support of the US; our stance is an essential determinant for the security of these nations. Hence, the belief that China poses no threat to the rules-based order, including the US, is not only quixotic, but simply dangerous. Indeed, China’s provocative behavior has not only manifested itself in its military posture, but also in its diplomatic efforts as well.

If we are to accept China’s newfound position in the world order, we must also expect it to adhere to a certain set of standards for governance, participation in international organizations, and environmental policies. However, China has not exemplified much of what the US or the international community should expect given its economic and military expansion. Indeed, despite its nominal participation in international organizations such as the UN, there is a litany of questionable actions China has committed with blatant disregard for international laws and resolutions. For instance, in October 2011, “China and Russia both vetoed an already weakened UN resolution condemning the Syrian regime’s human rights abuses.”¹⁷ Furthermore, these same two countries have habitually ignored the 1951 UN Convention which stipulates that refugees should not be returned to countries in which they are likely to be persecuted.¹⁸ Sometimes, this refusal turns into outright neglect. In 2016, China boycotted a UN tribunal which had enunciated a clear violation of Philippine sovereignty by Chinese maritime actions, stating the resolution was “ill founded,” and that they would not be bound by it.¹⁹ Coupled with widely known systemic intellectual property theft, China cannot be considered a role-model for other countries to aspire to. According to one major report, the Chinese government is still plagued by mass protests stemming from labor disputes, land acquisitions, forced demolitions, pollution, traffic accidents, and incidents involving ethnic groups.²⁰ The number of these incidents have risen each year from 2010.²¹ China’s behavior is simply unacceptable, and has affected US efforts to contain other threats, such as North Korea, as well.

North Korea has committed massive amounts of resources toward the development of nuclear tipped intercontinental ballistic missiles (ICBMs), a pursuit which has largely been successful. Unlike China or the US, which have reaped the benefits of economic liberalization, North Korea is an autarkic, totalitarian country known mainly for its human rights abuses, extreme poverty, and the megalomaniacal behavior of its authoritarian leaders.²² In the year 2016 alone, North Korea tested over 26 missiles, of which ten were successful.²³ It has largely been speculated that the latest missile systems within North Korea’s arsenal are capable of hitting US soil.²⁴ Given North Korean propaganda that has repeatedly alluded to an eventual

war against the US “imperialists,” this development can no longer be ignored; just this past year, for instance, Kim Jong-un threatened to bomb the US island of Guam during a series of recriminations between US President Donald Trump.²⁵ Unfortunately, our capabilities are limited. Reports indicate that “SM-3 and THAAD interceptors have shown success against IRBMs in test environments [but] they cannot assure defense against multiple North Korean Hwasong-12 missiles in a real attack scenario.”²⁶ In short, there is little probability of the US successfully defending against a nuclear attack, in which numerous missiles are fired simultaneously. Furthermore, as articulated brilliantly by the journalist Mark Bowden, any military action to topple the regime or destroy its nuclear weapon systems have low chances of success.²⁷ Therefore, an attempt to successfully deter North Korea would have to include its only trading partner, China. This has proven to be an intractable issue because China’s relationship with North Korea, though it has not been without a fair number of disputes, has largely been congenial. This relationship has also been indirectly supported by a reluctant US, which has relinquished much of its previous sanction-based strategy against this threat.

Despite years of severe sanctions which have made nearly 90 percent of North Korean exports illegal and the nation-state’s legitimacy acknowledged by President Trump’s administration (who has taken Kim’s promises of denuclearization at face value), North Korea’s nuclear program is not going anywhere any time soon.²⁸ Indeed, it is difficult to see how the country would want to backtrack itself into placating the views of either the US or the UN when nuclear weapons were the key to its success; apparently, developing nuclear weapons is enough to make a “madman” an “honorable leader,” according to President Trump.²⁹ If the US were to reinstate its previously effective efforts at applying pressure to the regime, especially now that North Korea suspended further talks with Secretary of State Mike Pompeo earlier this December, it would be even more difficult to do so. Rather than continuing with the “maximum pressure” strategy, both South Korea and China have sought to ease tensions toward the country amidst Trump’s anomalous actions, placing the US in a quandary over supporting its ally South Korea or continuing to be taken advantage of by Kim’s duplicity.³⁰ If there is any hope of disabusing Kim of his desire for international recognition without jettisoning his growing arsenal, the US must continue to support UN Security resolutions, lead international cooperation of a multitude of other countries (something it has done many times already), and apply new sanctions. If the US refuses to remonstrate North Korea or its Chinese benefactor, other nations may become inspired to commit similar pernicious acts as well. Luckily, the US still retains the resources needed to prevent this from happening again.

US Power

Recent academia has become filled with prophetic works warning of the eventual decline of the US, especially as China seems to surpass the US in economic output. Whether through realist pundits such as Graham Allison, Christopher Layne, or John Mearsheimer, China’s ascendancy

has conjured growing fears that the period of American hegemony is over and that a policy of “offshore drilling” may be the only prudent foreign policy method we have, considering our newfound military and economic handicaps. Accepting these arguments, however, would have detrimental consequences, especially since the US still retains the capabilities necessary to confront these revisionist threats. Contrary to what these thinkers would have many believe, the US will remain a country that is both strong and wealthy.³¹ Despite the growth of China’s and India’s economies, this occurrence has only resulted in a mere 3.48 percentage point drop of the US share of world GDP from the year 1980 to 2010.³² Although many contemporary academics have a penchant for extolling China’s presumptive economic ascendancy, it is still too cursory to conclude America’s decline to be inevitable. As Professor Joseph Nye of Harvard University has indicated, per capita income, rather than overall GDP, is a more authoritative tool for gauging the sophistication of a nation’s economy.³³ Using this, it can be deduced with ease the relative disparity between the US and China; China’s economy, in terms of per capita income, will not equal that of the US until the second half of the century.³⁴

Estimates indicate that Chinese per capita income is under 12,000 USD, compared to the US’s 58,000 USD.³⁵ Furthermore, it is an economy dependent heavily upon legal and illegal copying of foreign technologies rather than domestic innovation.³⁶ This derivative economy has also exasperated existing social and economic inequalities; for all the benefits Deng Xiaoping’s embrace of capitalism has brought to China, it has only accentuated the growing inequitable distribution of income, which has led to pervasive domestic issues such as corruption, social inequality, a contentious urban-rural divide, and a growing gender gap. These exigencies are all insuperable challenges for the aging and maladaptive Communist government; it is improbable they can address these infirmities without a dramatic change in governance.

Considering the issues described above, a contentious foreign policy climate between the US and its allies in the region would not seem to be in China’s favor. Yet, in the case that it does provoke the US (which has already occurred), our superiority in hard and soft power will make it a lopsided contest. When comparing our military capabilities to China, we still retain a marked advantage. According to the International Institute of Strategic Studies, the US spends more than four times as much on its military than does China, even though its expenditures result in a mere 3.3 percent of its GDP.³⁷ It is true that Chinese military capabilities have reached parity with some aspects of US military strength, but that is not to say they have attained parity in every domain. The same RAND report which noted approximate parity in US-China military strength also identified US military advantages in areas farther from the Chinese mainland. Although China has achieved equivalence in air superiority, airspace protection, and anti-surface warfare, these improvements are only applicable in areas close to the Chinese mainland, such as Taiwan.³⁸ In areas farther from the Chinese mainland, such as the South China Sea, the Straits of Malacca, or India, the US retains the advantage in anti-surface warfare, cyber warfare, and air superiority; China simply cannot project as much military force as the US can.³⁹ US military strength is also

buttressed by strong reserves of soft power intrinsic to American society.

Irrespective of military strength, which is limited at best, Chinese soft power is a critical impediment toward their best efforts at contriving a new world order. Globally, there is not much appeal for “socialism with Chinese characteristics,” and its malfeasance in international organizations has not been propitious for the communist regime. In contrast, this is an area the US excels in; as former President Barack Obama remarked, “When trouble comes up anywhere in the world, they don’t call Beijing, [...] They call us. That’s the deal.”⁴⁰ Apart from material resources, US society still retains:

...a durable political system, rule of law, vigorous free press and information media, and a competitive and adaptable economy, as well as strong traditions of entrepreneurship and innovation, leadership and critical mass in new technology, and a history of resilience and flexibility in overcoming adversity.⁴¹

All of these factors contribute to what Nye has coined America’s “Soft Power” and will keep the US in its position of relative dominance well into the 21st century.⁴² Though soft power is necessary for a range of objectives, however, it is insufficient to ensure both the security of the US and the defense of its ideals on its own. As the post-war construction of Germany and Japan indicate, soft power needs a suitable political climate in order to flourish;⁴³ the US cannot afford to wait until China has coerced all of its neighbors into submission. The US, in cooperation with the WTO and its allies, should do more to remonstrate China for the intellectual property theft, currency manipulation, military exercises, and human rights abuses that any form of Chinese expansionism portends. Furthermore, the US should continue reaffirming the defense pact with Japan and support strategic partners such as the Philippines and Vietnam whose sovereignty has been violated. It has already been proven that US military power is particularly adept in this regard, so deploying these resources should not be necessarily difficult. Hence, the US must not be content with its soft power and take more politically active measures to protect its ideals around the world and, most importantly, at home.

Putin and Russia

China’s aggressive behavior is surpassed only by the intrusive and nefarious deeds committed by Russian President Vladimir Putin. Indeed, establishing a political climate conducive to America’s soft power is particularly difficult when dealing with this opponent. In order to discern Putin’s actions, especially over his annexation of the Crimean Peninsula, it is important to explore the national identity of the Russian people in light of the dissolution of the Soviet Union in 1991. When the breakup of the Soviet Union occurred, it lost over two million miles of square territory, putting to shame an empire that had been contrived since the time of Peter the Great.⁴⁴ This resonates particularly hard with many native Russians and former loyalists to the Soviet Union, including President Putin himself. A Pew Research Center study found that in

countries such as Armenia, Moldova, Russia, and Belarus, at least half of their populations view the USSR's dissolution in 1991 as a bad thing for their countries.⁴⁵ Additionally, 58 percent of adults in Russia see Stalin's historical role in either a "very" or "mostly" positive light, compared with just 22 percent who feel the same way about Gorbachev.⁴⁶ With few natural borders and a history of foreign invasions, a sense of insecurity breeds a fierce and atavistic appreciation for power, a desire which President Putin harnesses to "protect" Russia against Western domination.⁴⁷ This has manifested itself both in Russia's domestic policy and its foreign policy.

Considering Putin's abhorrence of Western institutions and ideals, his annexation of Crimea in 2014 and his support of pro-Russian separatists in eastern Ukraine is more ideologically based than strategic. In a speech recognizing the successful annexation of Crimea, Putin referred to the US as "constantly trying to sweep us [Russia] into a corner because we have an independent position."⁴⁸ Furthermore, he referred to the Eastern expansion of NATO as "making itself at home right in our backyard or in our historic territory."⁴⁹ Yet, there are multiple inconsistencies in Putin's belief of a "humiliated" Russia. To start, there were no official agreements prohibiting the eastward expansion of NATO with Russia. Despite Russian military and economic attenuation, the US actually accorded Russia "great power status" on the UN Security Council.⁵⁰ Furthermore, Russia was invited into the Group of Eight, even though its economic and military power precluded it from joining.²¹ These facts prove that the Russian annexation of Crimea, contrary to what many realists believe, was not based on geopolitical concerns but mainly resulted from ideological reasons. If Putin really believed in a geopolitical solution to Ukraine, he could simply tell Angela Merkel, as Robert Manning speculates:

You accept the fait accompli in Crimea, guarantee a neutral Ukraine not in NATO, allow Ukraine and Russia a trade deal with EU, but allow Ukraine into Eurasian Union... lift all sanctions and return to pre-Ukraine relations, and I will withdraw all military forces, stop aiding rebels, and commit to no further use of force to change borders.⁵²

A weakened Ukraine would not seem to be in Russia's national security interests, yet Putin has escalated violence in the region solely to prove that Russia is still a great power.⁵³ Additionally, Putin has used domestic policy as an indirect affront to western values. Putin believes the west has strayed from its "Christian-occidental path and deteriorated into a hotbed of decadence, sin and...weakness."⁵⁴ Russian society, therefore, should represent Russia as a great eternal power. This has taken in the form of anti-homosexuality laws, the Dima Yakovlev law forbidding the adoption of Russian children by US citizens, the law to "protect religious feelings," and blatant falsifications of history.⁵⁵ Considering these unequivocal facts, it is chimerical to believe that Putin has somehow acted out of geopolitical concern. His actions, rather, are a testament to his own turpitude, brash behavior, and hatred of the west.

Strengthening NATO

Many critics of the continued US presence in Europe argue that the relatively small militaries of the European nations will eventually “balance out” a new and belligerent Russia. Furthermore, they contend, Putin would never dare launch an overt military occupation of Ukraine or any other Eastern European country because he does not have the manpower to do so. However, this cursory view does not take into account the other more nebulous ways Putin can tip the balance of power in his favor. In many Eastern European countries, particularly in the Baltic nations, there are sizable Russian minorities, providing Putin with a convenient excuse to threaten the sovereignty of these nations under the guise that he is responsible for the welfare of ethnic Russians.⁵⁶ A RAND study noted, “It is not hard to imagine a scenario in which Russia seeks to use the alleged “mistreatment” of the Russian minority in Estonia or Latvia as a pretext for making political demands on the two countries.”⁵⁷ Though a conventional military strike is certainly unlikely, Putin has at his hands a myriad of other ways he can surreptitiously bully these nations such as “deception, clandestine sabotage, and strategic ambiguity.”⁵⁸ This fact has been brazenly identified by the numerous forays of the Russian air force into Lithuanian airspace, a circumstance which caused NATO to scramble fighter jets a record 68 times.⁵⁹ On one occasion, Russian security operatives even kidnapped an officer of the Estonian Internal Security Service, dragging the officer at gunpoint in front of Russian cameras and charging the man with espionage.⁶⁰ All of these actions reinforce the image of a perfunctory NATO, delegitimizing the organization which has long been the bedrock for the peace and security of Europe. Unfortunately, Putin’s large and experienced conventional army, coupled with its near monopoly on oil in the region, has kept larger countries such as Germany and France from effectively countering these actions.

The Russian military is quite unique from its Western counterparts. Though it pales in comparison to the military capacity of the US, it has shown a remarkable level of ingenuity which academics and historians have likened a new military revolution. One of the most notable characteristics of this new military is its use of cyberattacks, a tactic first employed in the 2008 invasion of Georgia. In this operation, Russian hackers:

...broke into fifty-four Web sites serving the government, media, and banks. They stole military information and immobilized the nation’s Internet. Georgian officers struggled to send orders to troops, and bewildered citizens had no way to find out what was happening.⁶¹

During the annexation of Crimea, the Russians used “SMS messages to text Ukrainian frontline troops to demoralize their frontline forces [including] references to their wives and children back in Kyiv.”⁶² NATO servicemen stationed on the Russian border are also not exempt from this tactic. A common occurrence among Estonian conscripts, in close proximity to the Russian border, is the “creepy hihop” music, which frequently appears on their phones, a prelude to having nearly all their data scrambled.⁶³ Buttressing these attacks have been the raw

military power of the Russian land forces. Current estimates suggest that the Russian military is numbered at about 776,000 personnel, approximately 78 percent of the intended target of 1 million men in uniform.⁶⁴ With over 350,000 combat soldiers, 757 main battle tanks, 1,200 combat aircraft, the Russian military is the most formidable opponent in Europe.⁶⁵ Coupled with its imposing size is the practical experience this organization has accumulated after military operations in Syria and Eastern Ukraine. This has been accomplished largely as a result of the Russian policy of rolling deployments, a process by which units are deployed on short tours ranging from three to four months, as opposed to ten to twelve months.⁶⁶ According to one report, this policy has provided much more practical experience than conventional military exercises, increasing the war-fighting capability of the Russian military even during times of economic hardship.⁶⁷ Indeed, “professional military service, especially now that it is relatively well paid, is an attractive career option in Russia’s current economic crisis.”⁶⁸

Current US actions against the Russian government in response to its forceful annexation of Crimea have been both dilatory and insufficient in dissuading Putin from continuing his recalcitrant behavior. For instance, at a time when the Ukrainian government pleaded for heavy military equipment including body armor, night vision goggles, and antitank weapons, to resist incursions into its territory by Russian backed insurgents, the Obama administration only sent field rations to support the beleaguered Ukrainian military.⁶⁹ To be fair, Obama did place punitive sanctions on Putin’s regime, but this has had only a marginal effect since the Russian economy slightly improved from 2014 to 2017.⁷⁰ Additionally, the US has largely remained aloof from negotiations between Ukraine and Russia, preferring to let Chancellor Merkel and former French President Hollande to take the lead in ceasefire talks.⁷¹ Entrusting this traditional US responsibility to nations which lack any effective military resources to counter Russia’s aggression cannot lead to a long term solution in Eastern Europe and will certainly fail to diffuse the connivance of our adversaries. Thus, the US remains the only country, armed with both its ideals and its military power, able to counter this threat.

NATO has been and continues to be the bedrock for the peace and security of Europe. However, it has grown weak in the modern era and must be infused with more US military support, especially for eastern European nations, including Ukraine. It can do this by furnishing weapons, munitions, and other essential supplies needed to defend against Putin’s forays. Indeed, when the Russian annexation of Crimea occurred, the Ukrainian air force was largely in a state of disrepair, whilst the army suffered from a lack of transportation and troops of doubtful loyalty.⁷² These military deficiencies are also apparent in other Baltic countries, such as Estonia, a nation which only has a 5,000 strong army and an air force with no jets.⁷³ This country has fulfilled its military spending to NATO and has expressed a fervent desire to retain its democracy.⁷⁴ The responsibility for their security lies not only on the shoulders of the US but also on Germany, the most powerful and economically prosperous European nation.

Unfortunately, this country has only garnered a tepid response from its citizens. With its

unwillingness to use force abroad, derived from the indelible impression of Nazism, Germany has deliberately remained ignorant of Putin's schemes. As Georgetown University Professor of Political Science Robert Lieber notes, "the reductions in Germany's defense budget to barely more than one percent of GDP is consistent with popular sentiment."⁷⁵ This attitude is largely reflective of the persisting fragility of the NATO alliance, whose members disagree on the course of action to take. Without unanimity among the European powers, or effective military resources, negotiations so far have lacked the impact that Europe's size, demographics, and economy should have dictated.⁷⁶ Currently, the United Kingdom is the only member of NATO which allocates more than the alliance's minimum of two percent defense spending.⁷⁷ In the year 1980, US spending took up over half of NATO's budget but now, it comprises over 72 percent.⁷⁸ The US must make clear to participant nations in NATO that they must devote more of their resources toward military spending. Having a Europe committed to the defense of both its physical security and its democratic ideals will serve as a permanent barrier to Putin's machinations.

Objections

The recent election of Donald Trump casts into doubt whether the US will pursue a policy based on primacy. The strongest objection to this foreign policy method has arisen from the neo-isolationist school of thought which has proffered numerous grievances toward the perceived failures of primacy in the 21st century following the dissolution of the Soviet Union. These objections include the US handling of humanitarian concerns, nuclear proliferation, and efforts at regime change, all of which have accentuated the failures of American hegemony. Although these statements are well-intentioned, they are insufficient to seriously derogate the validity of primacy and rely on clear misunderstandings of the international order.

Following the dissolution of the Soviet Union in the early 1990's, the responsibility of the US in defending liberal hegemony should have been eased. After the Soviet Union's implosion, the US was the last remaining superpower whose preponderant supply of military and economic power should have made managing world affairs less difficult. However, new challenges arose as a result of unanticipated changes in international events, a phenomena which can be best described as the "weak state dilemma."⁷⁹ No longer needing to undergo the endless cycle of negotiations and build-ups characteristic of the Cold War, the US now had to traverse the intricacies posed by new states which "either attacked elements of their own population or failed to protect their own people from attacks."⁸⁰ These states lack the capacity to control events within their own borders, and their governmental authority is either extraordinarily weak or inchoate. Whether it be Bosnia, Somalia, or Iraq, during the 1990's, the US vacillated on what their responsibilities really were, considering the seemingly incorrigible issues they were called upon to solve. Although they were largely successful in ending violence in these

areas, such as the use of air strikes in Bosnia and Herzegovina, the US still could not create capable governments which could ensure peace without external support.⁸¹ Furthermore, the US could not prevent developing nations from obtaining nuclear weapons of their own, a task which had been key to the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty agreed upon by the US and the Soviet Union during the Cold War. In their quest for statehood, states such as Pakistan, India, and North Korea, created extensive stockpiles of nuclear weapons despite US protestations. These perceived failures were enough for some pundits to declare that liberal hegemony has failed ignominiously.

Because of the aforementioned events, some realist thinkers have erroneously concluded that the purpose of liberal hegemony is to promote some grand strategy directed toward diffusing peace through liberal democracy and international institutions, that the US possesses a subconscious yet inimical desire to spread its ideals abroad no matter the costs.⁸² The desire for this, the ultimate *bête noire* of realist doctrine, is often referred to as the “responsibility to protect” theorem, otherwise known as R2P, an idea which states that if a country is derelict in its treatment of its citizens, it is the duty of the world community to intervene according to humanitarian concerns.⁸³ The US, it must be admitted, retains an enigmatic relationship toward this ideal, oscillating between the need to protect innocents and the increasingly pejorative objective term of “national building.” Especially in light of the intervention in Libya, which began out of humanitarian concerns and evolved into regime change, some countries are dubious toward and have started protect against American machinations.⁸⁴ Indeed, Russia and China view this doctrine not as a way of preventing genocides or other human rights abuses, but as a facade the West can employ to intrude on their sovereignty. Instances such as these support the view that the role of primacy is not the protection of the American homeland, but some quixotic mission of proselytizing the world according to American ideals. Because of this, some may say, American hegemony has made the world less stable. Though these assertions may seem cogent, they are not enough to pierce the veracity of primacy.

It is true, American hegemony is reliant on principles such as liberal democracy, participation in international institutions, and economic openness, but it would be a grave mistake to believe that the promotion of these is its fundamental purpose. In fact, a more concise reading of primacy would read that the US should defend, spread, and deepen liberal values around the world where feasible. The easiest way of diffusing American hegemony is not through “nation-building” efforts, but through strengthening existing agreements and partnerships between reliable allies. In fact, a strategy of primacy does not have to include any stipulation which obliges a nation to forcefully interfere into the sovereignty of another state. Such occurrences would “violate the rights of an independent people struggling with its internal ills,” and could destabilize relations between other states, as had already occurred with the intervention in Libya.⁸⁵ This intervention, coupled with other US actions, have led countries such as Russia and China to be fearful that R2P and its truncated form of sovereignty could be used against them on the whim of decision-makers in Washington.⁸⁶ Yes, instances

such as the interventions in Somalia, Libya, or Iraq were mistakes, but this need not obviate the justification for primacy or the benefits it confers to the international community, such as security, economic progress, and, most importantly, a sense of predictability. R2P should not be confounded with primacy, a mistake which critics think invalidates the outlook altogether. Nothing could be farther from the truth, especially when current adversaries that are strong states with relative political maturity, such as Russia or China, have threatened the homeland directly, especially Russia.

Putin, Trump, 2016 election

In light of the Russian attempts at influencing the 2016 presidential election, a realist argument would conclude that, though Putin's actions are unacceptable, it does not harm the physical security of the US and, therefore, should not warrant continued US presence in Europe. These same people assume that if the US would forfeit its "overbearing" position in Europe, the nations of Western Europe would naturally "balance" Russian aggression. Although Russia has not jeopardized the physical security of the US, its activities have jeopardized the integrity of our nation's elections, ultimately seeking to affect the outcome of the 2016 Presidential election. When the very democratic processes necessary to ensure the peaceful transition of power are under attack, what other rationale exists for complacency? If the US chooses to turn a blind eye toward Russian intrusion in the Presidential election, it no longer supports the ideals which its founding and existence rest upon. Unfortunately, Russia does not need to harm the physical security of the US to succeed in accomplish this degradation.

It is an indisputable fact that Putin meddled in the 2016 Presidential election in order to heighten Donald Trump's chances of being elected President. According to the Obama administration, Putin was "setting out to encourage the 'breakup' of the European Union, destabilize NATO, and unnerve the object of his keenest resentment – the United States."⁸⁷ Hence, a political change in US foreign policy would grant Russia a "free reign in the post-Soviet space."⁸⁸ The first inkling of this desire was revealed by a tactic known as the "weaponized leak."⁸⁹ In early 2014, an aide to the Russian deputy prime minister tweeted a reference to part of a wiretapped conversation, posted soon afterward to YouTube, between Victoria Nuland, a US Assistant Secretary of State, and her colleague Geoffrey Pyatt, the US Ambassador in Ukraine. Nuland is heard saying "Fuck the EU" – a line that the Russians knew would cause difficulties between the Americans and their EU counterparts.⁹⁰ In the case of the 2016 Presidential election, the cyberattacks were just as simple and designed "to deepen an existing state of disarray and distrust" within the political electorate.⁹¹ This was done via the hacking of emails and the setting up of false identities on prominent social media sites. These tactics have been used to target other political figures, such as Angela Merkel in her bid for reelection in 2017, or to support political allies to the Kremlin, such as the right-wing candidate of the 2016

French Presidential election, Marine Le Pen.⁹² Thus, through the use of these cyberattacks, Putin can possibly tip the balance of power in Europe in his favor without ever directly harming the physical security of states. If the Trump administration were to give in to Putin's schemes, it would justify the enormous risks Putin has taken since 2014. However, if the US does not back down, "the Putin administration will be confronted with huge problems both domestically and in its foreign policy."⁹³ The US can still apply economic pressure to an already beleaguered Russian economy by lessening Europe's reliance on Russia oil via its own exports, strengthen the security of its domestic institutions, and use military maneuvers to deter against any future Russian incursions. It is time to face the fact that US incredulity has ubiquitous consequences both for the protection of its allies and of its homeland.

Conclusion

The US is at a critical moment in its history. Though it still has the capability to project its power in a positive way, it seems less willing to do so today. The consequences of inaction are already becoming salient as our political institutions at home become increasingly under attack by adversaries abroad. Remaining passive in the face of these revisionist powers will reverse the momentous gains the US and the free world have made since the Second World War. If the US still cherishes its liberal foundation yet refuses to continue its leadership of world affairs in accordance with those ideals, such would be the worst antinomy in its history. This will not happen as long as the people of the US believe in the responsibility to protect its ideals both at home and abroad.

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Acknowledgement: As part of the TFAS program, I studied American foreign policy under Professor Gary Armstrong of William Jewell College. It was his erudition, profundity – and most of all – patience, which made this article possible.

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Books: Feldman, Lily Gardner. *Germany's Foreign Policy of Reconciliation: From Enmity to Amity*. Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield Publishers, 2012.

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Online sources: Bonenberger, Adrian. "The War No One Notices in Ukraine," *New York Times*, June 20, 2017. <https://www.nytimes.com/2017/06/20/opinion/ukraine-russia.html> (accessed December 20, 2018).

For multiple notes referencing the same work, please use the following shortened note form after the first reference.

Feldman, Germany's Foreign Policy of Reconciliation, 73-78.

Roehrig, "Stability or Instability?," 131.

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